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## **Ohio, Evangelical Religion, and the Merging of the Antislavery Movement: Joshua R. Giddings, Salmon P. Chase, and Their Remarkable Crusades Against Slavery**

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Joshua R. Giddings and Salmon P. Chase deserve their own section on the spectrum of opponents to slavery in American history. Without the combined and prodigious efforts of these two Ohio lawyer/politicians working as antislavery activists, slavery in the United States would likely not have ended when and how it did. Their careers as antislavery activists began in the late 1830s and continued into the Civil War, spanning nearly the entire existence of the political antislavery movement. Joshua R. Giddings served as a congressman in the United States House of Representatives from 1838 to 1859 representing districts in the area around Cleveland, also known as the Western Reserve. From his earliest days in Congress to the day he left, he denounced slavery and the slave owners at almost every opportunity, often in the face of threats of violence against him from Southern congressmen, working and strategizing with abolitionists and other antislavery congressmen to keep the cause alive and in the public consciousness. He also was an effective polemicist, writing not only a torrent of editorials but also well-researched works to make his arguments against slavery.<sup>2</sup>

Salmon P. Chase also began his antislavery activism during the late 1830s, first as a lawyer in Cincinnati defending fugitive slaves and whites prosecuted for aiding them and then as a political organizer, polemicist, and later as a United States Senator (1849-1855), Governor of Ohio (1856-

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<sup>2</sup> James B. Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings and the Tactics of Radical Politics* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve, 1970); James B. Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), chapter 5.

1860), Secretary of the Treasury (1861-1864) and finally as Supreme Court Justice from 1864 until he died in 1873. His greatest work in opposing slavery was as a political organizer. As the well-known historian Eric Foner said of him: “No anti-slavery leader was more responsible for the success of this transformation [switching tactics of the fight against slavery from moral suasion to politics], and none did more to formulate an antislavery program in political terms than Salmon P. Chase.”<sup>3</sup> It is notable that these two successful antislavery politicians, perhaps the two most successful of the Antebellum era, settled in and built their careers in the state of Ohio. Even though their homes were in opposite corners of the state—Giddings in the northeastern Ohio’s Western Reserve and Chase in the southwestern Ohio city of Cincinnati—both these Ohio settings were critical in making and sustaining the antislavery careers of these two men.<sup>4</sup>

Before getting into the specific local and regional circumstances of their antislavery careers, a remarkable feature about Giddings and Chase is that they both combined elements and even embodied two distinct groups in the overall antislavery movement. The first group Giddings and Chase resembled were the evangelically inspired immediatist abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Theodore Weld, Joshua Leavitt, and Lewis and Arthur Tappan.<sup>5</sup> They resembled the abolitionists because Giddings and Chase were also inspired by evangelical religion and a relentless search for holiness and deeper meaning and purpose in their lives, and they all found it by fighting slavery, an institution they all considered the greatest injustice and evil in antebellum America. Giddings and Chase differed from the abolitionists in tactics, not their mutual hatred of slavery and goal of eradicating it. Both of them worked extensively with abolitionists. They were

<sup>3</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 73; John Niven, *Salmon Chase: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Frederick Blue, *Salmon Chase: A Life in Politics* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987);

<sup>4</sup> There is a growing body of scholarship emphasizing the Midwest as a distinct region in American history. Some notable examples include Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backwards: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 65. Although Phillips focuses on anti-abolitionism in the Middle region of the country, he does say the Western Reserve was one of the few places in the region with significant abolitionist sentiment. Andrew R. L. Cayton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Columbus: The Ohio University Press, 2002); J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> For a few examples of the scholarship on the abolitionists. Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); Lawrence Friedman, *Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982); Hugh Houck Davis, *Joshua Leavitt: Evangelical Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland: Case Western University Press, 1971); Robert H. Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

also members of a second group, two-party system politicians who opposed slavery but thought it could be best opposed by conventional political tactics and arguments couched in non-radical language based on their views of the Constitution and the ideals of the Founding Fathers.<sup>6</sup> Both Giddings and Chase spent parts of their political careers participating in the Whig/Democratic and then Republican/Democratic two-party systems, and other parts as members of third parties, but with the hope of using the third parties to influence the two major parties. And Ohio provided the setting where such an integration and merging of two distinctly different parts of the antislavery movement was possible. In Ohio, according to a historian of the Ohio-based Oberlin College, the ideological divisions that divided the antislavery movement among easterners between the New England-based Garrisonians and the New York-based political abolitionists, were far less pronounced, and in the case of Oberlin College, “the Ohio abolitionists united these two and became their counterpart in the West.”<sup>7</sup> The antislavery careers of Giddings and Chase reflect a similar blending of two approaches to fighting slavery.

This article will treat the antislavery careers of Giddings and Chase in three parts. The first part will show that they were exposed to evangelical religion early in their lives and that their religious lives continued to develop throughout their childhoods and young adulthoods. The second part will show what experiences inspired each to become antislavery activists. And the third part will show how religion remained the cornerstones of both of their fights against slavery while working within the American political system. Both themes of this essay—the importance of the Ohio society and environment in fostering and enabling their antislavery careers, and how both of them merged and embodied two distinct parts of the antislavery movement, the religiously inspired abolitionism and the belief that the American political system could be used to effectively fight slavery—will be developed through all three parts.

While the scholarship on abolitionism and antebellum politics and religion is voluminous, references to a few scholarly trends and works will help to situate this article. Some of the major studies on antebellum politics minimize the importance of abolitionism and antislavery politics on the two-party system, in some cases by barely mentioning them or by arguing that the Whigs and Democrats successfully stifled the slavery issue, at least until the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the

<sup>6</sup> Giddings would use radical, prophetic language, but he did base his antislavery tactics and some of his arguments on an interpretation of the Constitution.

<sup>7</sup> Morris, 6-7.

growth of the Republican Party.<sup>8</sup> Other studies, however, argue that abolitionism and antislavery politics were vitally important to American politics and others argue about the place of abolitionism in the larger antebellum society, such as its connection to antislavery politics and reform movements in general.<sup>9</sup> This article fits into the scholarship arguing for the importance of antislavery politics and de-emphasizing the differences between the so-called immediatist abolitionists, who rejected the American political system and hoped to end slavery through moral suasion, and the political abolitionists.<sup>10</sup> Another argument advanced in this article is that Ohio had a distinct political and cultural environment conducive to the success of Giddings and Chase.

### RELIGION AND UPWARD MOBILITY IN OHIO:

#### THE EARLY LIVES OF JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS AND SALMON P. CHASE

Both Giddings and Chase came from New England backgrounds, as did many of the abolitionists. Joshua R. Giddings was born in 1795, the descendant of a long line of New England Puritans, and he remained a member of the Congregationalist church his entire life. Giddings's father moved from Connecticut to Pennsylvania seeking a better living, where Joshua was born in 1795.<sup>11</sup> The large Giddings family struggled to survive as farmers, continuing to move in search of prosperity, moving on from Pennsylvania to New York and finally in 1805 to the Western Reserve in Ohio, the area where emigrants from Connecticut did their best to recreate the Puritanism of their place of origin and where Joshua would make his name and live most of his life. The

<sup>8</sup> See Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983); William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Gienapp argues that Temperance and Nativism broke up the Whig party before the heating up of the sectional crisis in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York: Harper, 1976); Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionist: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967); Kraditor makes a similar point about the insignificance of political abolitionism from the perspective of the abolitionism movement.

<sup>9</sup> Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Ronald Walters, *Anti-Slavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); Alan M. Kraut, ed., *Crusaders and Compromisers: Essays on the Relationship of the Antislavery Struggle to the Antebellum Party System* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983). Kraut's introduction provides an excellent historiographic essay on the interactions of abolitionism with the two-party system in the scholarship prior to 1983. Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party: Antislavery Politics Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009); Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> This article makes some of the arguments found in Frederick Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> George Julian, *The Life of Joshua R. Giddings* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1892), 15-16; Stewart, 4.

popularity of antislavery sentiments in the Western Reserve would make Giddings's political career possible.<sup>12</sup> Giddings spent most of his childhood working hard on his father's various farms as a boy and young man, leaving little time for formal primary education. He grew into a physically imposing, athletic man, a quality that would serve him well when confronted and physically threatened by pro-slavery congressmen later in his life.<sup>13</sup> Desperately wanting to avoid his father's constant struggles to survive, Giddings strove to educate himself and then focused on the study of the law, a career that brought him wealth and respectability. He partnered with Benjamin Wade, who would also become a prominent Republican and antislavery politician. As a young adult, he was active in his church and community, serving as an elder in his local congregation and as president of the local chapter of the Bible Society.<sup>14</sup> Giddings, like many of the abolitionists, had a strong religious foundation upon which he would build in response to the ups and downs of his adult life.

Born in Corning, New Hampshire in 1808, Chase too came out of the New England Puritan tradition but with a twist; one of his uncles converted to the Episcopalian faith and convinced the rest of the Chases to do the same, so Salmon grew up and lived his whole life in the Episcopalian faith. He did, however, live an intensely pious life more typically associated with overtly evangelical denominations.<sup>15</sup> The Chase family had a prestigious New England pedigree, with a United States Senator and an Episcopalian Bishop among their relatives. Salmon's father Ithamar never achieved the renown of his more successful relatives, but he did well enough to provide a comfortable life for his family, farming with the help of their ten children and investing in a nearby glass factory, with the added prestige of serving as Justice of the Peace and as a Senator in the New Hampshire Senate. His family managed to provide Salmon with a tutor and send him to primary school. Chase also acquired the trappings of piety and "rectitude" during his early

<sup>12</sup> Julian, 14; Harlan Hatcher, *The Western Reserve: The Story of New Connecticut in Ohio* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949), see especially chapter 16; Andrew R.L. Cayton, *Ohio: A History of its People* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 29, 119-120.

<sup>13</sup> Julian, 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> Stewart, 10, 11.

<sup>15</sup> Niven, *Salmon Chase*, 6.

childhood, qualities that remained with him and grew throughout his life.<sup>16</sup> While his early childhood was stable and comfortable, he would experience more than his share of personal tragedies, pushing him to seek a deeper and more meaningful religious life.

He experienced the first of many personal tragedies at age nine when his father died of a stroke after his glass factory went out of business due to increasing British competition after the War of 1812. After struggling to make ends meet his mother sent the twelve-year-old Salmon west to the central Ohio town of Worthington to live with his Uncle Philander Chase, one of the leading Episcopalian clergymen west of the Appalachians and a fearsomely strict disciplinarian. Salmon recalled how his Uncle's childrearing differed from his father's style of discipline, being strict and harsh instead of mild and gently persuasive. Philander gave young Salmon room, board, and a classical education in return for labor on his dairy farm. Noting Salmon's talent as a student, Philander encouraged him to pursue a career in the Episcopalian clergy while subjecting him to a rigorous education in the classics and theology. Although Salmon had unpleasant memories from this part of his life as he recalled the fear and constant threat of harsh beatings he got from his uncle whenever he supposedly did anything wrong in his many tasks, his religious development continued as he was confirmed in the Episcopalian church during his two year stay in Worthington. While occasionally restless in church, he nevertheless became "a zealous champion of the Episcopacy" during his two years in Ohio.<sup>17</sup> Philander then moved to Cincinnati to take over the presidency at Cincinnati College, taking Salmon along with him where he enrolled as a thirteen-year old freshman. The ever-ambitious Philander realized that more money was needed to establish a better Episcopalian college in the west, and once again he moved, this time to England to raise money for what would become Kenyon College. Salmon went with him as far as Kingston, New York, but returned home to New Hampshire, arriving in 1823, while Philander went on to England.<sup>18</sup>

Chase's next step in life was to attend Dartmouth College and teach school to help his family out financially.<sup>19</sup> Admitted to Dartmouth at age sixteen, he cruised through, finishing

<sup>16</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 35-37; John Niven, "Introduction," *The Salmon P. Chase Papers*, volume 1, *Journals, 1829-1872* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993), ed. by John Niven, James P. McClure, William M. Ferrar, and Steven Leikin, Five Volumes, xvi, xvii.

<sup>17</sup> Blue, *Salmon Chase*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 6; Niven, *viv.*

<sup>19</sup> Niven, *Intro*, *viv.*

eighth in his class without fully applying himself. The most important event for Chase at Dartmouth was a religious revival that profoundly affected him. Typical of Episcopalians, he was initially skeptical of revivalism but the evidence of its effectiveness caused him to change his mind and allow his own faith to considerably deepen. He wrote the following to his friend Thomas Sparhawk: "A revival has commenced here. I was not taught to believe much in the efficacy of such things, but I do not know enough to oppose them." He then went on to point out that several individuals were positively affected by the revival, and overall the student body showed much more solemnity and respect for religion, as evidenced by "so silent and attentive" a response to evening chapel services.<sup>20</sup> In a letter to the same friend two months later, he explained the revival as "the work which I verily believe to be the spirit of God..." In that same letter he urged his friend to "seek the kingdom of heaven," otherwise his efforts in life would be in vain. At least to his friend, Chase had become an evangelist.<sup>21</sup> His faith, first nurtured within his nuclear family and then through his time living with his uncle became even stronger after the Dartmouth revivals. Although he held out against his uncle's wishes by not becoming a clergyman and instead a lawyer, that choice allowed him to work in a system supposedly designed to bring justice to people. An older brother convinced him that Episcopalian ministers often became "hypocritical reverends" whose pride and desire for power made them "the disgrace of the Christian church," an insight similar to ones that occurred to some of the abolitionists contemplating lives in the clergy at a time when the prestige and even effectiveness of the clergy was in decline.<sup>22</sup> His deep exposure and commitment to his faith prepared him to join the growing number of Americans trying to reform their republic.

The Episcopal denomination, officially called the Protestant Episcopal Church, was itself divided between an evangelical party and a high church party. Chase and his Uncle Philander were evangelical Episcopalians. After the Revolutionary war, the Anglican church in America broke off from the English church and changed its name to the Protestant Episcopal Church, hoping to distance itself from its association with the British. The denomination faced enormous challenges. They lost their established status, meaning a loss of state sponsorship and the opening up of a competitive religious environment where they were just one denomination among

<sup>20</sup> Salmon Chase to Thomas Sparhawk, March, 16, 1826, quoted in Arthur Schlesinger, "Salmon P. Chase, Undergraduate and Pedagogue," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications* 28 (December 1919): 130.

<sup>21</sup> Chase to Sparhawk, May 15, 1826, *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>22</sup> Blue, *Salmon P. Chase*, 6; Freidman, *Gregarious Saints*, 18.

many competing for membership. American religion followed the pattern of American politics in the half century or so after the Revolution by becoming more democratic and opening up opportunities for people, denominations and sects not part of the establishment or elite. Preachers from denominations such as the Methodist and Baptists, feeling validated by their exploding membership, often mocked the elitism and formalism of the Episcopalians.<sup>23</sup> Enough members of the Episcopalian clergy realized that if they were going to remain relevant in American society, their denomination would have to adopt at least some of the trappings and methods of the rapidly growing evangelical denominations.<sup>24</sup> Careful to avoid the emotional excesses and lack of dignity they believed marred and sometimes delegitimized much of the revivalism in early American history, evangelical Episcopalians nonetheless promoted revivals through “prayer, preaching, the Episcopal liturgy and Lenten observation” and even occasionally encouraged extemporaneous prayer. They also organized Bible studies, Sunday schools and “inquiry meetings” as ways to gain conversions.<sup>25</sup> Chase was able to live out his evangelically inspired life within the Episcopal church.

After graduating from Dartmouth in 1826, Chase moved to Washington, D.C. hoping one of his successful relatives would get him a job in the government, which did not happen. He taught school while studying for the bar exam. Once he passed the bar exam, he decided to return to Cincinnati, a dynamic, growing city fast becoming the commercial hub of the Ohio Valley and an ideal place for a young lawyer to get his start and as it turned out, an ideal place to get immersed in the slavery controversy. He arrived in Cincinnati in 1830, and within a few years established a successful legal practice.<sup>26</sup> Chase’s piety grew stronger after he moved to Cincinnati. Despite the hard work he did to succeed as a lawyer, he found time to live a remarkably active Christian life, joining and attending regularly the St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, praying with his

<sup>23</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>24</sup> There was nothing new about Anglicans/Episcopalians becoming evangelists and revivalists—after all, George Whitfield and John Wesley were Anglican churchmen and remained so throughout their careers despite the considerable controversy they caused. Methodism was a movement within the Anglican church until 1784 when it declared itself a separate denomination.

<sup>25</sup> Diane Butler, *Standing Against the Whirlwind: Evangelical Episcopalians in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 35, 50; See also Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 624-625.

<sup>26</sup> Schlesinger, “Salmon Chase,” 131-133, 121.



family once he had one, reading the Bible, performing service in the church, and frequently recording and commenting on these activities in his journal. Like many of the other antislavery activists, Chase first participated in some of the other religiously inspired reform movements, joining the Young Men's Temperance Society, organizing the local Young Men's Bible Association, and serving as Superintendent of his church's Sunday School.<sup>27</sup> In his journal he constantly reproached himself for not being fully committed to his faith. A bout with rheumatic fever in January 1833 was a jarring reminder of his shortcomings: "Some things, I thought, almost venial now appeared exceedingly sinful. Yet I trust I was willing to depart in the hope I should be with Christ. I felt a confidence that though my transgressions were multiplied and aggravated yet the blood of Christ was sufficient to wash away all sin." Then he went on to resolve his determination to live up to Christian ideals even more fully: "And I resolved if I should recover to try to do more for God than I had done before—to live a more Godly life & to be near instant in prayer & more abundant in good works."<sup>28</sup> Chase's religious faith mandated that he do good works, and within a few years that mandate would draw him into the antislavery movement. And it would be the specific setting of Cincinnati as a border city that provided the catalyst for him to join.

### **FINANCIAL RUIN AND SPIRITUAL AWAKENING: THE RADICALIZATION OF JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS**

Giddings's transformation from conventionally pious young man to antislavery activist was more abrupt than Chase's. Like Chase, he succeeded as a lawyer and became a wealthy man, and like other driven, wealthy men in antebellum America, hoped to get even wealthier through land speculation. After investing in land near Toledo, Giddings became, at least on paper, independently wealthy. He had grown tired of the law, and with his additional wealth from his land investments, felt secure to retire, dissolving his partnership with Benjamin Wade in 1836.<sup>29</sup> In 1837, however, the economy crashed and Giddings's land holdings declined dramatically in value, leaving him on the verge of bankruptcy at 42 years of age. Combined with some health problems and an unsuccessful attempt to return to the legal profession, Giddings experienced

<sup>27</sup> Blue, *Salmon Chase*, 16-17.

<sup>28</sup> Salmon Chase, January 18, 1833, *The Salmon Chase Papers*, vol. 1, *Journals*, 1829-1872, ed. by John Niven, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1993), 68.

<sup>29</sup> Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings*, 16.

what today we call a nervous breakdown or a spiritual crisis. Giddings called it “hypochondria.”<sup>30</sup> Following the advice of his doctor, Giddings sought recovery through travel. First, he traveled to the east, visiting relatives on his mother’s side in New York and Hartford. Still unable to return home for fear that it would only exacerbate his depression and melancholy, he followed a path toward a more meaningful spirituality not uncommon in America at that time (and since), seeking inspiration and solace in nature, and in his case the prairie around Chicago.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, Giddings’s Congregationalist denomination, also the denomination of the Tappans, Weld, and Leavitt, had been undergoing dramatic changes. Along with the Presbyterians, with whom they allied themselves for the purposes of keeping up with westward expansion, they considerably modified Calvinism into a belief system that encouraged believers to pursue their salvation with greater intensity, putting much more agency for salvation in the hands of seekers and believers.<sup>32</sup> Both denominations increasingly promoted Baptist and Methodist-style revivalism, reaching its apex in the ministry of Charles Grandison Finney, setting upstate New York ablaze with revivalism in the 1820s and 1830s, and converting the future abolitionist leader Theodore Weld. All of this was controversial among the clergy of both denominations, leading to the Presbyterian split of 1837, with so-called Old School Presbyterians opposing Finney’s theatrical tactics to promote revivalism and the so-called New School promoting them. These controversies and schisms, however, did not stop or significantly dampen the new religious energy. Still striving to build Godly communities, but facing a turbulent, growing society threatening to order and morality on all fronts, the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, both as denominations and individual members, spearheaded the prodigious building of a network of benevolent organizations such as the American Bible Society, American Sunday School Union, and eventually antislavery organizations. The historian Robert H. Abzug described this overall movement as a “radical and angry explosion of revival religion...in turn helped radical reform.”<sup>33</sup> Giddings himself had been affected by revivalism as early as 1831, grumbling in several letters about the opposition to revivalism among conservative Congregationalists.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Julian, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Albanese, *Nature Religion in America from the Algonkian Indians to the New Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 120-121.

<sup>32</sup> Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 456-457. The alliance was known as the Plan of Union, and it began in 1801.

<sup>33</sup> Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 57, see also chapters 2 and 3 for the larger process.

<sup>34</sup> Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings*, 26.

The revivalism prepared Giddings for his prairie sojourn and his life afterwards. In a letter home dated July 20, 1837, Giddings expressed a measure of what he was seeking. Impressed by the flat, stark Midwestern landscape, he felt “a feeling of solemnity.” Only the birds “appeared to be at home amid this lovely, lonely, this majestic scene.” And he recalled “never sleeping sounder” even though he had none of the luxuries of domesticated life such as “mattress, pillow, nor blanket.”<sup>35</sup> Giddings’s biographer James B. Stewart describes his response to his immersion in nature: “He responded in a poetic, nearly animistic fashion to his surroundings, and began submerging his anxieties by seeing similarities between his difficult situation and God’s larger world of nature...”<sup>36</sup> He not only regained his composure during his foray into the prairie but came back a changed man who had undergone a “religious transformation,” determined to live a more pious, meaningful life and no longer pursuing material success, as he had done for most of his life.<sup>37</sup>

Upon his return from the prairie, he threw himself into reforming his community by visiting prison inmates, forming a temperance society and taking the pledge to not drink. He wrote to his daughter urging her to follow his path of helping others.<sup>38</sup> Like other religiously inspired reformers in the North at that time, he soon reconsidered his position on slavery. He had been a supporter of colonizing free African-Americans in Africa, a moderate antislavery position widely supported not only by Northerners but even by some Southerners. Colonization avoided the problem of having African-Americans living side by side with whites without threatening the property of slave owners because emancipation would require removing the freedmen and would be voluntary and compensated. Even some of the abolitionists, including Garrison, the Tappans, and Weld, originally supported colonization before rejecting it because of its inherent racism, impracticality, and the fact that African-Americans themselves did not want to move to Africa, a foreign land to most of them. They began supporting stronger antislavery positions, especially the immediate, unconditional emancipation of slaves.<sup>39</sup> The American Anti-Slavery Society, the main abolitionist organization supporting immediate and unconditional emancipation of slaves, had made their way to Ohio by the 1830s spearheaded by the talented orator Weld, and found

<sup>35</sup> As quoted from Julian, 35--36

<sup>36</sup> Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Stewart, *Abolitionism and the Coming*, 117.

<sup>38</sup> Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings*, 25-26.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 10; Friedman, *Gregarious Saints*, 15.

many willing listeners and supporters in the Western Reserve. Giddings had heard Weld speak as early as 1835 and Weld had even stayed in the Giddings's home. While Weld impressed Giddings, there is little evidence that he converted Giddings to his antislavery position in 1835 since Giddings continued to support colonization, which abolitionists strongly opposed by 1835. It was not until 1838, after his spiritual crisis and his resolution to seek greater piety through actions, did he commit himself to a stronger antislavery position. He soon found opportunities to act on his newly acquired principles when he helped found the abolitionist Ashtabula County Anti-Slavery Society and then ran for the vacancy created when his former friend and partner Elisha Whittlesey retired in 1838 from his seat in the United States Congress. The Whigs dominated in the Western Reserve, enabling Giddings to win the special election in 1838 and then the regular election for a full term in the following year.<sup>40</sup> He had arrived at the position and place where he would carry on his fight against slavery for the next two decades.

### **CINCINNATI, GRIEF, AND SALMON CHASE'S IMMERSION INTO ANTISLAVERY ACTIVISM**

Chase's transformation into an antislavery activist was more gradual than Giddings's. His active faith continued to grow, and when Episcopal services were not available, he often attended services of other denominations, including the more overtly evangelical ones. While still living in Washington, D.C., Chase attended a Methodist service and left an account showing both fascination and condescension. He first described it "as a scene unlike anything I ever saw, imagined, or heard of." Chase was struck by the preacher's speaking style of gradually increasing the tone and excitement of his sermon, and by his ability to "transition from darkness to light and from deep horror to lofty rapture..." The preacher got the reaction he wanted, as the congregation's "sobs and groans resounded thro' the house..." and "some started wildly from their seats as if to rush to joy or escape from woe..." Chase does not say how he was personally affected by the preaching, although he condescends towards the whole scene, referring to the congregation as "ignorant" and the preacher's style as "plainer than plain."<sup>41</sup> Nothing this emotional and raucous had ever happened in any of the previous services he ever attended, but he is never critical of the service beyond condescension, never assessing it any way as invalid or fraudulent. He had seen

<sup>40</sup> Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics*, 116; Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings*, 27-32.

<sup>41</sup> Chase, February 21, 1830, *Journals*, vol. 1, 39-41.

and experienced American revivalism at its rawest and most intense. And while living in Cincinnati, he heard the influential Congregationalist Lyman Beecher preach, describing one of his sermons as “plain and powerful.” The topic of the sermon was the necessity of immediate conversion, a straightforward evangelical topic that Chase listened to “with great attention & hope it will be blessed to my soul.”<sup>42</sup> The way Chase lived his Episcopalian faith was similar to how Giddings and the evangelically inspired Congregationalist abolitionists lived their Congregationalist faiths. As deep as his religious life was, by the mid-1830s, nevertheless, he still had expressed little interest in the slavery issue.

Had his life gone on without traumatic disruptions, perhaps his intense piety and reform work would have been enough for him. But his life became full of traumatic disruptions, and he would respond to them by seeking deeper, more meaningful religious experiences, finding them in the same place Giddings did, in the antislavery movement. No other event in his life had as dramatic an impact on his spirituality as the death of his beloved first wife, Catherine Garniss. Chase’s family had worried that his burning and relentless ambition to succeed professionally would put his faith and even his health at risk, so they were pleased when he fell in love with and married Catherine on March 4, 1834, with Lyman Beecher officiating. His family hoped that a warm family life would moderate his ambition, but that was not how his life worked out. Chase left on a business trip to Philadelphia in November of 1835, even though Catherine was still sick from complications following the birth of their child. For a while he thought she was getting better, receiving frequent reports on her health during his trip. Then the reports on her health turned bad, and he received news of her death before he returned home, devastating Chase and forcing him to reexamine his faith.<sup>43</sup> He blamed himself that she had not professed her religious faith before she died:

What grieves me most is that I was not, while my dear wife lived so faithfully...I have no certain assurance that she died in faith...I have not that clear evidence of her salvation which might reasonably have been expected to result from more faithful and diligent efforts on my part for her conversion.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 75. Lyman Beecher was also one of the early influences on William Lloyd Garrison.

<sup>43</sup> Goodwin, 41-42.

<sup>44</sup> Chase, December 27, 1835, *Journals*, vol. 1, 97.

In a journal entry dated January 17, Chase desired to “humbly submit myself to the Divine will & to magnify the name of the Lord.” On May 30 of 1836, he lamented how little he had served God, and pledged to “bring forth fruit to the glory of thy name...and to serve Thee.” In June of that year he meditated upon Psalm 119, a Psalm noted for urging followers to fulfill God’s law.<sup>45</sup> These pledges by Chase to glorify God and follow religious laws take on special significance because he was on the verge of joining the antislavery movement, whereas prior to Catherine’s death he had expressed no interest in the abolitionist movement, despite several local controversies raging in Cincinnati in 1835 that Chase had to have been aware of.

One controversy was about the debate over abolitionism then raging at Lyman Beecher’s Lane Seminary, where Theodore Weld led an exodus of students out of the college in response to the faculty’s conservatism on the slavery issue, and the other was about the former slaveowner turned abolitionist James Birney’s intention of publishing an abolitionist newspaper in Cincinnati.<sup>46</sup> The Birney controversy raged on throughout 1836, and was what pulled Chase into the antislavery movement. Birney began publishing his abolitionist paper, the *Philanthropist*, in Cincinnati in January of 1836, leading to mob violence trying to shut down the paper. The *Philanthropist* attracted a great deal of attention in the virulently anti-abolitionist environment of Cincinnati, including “advice” to stop publishing the journal. The environment of Cincinnati was such that there would be both a person willing to set up an abolitionist newspaper and then a population willing to resort to mob violence to stop it, a combination of circumstances fostered by the diverse population of Ohio.<sup>47</sup>

In July a mob destroyed his printer, but he managed to continue printing and publishing the *Philanthropist*. On July 30, another mob destroyed the printer again, and searched for Birney intending to do him harm, as anti-abolitionist mobs had been doing to abolitionists throughout the country. The next night another mob sought out Birney and tried to enter the house they believed he was in, but were instead met by Chase who refused to let them in. When the mob threatened Chase, he recalled telling them he was easy to find. Chase was at that time a physically imposing young man in his late twenties. Showing personal courage and risking his health and possibly his life was an important step for Chase on his journey to becoming an antislavery activist. From this

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 107, 125, 126.

<sup>46</sup> Niven, *Salmon Chase*, 44-46; Aron, *Queen City*, 300-312. These circumstances were not unique to Cincinnati.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

point forward, Chase considered himself part of the antislavery cause. To him at that time, the mob violence and threats to Americans' First Amendment rights were more alarming than slavery itself, but he understood that the institution of slavery led to the break downs of "law and order" he witnessed on the streets of Cincinnati, and most importantly, violated his religious views.<sup>48</sup> Several days later Chase expressed his opinions of the series of events in an article to the *Cincinnati Gazette*. Chase wrote that while he opposed many of the actions of the abolitionists, he thought that their "evils" were light compared to the mob's actions of threatening people and destroying property, later claiming that from this point forward he was a decided opponent of slavery and would even accept the label of abolitionist if anyone chose to call him that.<sup>49</sup> In a journal entry of December 27, 1836, he wrote about his own "sinfulness and destitution," hoping that God would enable him to have "greater love for others that I might pray for them more heartily."<sup>50</sup> Considering his newly found interest in the antislavery movement, Chase must have been considering slaves when he wrote "greater love for others."

Living in Cincinnati also brought Chase in contact with slavery in the form of the fugitive slave issue. Just across the Ohio River from Cincinnati was Kentucky, a slave state. Fugitive slaves often made their way through Cincinnati, pursued by their owners or their agents trying to recapture them. Chase represented some of the fugitive slaves and the whites assisting them, and soon established a reputation as one of the top lawyers defending fugitive slaves. One of Chase's most well-known and important fugitive slave cases involved Birney himself. Birney sought out Chase to represent a fugitive slave named Matilda who had been working for Birney as a maid when slave catchers caught up with her. Even though he often lost these cases—Matilda, for example, was returned to slavery—his arguments were sometimes published and became widely known and circulated, contributing to the larger legal fight to de-nationalize slavery.<sup>51</sup> Chase also had political ambitions, and those ambitions would soon involve him more deeply in the fight against slavery.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid; Blue, *Salmon Chase*, 30-31.

<sup>49</sup> Blue, 30; Chase, Letter to the *Cincinnati Gazette*, August 4, 1836, *Correspondence, 1823-1857* vol. 2, 62-63.

<sup>50</sup> Chase, December 27, 1835, *Journals*, vol. 1, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Oakes, *Freedom National*, 16-17.

### JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS'S CRUSADE AGAINST THE SLAVE POWER

Giddings came to Congress prepared to work against slavery as well as to try to advance the Whig agenda. By the end of his first few years in Congress, Giddings had at times acted like a radical opponent of slavery, quickly throwing himself into the middle of the storm of controversy, but other times he acted like a loyal Whig willing to work with slave owning members of his party. Ohio provided an ideal setting for his unique political career, not only because of the antislavery views prevalent in the Western Reserve but also because of a relatively strong abolitionist presence compared to other western states, that on some occasions inspired and worked with Giddings but at other times strongly criticized him, but also gave him cover to hold and espouse radical positions. He confused and often enraged both antislavery activists and Whigs as he went back forth between acting like a radical antislavery activist and a loyal Whig, but he never saw the contradictions, believing the Whig economic agenda to be an effective weapon against slavery. Early in his time in Washington, D.C., he witnessed slavery firsthand and the haughty, aggressive behavior and demeanor of proslavery congressmen, strengthening his resolve to work against slavery.

On January 30, 1839, in Washington, D.C., he watched a group of slaves chained together, likely being transported as part of the slave trade. In his journal, Giddings noted how the chained slaves were accompanied by a “being in the shape of a man on horseback, with a large whip with which he chastised those who...were tardy in their movements.” Especially galling was this happened “in public view of all who happened to be so situated as to see the barbarous spectacle.”<sup>52</sup> In a journal entry soon after arriving in Washington, he described the Southern congressmen as “self-important...haughty...and overbearing.” He lamented that “no Northern man dares fearlessly and boldly declare his abhorrence of slavery and the slave trade.” He then resolved not to back down: “This kind of fear I had never experienced, nor shall I commit to it now.”<sup>53</sup> Giddings prepared to do his “political duty and leave the consequences to God...,” who would “manifestly” show his “wisdom... in any subject brought before the congress.”<sup>54</sup> Immediately after witnessing the slave coffle, he conferred with Rep. William Slade from Vermont, one of the few explicitly antislavery congressmen and a close associate of John Quincy Adams. They discussed

<sup>52</sup> As quoted in Julian, 64.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>54</sup> As quoted in Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics*, 116.



how to best advance the antislavery agenda. Giddings also sent out a letter to Gamaliel Bailey, an Ohio abolitionist and the current editor of the *Philanthropist*, the abolitionist journal that Chase had defended in Cincinnati. Bailey wrote back, promising that abolitionists would help him, but also pleading for action, and for Giddings to “do something...make a beginning.”<sup>55</sup> This was one of many instances of Giddings working with abolitionists. And sure enough, Giddings did “do something.”

Faced with the notorious “Gag Rule” that tabled all antislavery petitions and often shut down any consideration of slavery in Congress, Giddings immediately tried to find ways around it, soon joining forces with John Quincy Adams and antislavery Whigs in a sustained campaign to overturn the Gag Rule. On February 13, 1839, Giddings dove headlong into the antislavery fight when he used a bill trying to appropriate money for building a bridge from Washington, D.C. across the Potomac as an excuse to excoriate the slave trade, arguing that such a bridge would help the domestic slave trade by providing an easy route into and out of Washington, D.C. even though a large part of the nation bitterly opposed the slave trade, and could not even petition against it due to the Gag Rule. Claiming to be only against the slave trade, Giddings was met by insults and threats, a pattern that would repeat itself many times. Even his own Whig party criticized him for raising the issue. It took an hour to restore calm, and Giddings was declared out of order.<sup>56</sup> This newly arrived congressman from Ohio helped create the storm of controversy over slavery and put himself in the eye of that storm, where he remained throughout his career. His son-in-law and future fellow antislavery Congressman George Julian from Indiana summed up the essence of Giddings’s challenge when he first arrived in Congress:

The church had joined hands with the state in the new trinity of the nation’s faith...to oppose it was to risk mobs...give up reputation...and all the prizes of life...which worldly ambition could covet. It was to take up the heaviest cross yet fashioned this century as the test of Christian character and heroism.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Stewart, *Giddings*, 41.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Julian, *Life*, 44.

And yet, after this initial foray into agitating on the slavery issue, he acted like a good Whig willing to compromise even on slavery throughout the campaign of 1840, fully supporting William Henry Harrison for the presidency and voting for the slaveholder Robert M.T. Hunter for Speaker.<sup>58</sup> In his correspondences with abolitionist leaders, Giddings received contradictory advice about Harrison's antislavery potential, with Bailey writing "a tolerably good case could be made for the general..." While hardly a ringing endorsement, it does show abolitionists had at least some hope Harrison would be responsive to some of their policy proposals, such as abolishing slavery in D.C. Lewis Tappan, on the other hand, wrote Giddings that Harrison was as bad as possible on the slavery issue.<sup>59</sup> The point is that for antislavery politicians such as Giddings, there was no clear, obvious path to achieving his objectives because political antislavery activism was new and did not have any precedents to work from.

So why would someone so adamantly opposed to slavery remain with a political party that generally supported it, or at least accepted it? Giddings believed that the Whigs were far more righteous than the Democrats and in essence an antislavery party, claiming that the Whig program of economic development consisting of policies such as a national bank, protective tariffs, and federally funded and planned internal improvements would debilitate slavery because it would reduce the ignorance of the population on which slavery was based. As he wrote in an editorial, slave owning interests were "jealous of the progress of knowledge which teaches men to know the rights God has given them."<sup>60</sup> The Democrats were clearly the stronger supporters of slavery, pursuing the expansion of slavery into Texas and beyond and sponsored and supported the hated Gag Rule. Like most parties in American political history, however, the Whigs were an unwieldy coalition that had limited ideological consistency, trying to appeal to both enemies of slavery and some slave owners at the same time. And since many antislavery people were in the Whig party, a strong antislavery advocate like Giddings could only help that wing of the Whig party. Giddings posed a challenge to the Whig leadership. On the one hand, his ferocious denunciations of slavery and his support of violence by slaves trying to free themselves frightened and alienated slave owners. On the other hand, those same actions and sentiments earned him and

<sup>58</sup> Stewart, *Giddings*, 51-52.

<sup>59</sup> As quoted and cited in Julian, 88-92.

<sup>60</sup> Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics*, 122. Another example of just how close Giddings was to the abolitionist position is that he urged his children to become abolitionists, succeeding with several of them.

their party support among some Northern opponents of slavery. He was trying to stake a claim in the Whig party for his position on slavery and hold on to it.

In 1840, however, he faced a new political threat, not from conservative Whigs or Democrats but from an abolitionist third party, the Liberty Party, formed by a group of mainly upstate New York abolitionists who realized the Garrisonian approach of moral suasion and staying out of politics was not working. The creation of the Liberty Party led to a major schism in the abolitionist movement over whether or not abolitionists should engage in politics.<sup>61</sup> The Liberty Party was relatively strong in Ohio due to the widespread political participation and the presence of abolitionists and other opponents of slavery.<sup>62</sup> Giddings could have joined the Liberty Party but he did not think there were enough of them to make an impact in Ohio or American politics, and thought the cause of antislavery could be better served by remaining with the Whig party and supporting its economic agenda. Giddings's district, however, was one of the most antislavery in the nation, so he now faced a threat from the more extreme antislavery side. Giddings became the target of scathing denunciations from the Liberty press, especially throughout 1840 when he campaigned vigorously for Harrison and the Whigs. The Liberty Party presidential nominee, James Birney (the same man Chase had defended in Cincinnati), had considerable support in Giddings's district, and for several election cycles Giddings had to fight off political and ideological challenges from the Liberty Party abolitionists. By opposing the Liberty Party, Giddings gained support from the Garrisonians, both nationally and the Garrisonian organization in Ohio, the Ohio American Antislavery Society, and he hosted and even appeared at rallies with Garrisonians.<sup>63</sup> The irony is that Giddings's approach to fighting slavery aligned more with the Liberty Party's, which also believed in denationalizing slavery through the political process.

After the 1840 elections, Giddings got back to fighting slavery. Early in the 1841 session Giddings and his small group of antislavery congressmen met to strategize on how to overthrow the Gag Rule, realizing they could introduce petitions and make antislavery speeches as a collateral matter whenever the issue at hand intersected with slavery in any way, like he had done in 1839. In 1841 he found another opportunity to do so, this time by denouncing the Second Seminole War, a war Giddings accused the national government of fighting only to help slaveowners

<sup>61</sup> Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 90.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson, *Liberty Party*, 177.

<sup>63</sup> Douglas A. Gamble, "Joshua Giddings and the Ohio Abolitionists: A Study in Radical Politics" *Ohio History* Winter 1979 (88), 42.

recapture runaway slaves. On February 9, 1841, he clearly stated his position in a speech denouncing the Seminole War:

I hold...if the slaves of Georgia...leave their masters and go among the Indians, the federal government has no constitutional power to employ the army for their recapture...slavery is a state institution, with which this government cannot rightfully interfere, either to sustain it or abolish it.<sup>64</sup>

Using even more scathing language, he accused the United States government of turning the American army into “slave catcher[s], the most degraded class of human beings who disgrace that slave cursed region.”<sup>65</sup> Southern congressmen repeatedly interrupted his speech with threatening language and at least in one case physically threatening him, while earning the admiration of the abolitionist William Jay.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to a finding a way around the Gag Rule, the Seminole War helped Giddings formulate his precise position on slavery. As much as he hated slavery, he nevertheless publicly denied being an abolitionist, and instead took a position that slavery was entirely a state affair and that the Tenth Amendment denied Congress “any legislative power” over slavery where it existed, claiming that this position was in line with the strong states’ rights position of Southern slave owners. An example of his policy to denationalize slavery was to advocate for the abolishment of slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C., an area under federal jurisdiction.<sup>67</sup> His speech further cemented his reputation as one of the congressional leaders in the fight against slavery and helped inflame American politics.<sup>68</sup>

Giddings continued to make national news from his unofficial position as the leader of antislavery congressmen, continuing to support Adams’s efforts to overturn the Gag rule by finding more ways to introduce the topic slavery collaterally, such as the *Creole* case. The *Creole*

<sup>64</sup> Joshua Giddings, *Speeches* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853), 6.

<sup>65</sup> As quoted in Julian, 94.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-98, 106.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics*, 122, 125. Giddings lays out his arguments regarding slavery in the *Pacificus* essays, originally published in *The Western Reserve Chronicle* after the election of 1842, and they were later reprinted in Julian, 415-462.

<sup>68</sup> Gamble, “Joshua Giddings,” 38; Robert Ludlum, “Joshua Giddings, Radical” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 23 (June 1936): 55.

was a ship transporting slaves from Virginia to New Orleans in 1841, during which the slaves rebelled and took over the ship and landed it in the British West Indies, where they were immediately free according to British law. The American government, on behalf of the slave owners who had lost their “property” in the rebellion, lobbied the British government to compensate the slave owners, clearly violating Giddings’s position that the federal government should not help in any way to uphold slavery. In another example of Giddings working with the abolitionists, his group enlisted the support of Theodore Weld to research the *Creole* case and write a powerful denunciation of how the American government was handling it, basing it on the argument slavery could only be upheld by local jurisdictions since it was against the natural law at the heart of the American government. Giddings presented Weld’s argument to Congress on March 21, 1842, making even more radical antislavery statements than he had before, saying the slaves had and have the right to rebel violently against their white captors: “I suppose that at no moment of time from their first seizure in Africa until their restoration of freedom, were they under any moral obligation to obey their oppressors...” Giddings went on to say that if the slaves had any opportunity to free themselves “it would have been just and right for them to do so at any expense of life and treasure to those who opposed their freedom.”<sup>69</sup> Congress censured Giddings for his remarks on the *Creole* case. He then resigned but was then re-elected in a landslide, running on a platform that highlighted his remarks about the *Creole* case. The Western Reserve in Ohio, which was sympathetic to abolitionism due to the work several years earlier by Theodore Weld, was one of the few places in the nation a politician so critical of slavery could get re-elected after being censored for inflammatory antislavery statements.<sup>70</sup> Giddings’s actions during the *Creole* case made him a hero to antislavery activists, including earning praise from Garrison’s own *Liberator*.<sup>71</sup> He was not, however, done being a Whig.

Giddings’s support for Henry Clay for the presidency in 1844 even drew criticism from his strongest supporter, his son-in-law and admiring biographer George Julian. Clay initially opposed the annexation of Texas. Opponents of slavery bitterly opposed the annexation of Texas because it would add at least one more slave state to the union and give the lie to any hope that slavery was being contained. However, Clay soon qualified his position, saying he would support

<sup>69</sup> Giddings, *Speeches*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings*, 76; James M. McPherson, “The Fight against the Gag Rule: Joshua Leavitt and the Antislavery Insurgency in the Whig Party, 1839-1843,” *Journal of Negro History* 48 (July 1963), 193.

<sup>71</sup> Gamble, “Joshua Giddings,” 41.

annexation if it could be accomplished “honorably,” presumably meaning without war or hostilities with Mexico. Annexation, regardless of how it was accomplished, meant expansion of slavery, an outcome someone with Giddings’s views should not have tolerated. Clay’s ability to appear supportive of clashing political positions deceived Giddings. In an April 28 letter to his wife, Joshua felt “flattered” by Clay’s attention and his supposed support for Giddings’s position on slavery. Giddings wrote that Clay “complimented me on the course I had taken in public life, and declared my views to be correct.”<sup>72</sup> Even George Julian thought Giddings was taken in by Clay, perhaps because of his personal magnetism or near legendary status among Whigs. Giddings’s belief that the Whig party could serve as an effective check against the extreme, proslavery forces died hard, but it would die.<sup>73</sup>

Giddings continued to work against slavery after the 1844 election, helping to overthrow the Gag Rule in December of 1844 and diving headlong into trying to stop the annexation of Texas.<sup>74</sup> In January 1845, he argued that the Texans deserved no help from the rest of the United States against the threat posed by Mexico because the Texans treated their slaves far worse than anything the Mexicans had done or could do to the Texans. He accused the cotton planters of purposefully working their slaves to death in seven years because the “driver’s lash impels them to excessive effort, and really causes their death as much as the knife or pistol of the murderer causes the death of his victim.” He went on to compare the slave owner to the pirate, with the former finding it in his interest to keep his captives alive seven years whereas the pirate only for a few hours. And as was often the case with his speeches, he wrapped it up with God’s impending judgment: “With this impression, I feel as confident that chastisement and retribution for the offenses we have committed against the down trodden sons of Africa, await this people, as I do that justice controls the destinies of nations or guides the power of omnipotence.”<sup>75</sup>

He was one of fourteen Whigs to vote against the declaration of war against Mexico, criticizing the process of the declaration of war for not allowing discussion of the matter. He even

<sup>72</sup> As quoted in Julian, *Life*, 158.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 168. James Stewart argues that Giddings remained a Whig for as long as he did because of a combination of political ambition, love or need for the political combat he was constantly involved in, and for the idealistic reasons summarized above.

<sup>74</sup> Stewart, *Joshua R. Giddings*, 103.

<sup>75</sup> As quoted in Julian, 181-182.

wrote an accompanying editorial saying the Union should be dissolved because of the unconstitutional nature of the war.<sup>76</sup> The Mexican-American War further inflamed sectional antagonism, not only because the war consummated the annexation of a slave state, Texas, but also created the possibility of even more slave territory added to the nation from land that could be taken from Mexico. During the sectional antagonism that erupted during the Mexican-American War, Giddings finally would have enough of the Whigs and take principled stands leading to the fragmentation of his Whig Party, constituting “the most significant role of his political career.”<sup>77</sup> During 1848, Giddings’s wing of the Whig Party suffered two significant losses as a slaveholder, Zachary Taylor, was nominated for President and a pro-war and pro-Southern Massachusetts Whig, Robert Winthrop, was elected Speaker of the House. Giddings tried to force Winthrop to support several antislavery positions, including trying to end the war, bringing bills to the floor of the House calling for the abolition of slavery in D.C. and repealing the 1793 fugitive slave law. After Winthrop refused these demands, Giddings did not vote for Winthrop, who won the speakership anyway by one vote. Once again, Giddings found himself the target of scathing criticism by the Whig press, to which he responded using his own press outlets. In a September 7, 1847 letter to Horace Greeley, he wrote he would rather see the Whigs disband than support the war. Electing a Whig speaker was of no importance if they did not maintain “their integrity” and advocate for “great and holy principles.”<sup>78</sup> Giddings spent the first part of 1848 doing all he could to prevent Taylor from getting the presidential nomination, supporting Ohio Whig, future Republican and Dred Scott dissenter John McLean for the nomination. Still hoping the Whigs would come to their senses, however naïve that seemed to his contemporaries and to modern historians, he agitated as hard as ever against slavery, speaking not only in his native Ohio but also in Massachusetts, where he had become a hero to antislavery people.<sup>79</sup> While he failed to sway the Whigs from their conservative course, he did get many Liberty Party abolitionists, including Henry Stanton and Joshua Leavitt, to reconsider him as a legitimate antislavery advocate.

<sup>76</sup> Stewart, *Life*, 114, 115-116; Julian, 192, 196.

<sup>77</sup> Stewart, 123.

<sup>78</sup> Julian, 216. Winthrop and Giddings would then get involved in a bitter battle in the press over Giddings’ accusation that Winthrop had caucused the Whigs to support the war. Winthrop vehemently denied the charge. See Stewart, 143-44 for more details about this battle.

<sup>79</sup> Stewart, 154-155.

Opponents of slavery began to think about uniting the various antislavery political groups, from the antislavery Whigs like Giddings, the Liberty Party supporters, and a faction of northern Democrats increasingly opposed to the extension of slavery. While trying to unite the Whig Party, Giddings “unwittingly” helped “galvanize the third-party movement.”<sup>80</sup> When the Whigs nominated Zachary Taylor in its June convention in Philadelphia, Giddings and other antislavery Whigs bolted and joined the quest to create a new antislavery party, the Free-Soil Party, which its supporters hoped would have greater appeal than the Liberty Party.

Giddings’s religious beliefs continued to change throughout his life. In addition to his immersion into nature religion prior to his awakening in 1837, he dabbled in Spiritualism beginning in 1852, trying to get over the deaths of family members and close friends, including his mother and John Quincy Adams. He no longer feared death and increasingly believed God was all-loving and not at all vengeful, a far cry from the Calvinist deity of his earlier life.<sup>81</sup> Following in the path of some of the abolitionists, he lost respect for Christian denominations in antebellum America because of their tolerance, as he saw it, for slavery. He stated some of his new religious beliefs in a letter to the *Anti-Slavery Standard*. For example, he accused the Presbyterians of “open and undisguised infidelity” for their indifference to slavery considered it “an absurdity... to be a Presbyterian who barter his fellow man for gold.”<sup>82</sup> He even criticized the early Protestant reformers such as Luther and Calvin for their inability or unwillingness to create ideals and teachings that would actually liberate mankind. Crediting the Protestant reformers with at least getting rid of “some of the prominent errors of the church,” he then pointed out how they still “held to the divine right of kings to...rule over their fellow man” and to “establish privileges for one class and hold heavy burdens on the other.”<sup>83</sup> He hoped a new version of Christianity would develop that “should erect the standard of a higher, purer justice, of God; a theology in harmony with the teachings of the gospel...”<sup>84</sup> Sectarian differences over theology became at best impotent and useless and at worst fetters preventing people from becoming true Christians devoted to the brotherhood of humanity. His son-in-law George Julian summed up not only this phase of Giddings’s spiritual development but also the essence of it since his reawakening in

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 153-55.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 208-209,

<sup>82</sup> Julian, 401.

<sup>83</sup> As quoted in Julian, 400.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 401



1838: “In laboring for the emancipation of the slave, Giddings emancipated himself from the bondage of sectarian theology.”<sup>85</sup> Giddings long believed politics and religion were intertwined, and he provided a full articulation of this view towards the end of his congressional career. In February of 1858, an elderly Giddings gave a speech in Congress that was later published, entitled *American Infidelity*, laying out how much his sense of religion had merged with his antislavery politics.

The American infidels, of course, were the slave owners and their supporters in both the North and the South. Giddings argued that the national debate boiled down to a simple dichotomy. Americans opposing slavery were upholding “religious truths” while those supporting slavery were violating “religious truths,” truths stated clearly in one of the core phrases of the Declaration of Independence, “that all men are endowed by their creator with inherent, equal, and inalienable rights.”<sup>86</sup> The United States was founded “on religious truths, and it was thus far emphatically a religious government.” Slavery clearly violated the God-given rights granted to all people in the Declaration, and all supporters of slavery, which he implied was the Democratic party, “deny that the right to live, to protect life, and to attain moral elevation and happiness, is derived from Heaven...” The defenders of slavery “claim unlimited sovereignty over human Governments over human rights,” the essence of tyranny. He then went on to show the brutality of slavery, including how it literally worked people to death and paralyzed “the soul” by denying slaves the most basic right to pursue a proper religious life. Giddings spelled out, once again, that Christianity and the fight against slavery had become one and the same: “The great heart of Christendom now beats in sympathy with the enslaved of this land.”<sup>87</sup> Nor was this basic struggle unique to the United States, as he placed the efforts to end serfdom in Russia and the eventual abolishment of slavery in the British and French West Indies as part of the same struggle to live up to the principles of Christianity. For much of its history, the United States was moving away from the principles of Christianity as Northerners “became unwilling to offend those who had embraced this infidelity.” Finally, during the 1856 Republican national convention in Philadelphia, did a group of Americans stand up and resolve to set itself on the path of restoring true

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 403.

<sup>86</sup> Joshua Giddings, *The Conflict Between Religious Truths and American Infidelity: Speech of Mr. Giddings of Ohio, upon the Issues Pending Before the American People in Regard to Freedom and Slavery* (Washington D.C.: Buell & Blanchard, Printers, 1858), 1.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 2-6.

Christianity to the Republic. He did not understate the significance of the Republican party: “That day witnessed the dawning of a reformation more deep, more radical, more important in its religious, moral, its social and political effects upon mankind, than has occurred since the sixteenth century.... the first to proclaim the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man.”<sup>88</sup> With this published speech, Giddings merged two of his guiding principles: the sacredness of the fight against slavery and the sacredness American politics established by the Founders that the Republican Party had restored. And yet, Giddings still did not call himself an abolitionist and the Republican Party was not an abolitionist party. Merely denationalizing slavery was enough to make the nation once again Godly because denationalizing slavery would lead to its extinction.<sup>89</sup> Giddings lived until 1864, long enough to see the Civil War transformed into a war to abolish slavery. He was finally denied a seat in Congress in 1859 when passed over by the Republican nominating convention after over twenty years of nearly continuous service in Congress. He was too closely associated with radical antislavery views for the Republicans at that time who were trying to appear as moderate as possible.<sup>90</sup> The Republican Party, however, had not forgotten all that Giddings had done to pave the way for their success, and he was appointed as Consul General to Canada by Abraham Lincoln. Giddings’s fellow antislavery activist Salmon Chase never abandoned his orthodox Christian views but those views would continue to inspire his struggle against slavery. While he would go on to achieve even greater political success than Giddings, his political success originated in his activities organizing and promoting the Liberty Party in Ohio.

### **SALMON P. CHASE’S RELIGION AND THE MAINSTREAMING OF ANTISLAVERY POLITICS**

Salmon P. Chase did not make as many explicit connections between his opposition to slavery and his religion as did Giddings, nor did he use as often the millennialist-tinged, perfectionist language about abolishing slavery that Giddings and many of the abolitionists used. There are, however, three ways to show Chase’s religion motivated his antislavery activities. First,

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>89</sup> Not even all Republicans were in favor of de-nationalizing slavery in the sense Giddings wanted to. For example, Lincoln would have been willing to enforce the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act.

<sup>90</sup> Stewart, *Joshua Giddings*, 259-260.

Chase's faith became stronger as he went through life, beginning with strong childhood influences, deepened by revivalism, immersion into reform activities, and finally his antislavery activism, as shown in his journal and in his letters. He was so intensely religious that religion influenced everything he did that had a clear moral dimension. Second, his plunge into antislavery activism occurred simultaneously as he experienced spiritual crises brought on by the traumatizing impact of the deaths of all three of his wives and several daughters, beginning in the 1830s and continuing through the 1840s. The timing itself shows a connection. And finally, he made the connection explicit enough to leave no doubt in his writings and speeches.

In addition to his first wife's death in 1835, more personal tragedies haunted Chase as he struggled with religion and continued to get more involved in the antislavery movement. He remarried in 1839 to Eliza Ann Smith. Within three months, however, his daughter with his first wife died. In a letter to James Birney he expressed his grief: "You lost a most interesting child but had another left; I have lost my only one—her upon whom all my affections and hopes centered."<sup>91</sup> He had three daughters with his second wife, but two of them died within a year of their birth.<sup>92</sup> And then Eliza died in 1845. He married a third woman, Belle Ludlow, but she too died prematurely, in 1852. He did not remarry again. Even during an era when disease took far greater percentage of young lives than today, Chase's experiences were horrific and undoubtedly took a toll on him. It is no wonder that he struggled with religion, as he expressed repeatedly in his journal. In 1840 he even expressed dissatisfaction with his denomination for its acquiescence to slavery. On a Sunday when he did not attend church because there was no place "for my horses," he further explained his absence "because I feel doubtful as to my duty arising from the relation of the Church to Slavery...I cannot doubt that it is wrong for the church to maintain an indifferent if not hostile attitude to the cause of the enslaved..."<sup>93</sup> Several months later he thought himself "insensible in private prayer and not much moved at family devotions...loaded with benefits by a gracious father and rendering such poor returns." On May 23, 1840, he found himself bored by the preacher: "The sermon was dull, or I was sleepy."<sup>94</sup> In an August entry, he once again found

<sup>91</sup> Chase, letter to James Birney, February 7, 1840, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, 67.

<sup>92</sup> James P. McClure, Peg A. Lamphier, and Erika M. Kreger, eds., "*Spur up your Pegasus*": *Family Letters of Salmon, Kate, and Nettie Chase* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>93</sup> Chase, February 22, 1846, *Journals*, 178.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 121, 123.

family prayers “cold and informal,” and later admitted “Nothing saves me from absolute despair...but that the certainty of atonement is infinite, and that the Holy Spirit is pledged to those who ask.”<sup>95</sup> During the 1840s, he sought to save himself from “absolute despair” and acquire “a better and holier spirit” by getting increasingly involved in the antislavery movement, no longer as a lawyer but also as a political organizer and eventually by holding major political offices.

Chase had been sympathetic to the Whig Party during the 1830s, helping to organize it in Cincinnati.<sup>96</sup> Like Giddings, he thought that the Whig Party had a greater chance to be an anti-slavery party than the Democrats. In 1840, however, a new political possibility emerged when a group of abolitionists dissatisfied with the progress of moral suasion, James Birney among them, decided to form the Liberty Party, the same Liberty Party Giddings refused to join and had to contend with in his antislavery district.<sup>97</sup> When the Liberty Party appeared in 1840, Chase at first thought it too small to do anything substantial to weaken slavery, an opinion shared by Giddings.<sup>98</sup> His allegiance to the Whigs, however, eroded over the next year and a half, with the ascension to the presidency of the Virginian slave owner John Tyler after William Henry Harrison’s unexpected death in 1841. He also changed his thinking on economic policies, believing the Democrats’ Independent Treasury proposal a wise policy, and he increasingly favored other Democratic economic policies over Whig policies. Further racial violence in Cincinnati during the summer of 1841 and the Whigs’ rejection of Chase as a candidate to the State Senate due to his antislavery reputation after he had been defeated for reelection to the City Council convinced him to make the leap and support the Liberty Party, which he first announced at a statewide convention in December of 1841. Chase would go on to become a leader if not *the* leader of the Ohio Liberty Party. Due to the propensity of Ohioans to become politically involved and the relatively high presence of antislavery sentiment in Ohio, the Liberty Party did reasonably well in his state, fueling Chase’s rise in both regional and national prestige.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>95</sup> As quoted in Robert Warden, *An Account of the Private Life and Public Service of Salmon Chase* (Cincinnati: Wilstach, Baldwin, & Co., 1873), 291.

<sup>96</sup> Blue, 40-41.

<sup>97</sup> James Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 95-96. Some abolitionists also noted that debates over slavery had entered American politics, due in large parts to the efforts of Joshua Giddings in the United States House of Representatives.

<sup>98</sup> Vernon L. Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest, 1838-1848* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990), 48.

<sup>99</sup> Blue, 43-46; Volpe, 54.

From the beginning of Chase's involvement in the Liberty Party, he sought to widen its appeal by supporting the denationalization of slavery rather than explicitly calling for the abolition of slavery and by trying to replace his former client, James Birney, at the top of the ticket with a candidate with greater name recognition and more appeal. He even wrote to Birney, urging him to step aside by writing "no one ... would not cheerfully vote for you... but all regard your election... as impractical."<sup>100</sup> Chase also wanted to emphasize the constitutional arguments against slavery whereas the eastern Liberty men had emphasized religious and Biblical criticisms of slavery. That did not mean, however, that religious reasons were not Chase's inspiration for opposing slavery. He thought that emphasizing the constitutional arguments, which he also believed, would be more effective in gaining supporters for the party.<sup>101</sup> Religion, after all, inspired the Liberty Party, as it did much of the antislavery movement.<sup>102</sup> For the same reason of hoping to widen their appeal, he wanted the Liberty Party to avoid labelling itself "abolitionist" because that term alienated much of the population, not only Southerners but Northerners as well. He wrote his friend Charles Cleveland: "It [abolitionism] dare not show itself principally because it is believed to be unpopular, but partly because Ministers and Party leaders denounce abolitionism." Another criticism and stumbling block to the success of the Liberty Party was that their critics accused them of blending Church and State, and once again he tried to avoid the pitfall, as he wrote to Gerrit Smith: "...most of us believe, in fact, that political bodies have nothing to do with ecclesiastical organization... to avoid giving any occasion of this cry... our political conventions carefully refrained from any expression ... in relation to church govt. and discipline." He purposefully kept as much religious rhetoric as he could possibly influence out of the Liberty Party, but that does not mean he cared any less about religion.<sup>103</sup> His insight was that he saw the potential for a larger antislavery movement because he correctly observed that despite the widespread and strong anti-abolitionism present in Ohio, "strange as it may seem there is a large amount of genuine antislavery feeling in this city....," referring to Cincinnati.<sup>104</sup> To what extent that was true in 1841 is hard to assess, but it would become truer and truer throughout the North

<sup>100</sup> Chase to James Birney, January 25, 1842, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, 84-85.

<sup>101</sup> Foner, *Free Labor*, 78

<sup>102</sup> Johnson, *Liberty Party*, 226.

<sup>103</sup> Chase to Gerrit Smith, May 14, 1842, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, 96-97.

<sup>104</sup> Chase to Charles Cleveland, *Ibid.*, October 22, 1841, 79-81.

over the next two decades. From the beginning of his political antislavery activities, Chase envisioned the arguments and strategy that would eventually bring down slavery in the United States. He understood the importance of free labor to Northerners and he conceptualized slave labor as being antagonistic to it. Constitutional and legal arguments against slavery, some of which he advanced while serving as a lawyer for fugitive slaves and those accused of aiding them, would resonate throughout Northern society. He thought a considerable number of Northerners would soon agree with him that slavery was “threatening to nullify and overshadow” all that was worthwhile and positive in the American government. Like Giddings, he thought denationalizing slavery would leave it “stripped of her protective veil, to be exposed in all her monstrous deformity, and to perish amid destruction of them whom she has so long deluded and betrayed.”<sup>105</sup> Chase forecasted the appeal of the Republican Party over a decade before its formation. His original religious motivations, however, remained at the heart of his antislavery thought and actions.

Two of Chase’s nineteenth century biographers, Jacob Schuckers and Albert Hart Bushnell, believed Chase’s religion accounted for his antislavery activism. Schuckers, who personally knew Chase, wrote “upon faith in Almighty God and a belief in accountability in another world for acts done in this, and those other beliefs which Protestant Christians hold to be fundamental, Chase founded the maxims and conduct of his life.”<sup>106</sup> Albert Bushnell Hart wrote the following: “The testimony of those who came closest to him is that he took up the antislavery cause because he felt it to be a religious duty because he believed slavery to be a dreadful wrong.”<sup>107</sup> Even though neither book emphasizes Chase’s religion, both authors explicitly state they thought religion was the heart of Chase’s motivations for his antislavery activism.

Chase’s own words, both private and public, further demonstrate his belief in the sacredness of the cause. After pining over his dead daughter Katherine, he criticized himself for being “deficient in charity and brotherly kindness” and for not doing enough to help “the poor and distressed...” and to have “a better and holier spirit.” He wrote this in December of 1841, just as his

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.; Peter Walker, *Moral Choices: Memory, Desire, and Imagination in Nineteenth Century America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 309-310. Perhaps Giddings remained with the Whig party six years longer than Chase because Giddings still had his Congressional seat, which provided him with a good platform to advance his views.

<sup>106</sup> Jacob Schuckers, *The Life of Salmon P. Chase: United States Senator and Governor of Ohio* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1874), 593, <https://bit.ly/2YxeJFe>.

<sup>107</sup> Albert Bushnell Hart, *Salmon Portland Chase* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 53, <https://bit.ly/2WJjbQY>.

activities with the Liberty Party were getting started, so he had to have been referring primarily to slaves as the “poor and distressed.”<sup>108</sup> Writing to Smith, he affirmed his commitment to anti-slavery principles by saying that the Democrats and Whigs needed to become sufficiently anti-slavery before they could align: “We shall be glad when Whigs and Democrats become Liberty men. But Mahomet must come to the mountain—the mountain cannot possibly come to Mahomet...for the mountain is planted by the Almighty.”<sup>109</sup> Chase was saying that the antislavery cause was planted by “the Almighty.” During an address at a Liberty Party convention in Philadelphia during February of 1844, Chase made these positions clear: “Profoundly do we revere the maxims of true Democracy; they are identical with those of true Christianity, in relation to the rights and duties of citizens.” Later in the address he said what he hoped would happen to slavery: “Regarding, as we do, the question of slavery as the paramount question of our day and nation, to give it our cordial and vigorous support, until slavery shall be no more.”<sup>110</sup> In an 1849 speech, he claimed that the newly formed Free Soil Party was the only national party, accusing the Democrats and the Whigs of being split along sectional lines. He said that Free Soil men “must stand up erect in the dignity which God has given him and say my creed is the Declaration of Independence” and that regardless of where he stood in the United States, “no slave must stand upon that Holy ground.”<sup>111</sup> Years later, in 1864, when slavery was on the verge of being abolished, he gave a speech comparing Abraham Lincoln to a ship captain where he “studied the political charts and felt the pulse of the people...Captain Lincoln told them to set the main sail Emancipation...the old ship dashed into the water as if she would go under but then there was faith in God that kept her afloat.”<sup>112</sup> Chase hated slavery because it violated Christian ideals and he used his considerable talents to end it, just like the abolitionists.

Chase’s political career took off once he began working for the Liberty Party. When the sectional crisis exploded during and after the Mexican-American War, Chase was certainly in the right place at the right time. By 1848, he was instrumental in merging much of the Liberty Party with free soil Democrats and so-called Conscience Whigs (antislavery Whigs) to widen the appeal of the antislavery movement and to create the Free Soil Party, one of the forerunners to the

<sup>108</sup> Chase, January 31st, 1841, *Journals*, 148.

<sup>109</sup> Chase to Gerrit Smith, May 14, 1842, *Correspondences*, volume 2, 96-97.

<sup>110</sup> Chase, “Address,” as quoted in Warden, 305-306.

<sup>111</sup> Chase, “Speech of Hon. S. P. Chase,” August 28, 1849, *Daily Evening Traveler*, <https://bit.ly/2vZ5npJ>.

<sup>112</sup> Chase, *Speeches and Writings*, Thursday, Nov. 12, 1864, <https://bit.ly/2HtIzDK>.

Republican Party. Chase parlayed his influence with the Free Soilers and some Democrat state legislators in Ohio to be elected to the United States Senate in 1849, a remarkable achievement considering both his strong antislavery views and his relative inexperience holding political office. In Ohio, the Whigs and the Democrats were so close in their level of support that the Free Soil Party held the balance of power, giving them immense leverage distinct to Ohio.<sup>113</sup>

He opposed the Compromise of 1850, but his influence in the Senate was limited by the other Democrats, especially Southerners, who found his antislavery positions unacceptable. He took a bigger role opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act, first facing off against Stephen Douglas in a debate in the Senate, and then collaborating with Joshua Giddings and other antislavery Senators and Congressmen to write the influential “Appeal of the Independent Democrats in Congress to the People of the United States,” originally published in *The National Era*, an abolitionist newspaper, and then circulated throughout the North as a pamphlet. Giddings wrote the first draft and then Chase and Charles Sumner edited and refined it. The “Appeal” contained especially harsh language against the authors and supporters of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, calling it “a gross violation of a sacred pledge” and a “criminal betrayal of precious rights” for abrogating the Missouri Compromise by opening up the possibility of slavery in the Louisiana Purchase north of the 36-30 line. While most of the arguments were political and legal, they did “implore Christians and Christian Ministers” to oppose the bill because “their divine religion” demanded that all men be treated as brothers, a standard violated by potentially advancing the territorial reach of slavery.<sup>114</sup> The “Appeal” helped galvanize opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and support for the Republicans, which emerged from the chaos of the break-up of the Whigs and the sudden emergence of the nativist American Party to become the second party alongside the Democrats. Both Giddings and Chase joined the Republicans.<sup>115</sup> Chase became the Republican governor of Ohio and then hoped to get the Republican presidential nomination in 1856, failing to do so in part because he was considered too strong an opponent of slavery and had alienated enough Ohio politicians by his machinations to secure the Senate seat in 1848.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Stephen Maizlish, *The Triumph of Sectionalism: The Transformation of Ohio Politics, 1844-1856* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1983), chapter 6.

<sup>114</sup> Niven, *Salmon Chase*, 150; Giddings, Chase, et. al, “Appeal to the Independent Democrats of the United States,” <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/appeal-of-the-independent-democrats/>

<sup>115</sup> Giddings sacralized the Republican party in his *Conflict Between Religious Truths and American Infidelity...*

<sup>116</sup> Goodwin, 186-187.



Chase continued to seek the presidency in one way or another until his death in 1873. Lincoln, after defeating Chase in the contest for the 1860 Republican nomination and becoming the President, offered Chase the prestigious and vital cabinet post of Secretary of the Treasury, a compliment to Chase's all-around abilities since he had little experience as a public financier or administrator. As part of Lincoln's cabinet, Chase found himself in a position to advocate for his lifelong goal of ending slavery, and he did so, constantly urging Lincoln to take stronger anti-slavery steps. When Lincoln first proposed the Emancipation Proclamation, Chase surprisingly wanted a revised version that would leave it to the military commanders to enact emancipation, although he ultimately gave it his approval. When the time came in December of 1862 to implement the Proclamation, Chase suggested a rhetorical flourish to conclude the document: "Upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God." Lincoln and the other cabinet members agreed, enshrining Chase's sacred view of emancipation.<sup>117</sup>

Chase's piety did not wane in his later years, and his antislavery activities did not alter his belief in conventional evangelical religion like it did for Giddings and some of the abolitionists. His frequent and earnest references to his faith in his letters to his two remaining daughters, Kate and Nettie, reveal a person living out his religious faith, and urging his daughters to do likewise. The following that he wrote to his daughter Kate in February of 1852 is typical. Here is the language in his second paragraph:

You and I have lost one who was to me a devoted comforter & supporter and to you a kind and affectionate guide [his third wife Belle]. Now, my dear child, you must think of her as in heaven whither a purer and gentler spirit has seldom gone. You, I hope, will manifest your sincere devotion to her memory, by constant endeavors to do what you know she would wish in every respect—by cultivating your manners and your intellect; by doing all the good you can; above all, by devoting your heart to God, and seeking reconciliation with Him through Jesus Christ.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Allen Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 179-180.

<sup>118</sup> Salmon Chase to Nettie Chase, February 12, 1852, from "Spur up Your Pegasus," 111.

Just one month later in another letter to Kate, Chase's puritanism came out when he warned her "that you naturally have an evil heart and that it is through God's grace alone that you can overcome sinful inclinations...and look constantly through Christ for his blessings."<sup>119</sup> A decade later, in the midst of the Civil War and Chase's exhausting task of financing the Union war effort, he made similar points to Kate. Worrying whether or not she would be able to hold up to the tragedies life inevitably brings, he wrote "... trust in God, proved by conformity to His will, is a sure defence against the ills of life." After pointing out the near impossibility of abiding by God's laws, he reminded his daughter "the Christian faith comes in to save us from our despair."<sup>120</sup> Countless examples of Chase's heartfelt religion in his letters and other writings such as these show a person continuing to be guided by the evangelical religion he acquired early in life and nurtured throughout the rest of it.

Chase would go on to have an eventful final decade or so in life and in politics. Never abandoning his deep piety or his ambitions, he repeatedly sought the presidency and clashed with Lincoln to the point where Lincoln finally accepted his resignation.<sup>121</sup> As Secretary of the Treasury, he helped facilitate the Union's successful financing of the war, including marketing the Union war bonds, helping to set up the banking system that would prevail until the early twentieth century, and even went against his hard money beliefs by issuing greenbacks as a way to maintain liquidity in the North. Despite Lincoln's problems with Chase, he nominated Chase to be the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court after Chase resigned from the Cabinet, once again showing his great respect for Chase's intellect and all-around competence while at the same time eliminating his ability to hurt Lincoln politically. Chase had been a lawyer, but never a judge. While even a cursory summary of his career as Chief Justice cannot fit into this paper, the years he presided were critical ones, covering the first part of the Reconstruction Era.

<sup>119</sup> Salmon to Kate, March 4, 1852, in *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>120</sup> Salmon to Kate, November 18, 1863, *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>121</sup> Goodwin, 603-609. Chase tried to take the 1864 Republican nomination from Lincoln, and was left in an awkward position when that failed, giving Lincoln the upper hand in their relationship.

**CONCLUSION: THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF  
JOSHUA R. GIDDINGS AND SALMON P. CHASE**

Joshua R. Giddings and Salmon P. Chase succeeded as antislavery politicians, beginning early in the movement in the 1830s, and remaining to see the end of slavery in Chase's case and nearly the end in Giddings's case. They succeeded because they had settled in Ohio, a state that provided settings that brought the slavery issue to their respective attentions, and then had the right mix of voters and politics enabling them to win office and exert considerable influence both within the state and nationally. Both had the distinctive set of personal qualities, including deep religiosity, belief that slavery could be effectively opposed through the American political system, and burning ambition for influence and political office, to make it possible for them to persevere. And both could be hard-headed, practical politicians as well as religiously inspired idealists, hoping to project their religious visions onto American society. There were not many people in America with these distinct qualities to fight against the slave system for as long as they did, making the fight against slavery so difficult at least until the sectional upheavals of the 1850s and 1860s. But Giddings and Chase had kept the cause alive, agitating and organizing and helping to put the antislavery cause in position to make a dramatic difference when the time came.<sup>122</sup>

Although there were other antislavery politicians in the North about whom some of the same could be said, including Charles Sumner, Thaddeus Stevens, George Julian, William Slade, Henry Wilson, John Hale, and some others, few of them were as consequential or had as long careers at the center of this fight as Giddings and Chase. Without the dynamic religious and political landscape of the antebellum North in general and Ohio in particular, however, Giddings and Chase never would have had the inspirations or opportunities to lead this political movement and help put it in place to fight the Civil War and abolish slavery.

<sup>122</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 115.