FREEDOM FROM SIN: MORAL REGULATION IN PHILADELPHIA'S EARLY FREE BLACK CHURCH COMMUNITIES

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"People of Colour:

To you, the murder of Mrs. Cross, speaks as with a voice of thunder. Many of you fear the living God, and walk in his commandments;--but, oh, how many are slaves of Sin. See the tendency of dishonesty and lust, of drunkenness and stealing, in the murder, an account of which is subjoined. See the tendency of mid-night dances and frolics. While the lustful dance is delighting thee, forget not, that 'for all these things God will bring thee into judgment."

- Richard Allen, *Confession of John Joyce and Peter Matthias* (1808)

On a cold December night in 1807, "covered by the darkness of night" in Philadelphia's Black Horse Alley, two young, free Black men robbed a white, widowed shopkeeper, Mrs. Sarah Cross.[1] They strangled the woman with a rope and wounded her with a sharp blow to her head.[2] The two perpetrators, John Joyce and Peter Matthias, were captured by local authorities shortly thereafter.[3] The violent nature of the crime transformed the trial into a spectacle, drawing in clamoring crowds "whose curiosity was not to be restrained" in the streets surrounding the courthouse.[4] Joyce and Matthias were both convicted of first-degree murder, or, as Chief Justice

William Tilghman declared in his opinion, “an offence of the blackest dye.”[5] His opinion reviled the two young men for their depravity. “You,” Tilghman’s voice bellowed to the courtroom with a choked tone, “rifled her house of her money, clothing and bed; and proving yourselves utterly destitute of human feelings, you went fresh from this scene, at the bare recital of which the heart recoils, to partake of the amusement of a dance.”[6] In what would become his first exercise of the death penalty in his judicial career, Tilghman recognized the execution of Joyce and Matthias as a moral “example” from which Philadelphia’s free Black community could potentially “profit.”[7]

Though the murder of Sarah Cross cost the two eternity-bound men their lives, the infamy of the crime outlasted them.[8] One newspaper account written about the trial included the following meditation: “The evil that men do, lives after them.”[9] And live on it did. Joyce and Matthias’ crime not only harmed society but also led to the vilification of people of color as a whole “by rendering them objects of disgust and suspicion.”[10] For many white Philadelphians, Joyce and Matthias’ crime invigorated their beliefs which equated the city’s growing free Black population with a pervasive immorality on the basis of race. The public dimensions of Joyce and Matthias’ trial impelled free Black religious leaders in Philadelphia to answer for the men’s crimes by developing new ways to regulate the moral behavior of their congregants and protect their communities’ newly free and self-determined identity.

Villainy and Violence: Fears of Black Criminality in Early-1800s Philadelphia

"And with respect to the oppressed, it debases the mind and corrupts the moral character very naturally: for what else can be expected of ignorant, unlettered Africans, groaning under the frowns of oppression, seeing nothing but complicated villainy and violence; instructed by the treachery and deception, with which they are subjected, they naturally learn to disregard the rights of others; every moral feeling is blunted, and every social virtue is destroyed. They are of course exported to the North, where we have to provide for, and support them, with all their vices upon them."

- Thomas Branagan, *Serious Remonstrances Addressed to the Citizens of the Northern States and Their Representatives* (1804)

Following the passage of Pennsylvania's Gradual Abolition Act in 1780, Philadelphia became a "city of refuge" for free Black people, with Philadelphia's free Black population reaching 6,381 by the turn of the 19th century.[11]Despite free Black people only making up 9.2 percent of the 69,678 people living in Philadelphia in 1800, white Philadelphians feared that the city's newest residents would soon overwhelm the city with crime due to their reputedly rebellious, immoral, and vengeful tendencies.[12]

Thomas Branagan's 1804 publication of Serious Remonstrances Addressed to the Citizens of the Northern States and Their Representatives spurred Philadelphia whites' pre-existing fears of Black immorality. Branagan warned that while free Black people had escaped their previous condition of enslavement, their lives were indelibly marked by slavery. According to Branagan, the very nature of slavery destroyed formerly enslaved people's capacities to act morally.[13] White Philadelphians' concerns regarding free Black refugees' perceived inability to assimilate into the strict moral conventions of white society resulted in a deep-seated paranoia about potential social disorder, or worse, outright insurgence.

The dread of a free Black rebellion in Philadelphia, whether real or imagined, loomed in the wake of the slave revolt beginning in 1791 in Saint Domingue. On one stormy night in August, thousands of enslaved persons, Maroons, free Blacks, and mulattoes living in the slave colony Saint Domingue rose up to kill thousands of the island's white slave owners after holding a clandestine Vodou ceremony at Bois Caiman.[14] In Philadelphia in 1804, decades after America declared its independence, hundreds of free Black people armed with bludgeons and swords marched down the streets of the Southwark neighborhood on July 4th, "damning the whites and saying they would shew them St. Domingo."[15]

White Philadelphians escaped from the scourge of Black resistance by retreating from the areas of the city where free Black people resided. As crime rates increased in the Cedar Ward area, white Philadelphians moved inward to the center of the city in Middle Ward, where space, resources, and security were more abundant.[16] Poor Black Philadelphians migrated outward to the city's edge, where crimes like drunkenness, prostitution, and theft ran rampant. By the time Joyce and Matthias set foot in the city, Philadelphia was segregated along racial lines. The crossing of racial lines in the Cross murder struck a chord within the hearts of white Philadelphians, who feared that free Blacks would bedevil their newly-formed safe havens.[17] White notions of Black-incited chaos posed a threat to free Black people's ability to establish themselves within society and exercise their new domain of freedom.

Free Black people living in Philadelphia gained their freedom through a variety of means, whether it was through intrepid escapes or inspiring manumissions; however, their freedom was fragile and tenuous. Formerly-enslaved individuals possessed formal legal rights allowing for an abstract exercise of freedom in court, but these rights ultimately lacked any meaningful tenets protecting civil freedom within society. Social mobility for free Blacks was certainly not impossible, but achieving respect within society was no easy task. Complete freedom had to be earned and, in some cases, acquired with moral force. Free Black religious leaders in Philadelphia regulated morality within their religious communities and beyond in order to secure and protect the freedom of liberated Blacks by remaining morally deserving and pious in the eyes of white society.

The Long Walk: Allen's Gallows Pamphlet and Freedom Through Piety

"When the pious are informed of the departure of any from this world, the first enquiry arising in their minds, is, How did they seem prepared? In answer to such we can say…to repent of his sins, and to implore mercy from the hands of that Omniscient Being from whose notice nothing can be hid, and before whose bar he must shortly stand. By means of these admonitions (to all human appearances) he was brought to a discovery of his lost and deplorable condition, not merely under sentence of that law, which can only inflict its penalties on the body, but that more awful one which roars in thunder, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

- Richard Allen, *Confession of John Joyce and Peter Matthias* (1808)

Joyce and Matthias were hanged by mid-March 1808 before an audience of 20,000 Philadelphians, composed of white and black people alike. For the free Black onlookers within the multiracial crowd, the execution carried heavy moral consequences.[18] Among these onlookers was none other than Reverend Richard Allen, founder of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia's Society Hill neighborhood. Allen penned a fervent response to Joyce and Matthias' crimes in a publication that is widely considered to be the first Black-edited gallows pamphlet.[19] Joyce and Matthias were not members of Allen's free Black congregation, but the public nature of the crime gave Allen the opportunity to publish a spirited, public commentary on the importance of living a God-fearing life. "To you," Allen's voice echoed off the page, "the murder of Mrs. Cross, speaks as with a voice of thunder. Many of you fear the living God, and walk in his commandments;--but, oh, how many are slaves of Sin."[20]

Contending with how Joyce and Matthias' crimes would shape the white public's perception of Black criminality, Allen's Confession of John Joyce and Peter Matthias set out to lambast the two men as sinners — not as black sinners, but just as sinners. Beyond the morally reproachful tone of Allen's Confession, Allen offered the two men comfort in their final moments, along with a final opportunity to seek repentance from a higher authority. The two men were enslaved by their sins but found freedom "through the atoning blood of Christ" in their final moments in the temporal world.[21] After the execution of Joyce and Matthias, Allen implemented a stricter form of moral regulation in Bethel's amended articles of incorporation to challenge the belief that free Black people were incapable of regulating the morality of their communities without white encroachment. Allen's work in moral regulation cemented his status as a prominent, literate, and respectable leader within Philadelphia's free Black community, forging a destiny for himself in a country where free Black people's lives were overly determined by their previous status of enslavement.

Born into slavery in Delaware to prominent Quaker lawyer Benjamin Chew in 1760, Allen was introduced to Methodism by a nearby religious society while under the ownership of Delaware planter Stokely Sturgis. Methodism provided Allen with his freedom and salvation.[22] "My sins were a heavy burden," Allen wrote in his autobiography, The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen, "… I cried to the Lord both night and day…I cried unto Him who delighteth to hear the prayers of a poor sinner; and all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and glory to God, I cried."[23]Allen learned how to read with encouragement from Sturgis, and he began to preach in his teenage years, freely exhorting sermons to nearby houses at his owner's discretion. Sturgis, under the influence of the leading Methodist preacher Freeborn Garettson, offered Allen and his brother an opportunity to purchase their freedom.[24]

By 1780, after five years of working extra time, Allen bought his freedom for $2000, escaping the "bitter pill" of enslavement.[25] Shortly after arriving in Philadelphia, Allen became a minister in 1786 at St. George's Methodist Church, a mixed-race congregation. However, he was relegated to preaching only during early morning services.[26] Allen's services attracted crowds of new Black followers, sowing tension between St. George's white Methodist authority and its latest crop of congregants who were viewed as a "nuisance."[27] Racial strife within St. George's congregation came to a head when the white elders constructed a separate seating area for Black parishioners, prompting the Great Walkout in 1791, where the Black congregation members left in a mass exodus.[28] Jones and Allen parted ways, with Jones founding St. Thomas African Episcopal Church in 1792 two years before Allen founded Bethel Church. The two men worked together as allies in uplifting free Black

Philadelphians but competed at every turn, battling over congregation numbers and church incorporation.

By 1808, Allen was a well-known figure within Philadelphia's free Black community with immense influence over his religious community, already adept in the art of public print culture. Allen's status as a prominent leader within Philadelphia's free Black community grew after a devastating yellow fever outbreak swept Philadelphia in 1793.[29] Matthew Carey, an Irish immigrant living in Philadelphia, published A Short Account of the Malignant Fever. "The great demand for nurses," Carey began his attack on Philadelphia's free Black community, "afforded an opportunity for imposition, which was eagerly seized by some of the vilest of the blacks. Some of them were even detected in plundering the houses of the sick."[30] After condemning the very group of people who aided the sick and dying during the epidemic at the expense of their lives, Carey later revised his attack to praise "the elders of the African church" by name.[31]

He wrote, "The services of Jones, Allen, and Gray, and others of their colour, have been very great, and demand public gratitude."[32] In response to Carey's enmity, Allen and Jones published a pamphlet entitled, Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the Year 1793. "We wish not to offend," the two men wrote in their acerbic counterattack, "but when an unprovoked attempt is made, to make us blacker than we are, it becomes less necessary to be over cautious on that account; therefore we shall take the liberty to tell of the conduct of some of the whites."[33] Allen's first major foray into print culture allowed him to challenge Carey's claims regarding Black immorality in the yellow fever epidemic, indicting whites for the same behavior that free Blacks were "held up to censure" for Allen and

Jones' pamphlet was emblematic of the same category of protest print literature with which the country declared its independence, rewriting the narrative of the "awful calamity" from the perspective of Black people.

As a prominent and literate Black leader, the pamphlet fashioned Allen as an important liaison between free Blacks and their deprecatory white counterparts. On a mission to establish his status, Allen desired to pave a path towards acquiring resolute and unchallengeable freedom in a racially divided city and country, since financial security and economic privileges failed to guarantee Black people with true freedom outside of legal formalities. Allen nearly saw his freedom snatched away when a slave catcher accused him of running away from a Southern plantation and threatened to sell him on the slave market. Allen's status as a public figure saved his life when an acquaintance corroborated his status as a free man.[34] However, most of Philadelphia's free Black community did not possess the specialized social status that Allen did. For the rest of his Bethel brethren, Allen believed that initiatives to morally uplift Black Philadelphians were the only legitimate means by which they could safeguard their freedom — by remaining morally deserving through piety in the eyes of white society.

Allen's Confession of John Joyce and Peter Matthias sought to reinstate free Black people as morally deserving in the eyes of whites, all while castigating the two men who put his Black flock's freedom in peril. Compositionally, Allen's pamphlet contained an address to the public and people of color, notes and details about the trial, Tilghman's "an offense of the blackest dye" opinion, and Joyce and Matthias' confessions, which were transcribed by Allen and certified with the two men's marks. Execution confessions and gallows pamphlets were especially popular in nineteenth-century America, as they doubled as sensational entertainment and moral instruction.[35] Thus, Allen's didactic tone in Confession was modeled after popular contemporary pamphlets and a familiar sight to the public. However, Confession was remarkable for being the first gallows pamphlet edited and published by a Black person, demonstrating the increasingly important role of free Blacks in shaping morality within their communities and beyond.

While the question of who wrote Confession is no mystery, determining who the pamphlet was written for is more complex. The pamphlet was printed "for the benefit of Bethel Church."[36] Allen's religious flock comprised all economic classes, from artisans to day laborers, many of whom were not literate.[37] In Bethel's original articles of association in 1792, six trustees signed with their names, while the remaining three signed with "their mark," indicating that these men were not literate. Early gallows literature was often dictated in the form of sermons by preachers eager to extract moral lessons for the benefit of their congregations, meaning that parts of Confession, like Allen's "Address to the Public, and the People of Colour," were likely read aloud as a sermon to Bethel congregants.[38] However, with a large number of Allen's congregants unable to read Confession, Allen's printing of Confession's moral messaging suggests the pamphlet was geared toward a wider audience. This makes Allen's meditations on sin and guidance on moral actions even more poignant, as they were intended to address all Philadelphians, not just his small circle of Black parishioners.

"Reader," Allen's printed words call out with fervor, "hast thou conceived murder in thy heart? tremble! tremble! The eye of God is upon thee! his providence will supply a clue for thy detection. 'Be sure your sin will find you out.'"[39] With Confession, Allen took the white-dictated account of Black immorality in the Cross murder and revised the narrative to implicate all people failing to live a pious Christian life with criminality. For Allen, sin — not blackness — was the true basis for crime and piety represented morality. His argument severed the relationship between blackness and immorality woven into the Cross murder judgment. Achieving piety could shelter free Black people from white claims that they were unworthy of their freedom due to their supposed criminal nature.

Allen introduced the concept of piety in his pamphlet with a discussion of the condemned man's relationship with God. Allen devoted much of Confession to publishing Joyce and Matthias' final confessions of their crimes, which was not uncommon for gallows pamphlets, dating back to the Medieval period which followed the same structure. However, the inclusion of details surrounding the men's lives leading up to their crime served a purpose beyond satiating the readers' mere curiosity. Allen spent a significant amount of time with the two men in the final days of their lives, providing them with the chance to tell their stories beyond the context of their crimes. Instead of painting the two men as unabashedly evil, as the trial accounts and newspapers did, the biography of the two men offered insight into where their lives deviated from moral goodness . While the two men were not born with immorality in their hearts, their lack of piety failed to equip them with the moral sensibilities needed to survive in early-nineteenth-century Philadelphia, marked by bleakness and struggle for free Black communities.

Born into slavery in Maryland, Joyce escaped his owner around the age of fifteen to serve in the United States Navy. Upon his arrival to Philadelphia on a stolen horse, Joyce struggled financially, taking on various odd jobs around the city and committing petty crime to remain afloat. Joyce also remarked that his parents were "piously inclined," with his uncle holding religious meetings at his home.[40] However, Joyce was not pious in the slightest. He described himself as "depraved in my morals, having "never belonged to any religious society."[41] When Joyce fled enslavement, his mother warned that he "'would be hanged one day or another,'" fearing that Joyce's loose sense of morality would land him in dire circumstances.[42] Joyce's mother's parting words were prophetic, as he would be hanged for his final crime in one of Philadelphia's public squares. By including a discussion of Joyce's piety, Confession suggests that Joyce's lack of piety was the reason for his crimes, rather than his Blackness. Perhaps, the reader might have surmised, if Joyce had joined Allen's flock upon his arrival in Philadelphia, he might have found himself in an entirely different set of circumstances.

In the second portion of the pamphlet, Confession extends its evaluation of piety to the life of Matthias. Matthias was also born into slavery in Maryland, purchasing his liberty from his owner's wife in the years after his death. The pamphlet describes Matthias' relationship with religion:he states in his confession that his mother and uncle were pious and "often gave [him] good advice, to which [he] paid but little attention."[43] Upon arriving in Philadelphia, Matthias found work playing the violin at local dances, which is where he met Joyce. Joyce offered Matthias a lucrative opportunity that was far too good to pass up: Joyce asked Matthias to accompany him in collecting twenty-four dollars in wages from his employer's residence in Black Horse Alley. After Matthias initially refused, Joyce offered to share his wages with Matthias, which amounted to more than he could receive for playing the fiddle. Although Matthias was entirely unaware of Joyce's premeditated plot to rob and kill Cross, his unintended involvement in the crime cost him his life.

In Allen's eyes, Matthias, who had no prior criminal history, was haunted by previous "bad luck," trapped in an economy whose doors had been closed to new free Black migrants years before he ever stepped foot in Philadelphia.[44] Allen perhaps possessed a greater sympathy for Matthias because he had achieved his freedom in the same respectable manner that Allen did — by paying for his freedom through hard work, as opposed to acquiring freedom by escaping one's owner. Enslavement determined enslaved people's destinies by trapping them in an inherited institution where they had to lead their lives according to their owners' demands. No matter the means, the methods by which free Black people attained their freedom demonstrated their initial steps towards forging their own destiny. However, once the full range of freedom was obtained, free Black people like Joyce and Matthias faced a wide range of institutional obstacles that existed outside of their control.

Matthias was restricted to a destiny determined by the hazards of economic instability and civil enslavement for free Black people in early-19th century Philadelphia, which were the very same problems that Allen and other Black leaders set out to combat through their work to morally uplift the free Black community. Allen's moral guidance conferred to Joyce and Matthias stemmed from his desire to protect fellow free Black people in Philadelphia, whose success and social adjustment in society reflected back onto him as a prominent, free Black leader. The two men's deaths represented Allen's failure to protect a new generation of free Blacks who struggled to survive in Philadelphia, a city that had shut its doors to men like Joyce and Matthias years earlier by social and economic alienation. In Allen's eyes, religious leaders needed to enhance their methods in regulating their flock and specifically its moral and religious conduct, not as a means of control, but as a means of protecting Black freedom and self-determination from opponents of racial integration. This moral regulation led free Black religious leaders to seek help from an unlikely ally — the law.

Powers, Privileges, and Immunities: Moral Constitutionalism in the African Supplement

"Trustees and members of Bethel Church, aforesaid, and their successors duly qualified, elected and appointed in such manner as here, and after is provided and decided, who shall be trustees (for the purposes, and with the powers, and privileges here in after granted and specified) of the church, called Bethel Church, and of all, and any such other church and churches do now or hereafter shall become the property of the corporation."

- Articles of Association of Bethel Church, *Letters of Attorney* (September 17, 1796)

Over a decade before the publication of Confession of John Joyce and Peter Matthias, Black religious leaders set out to incorporate themselves into "corporations and bodies politic," demonstrating a desire to regulate the affairs of their communities through the powers, privileges, and immunities conferred upon corporate bodies at the time.[45] For Allen, these powers, privileges, and immunities could protect free Black people from external white control and influence on moral regulation and religious matters.[46] "Our only design," Allen wrote on behalf of Bethel's Board of Trustees to Saint George's pastor Francis Asbury in 1807 while Bethel was in the process of amending its original articles of association written in 1796, "is to secure to ourselves our rights and privileges, to regulate our affairs, temporal and spiritual, the same as if we were white people, and to guard against any opposition which might possibly arise from the improper prejudice or administration of any individual having the exercise of discipline over us."[47]

Bethel's acts of incorporation are bound in the pages of the massive Letters of Attorney volumes housed in Harrisburg's Pennsylvania State Archives. The words written in black ink do not fully encapsulate the consequential meaning of what the acts represented. Between the lines of scribe-written penmanship are these free Black men's struggle to forge destinies for themselves and their "successors," and protect their communities from the encroachment of white corruption.[48] Mother Bethel was the first Black corporation in America, with Jones' St. Thomas and its comparatively economically elite congregation, incorporating just forty days after Allen's church.

The acts of incorporation were legally certified by Attorney General Jared Ingersoll and Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justices Thomas McKean, Edward Shippen, Jasper Yates, and Thomas Smith. The act, titled "Act or Instrument for the Incorporation of the African Episcopal Methodist Church of the City of Philadelphia in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania," also required then Governor Thomas Mifflin to approve the act and that Master of Scrolls Matthew Irvin "to enroll the same at the expense of the applicants to the interest that, according to the objects articles conditions there and set forth, contain the parties maybe come and be a corporation and body politic in law."[49] On the surface, the articles of incorporation contain banal details about vestry elections, the appointment of ministers, the expulsion of disorderly members, the passage of bylaws and ordinances, and other provisions of religious governance, but a closer inspection reveals the inner workings of the nascent politics of self-determination operating within Bethel at the time. The articles of incorporation add greater complexity to historians' modern-day understandings of free Black peoples' relationship with law, which could be used to confer rights and protections in some contexts while legalizing their enslavement and disenfranchisement in others.

While corporations possess a largely business-minded connotation in the modern-day, religious organizations were among the first to be granted the rights of incorporation in North America. The law allowed for any "religious society" to incorporate, subject to state approval.[50] Corporations possessed unique benefits that allowed for property and other estates to be passed down for generations, a feature that Allen and his forward-thinking trustees might have found especially appealing, while the democratically-elected trustees, who were tasked with regulating the temporal affairs of the church, instituted a form of self-governance that paralleled the new republic's ongoing mission to achieve constitutionalism.[51] Corporate culture was not reserved for the exclusively wealthy and privileged, as even free Black people from middling means could vote on corporate affairs related to religious worship. Black religious societies took advantage of the corporate culture to advocate for civil rights in the frame of religious piety. Bethel's original articles of incorporation put in place social hierarchies, with elections sometimes requiring a majority of "two thirds of the regular male members of the said church of at least 21 years of age one years standing"[52] and other times requiring a majority of "two thirds of the trustees for the time being." The articles also centered around the consent of the church's "elder," whose power remained paramount to everyone else's, even the nine trustees. At face value, the language of "trustees" and "elders" seems benign, and if anything, unclear, but additional context enriches the Letters of Attorney Book pages.

The 1796 articles were written by white Methodist elder Ezekial Cooper, an acquaintance of Allen's, who drafted the articles of incorporation to which the trustees[53] "being ignorant of corporations, cheerfully agreed."[54] Allen would later consider the 1796 articles one of his greatest regrets. Allen despised the amount of power the articles granted to the white Methodists, who, in Allen's eyes, would never accept free Black self-determination and freedom. However, leading historian on Allen's life Richard S. Newman suggests in his book Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers that Allen's claim of the trustees' ignorance was likely disingenuous. As Newman writes, Allen was a "focused, confident, meticulous man," hardly ignorant or naïve of anything. He knew the immense force that corporations possessed, as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society — a prominent Philadelphia antislavery institution that Allen had come into contact with several times before — had incorporated seven years earlier, furnishing PAS with a sense of legitimacy in their work as an abolitionist enterprise. Incorporation was no flippant feat, and, Black-written or not, it would still result in the legal recognition of Bethel as an established religious institution within Philadelphia. Attorney General Jared Ingersoll, and Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justices Thomas McKean, Edward Shippen, Jasper Yates, and Thomas Smith, Governor Thomas Mifflin, and Master of Scrolls Matthew Irvin would read the name of "Bethel Church," along with the names of Richard Allen and his body of trustees. They would have to acknowledge that Allen's church, an African Episcopal Church composed of free Black people from all walks of life, was now a corporation.

The original act of association was more likely a compromise between Allen and the white Methodist elders, and one built with protections at that. While the white "elders" had the power to expel "disorderly members," "preach once on every Sunday," and influence "the direction and management of the spiritual concerns," the elder's power was not without its limitations. If the elder wished to expel a "disorderly member," he was required to seek "the advice" of the Black trustees. While the elder was "at liberty to act according to his own judgment," the trustees were at liberty to create their own appeal process. “But,” the articles stated with insoluble determination, “if at any time it shall happen that a majority of the trustees, so concerned for the purposes aforesaid shall differ in opinion with the elder, the persons or persons concerned shall be allowed an appeal from the judgment of the elder.” The race of the “trustees,” as well as “local preachers, exhorters, and class leaders,” was further clarified in the articles, with positions only available to “Africans and descendants of the African race.”

Still, America’s first Black corporation was not legally constructed by Black people, leaving enough of an entryway for the white Methodist influence to dictate how Bethel’s temporal and spiritual affairs would operate. This entryway, no matter how narrow it might have been, was mutually exclusive with Allen’s quest for free Black self-determination. Allen was willing to set fire to his compromise with the white Methodists in his journey to secure absolute and unchallengeable freedom. The articles provided the grounds for the Black trustees to gather the votes and create a new, Black-dictated covenant, which is precisely what occurred in 1807, when Bethel’s delegation voted to construct what is now known as the African Supplement. Allen and his trustees reestablished Bethel as a church owned by and operated for free Black people — not the white Methodist committee that sought to keep them under their thumb. In creating the African Supplement, Allen could now regulate and protect his religious flock without white obstruction, creating a moral constitution that used the law to forge a destiny that could finally be directed by Black people.

The African Supplement was more formally known as the “Articles Improving, Amending, and Altering the Articles of Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church” and was certified on March 28, 1807, nearly fifteen years after their original articles of association were certified. This time around, the articles were certified by Attorney General Joseph Bell and Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justices William Tilghman, Jasper Yeats, Thomas Smith, and Hugh Henry Breckenridge.[55] Certification by Governor Thomas McKean was also required in order to approve the document and a request was made that Master of Rolls Timothy Matlack "enroll the same at the expense of the applicants to the intent, that, according to the objects, articles, and conditions therein set forth and contained the parties may become and be a corporation and body politic in law."[56] In swift and resolute terms, the Supplement took aim at the original incorporation's Article 1. The trustees repealed and altered the first article, which required Blacks to seek white approval to sell church property. Next, Article 2 was taken down, thus placing the power to expel an insubordinate member in the hands of the Black trustees. The African Supplement was a daring act of self-determination, but more importantly, it was an act of freedom from the control of the white Methodist elders, procured by means of exercising their rights through the legal process.

Naturally, such a dauntless declaration of self-determination and freedom did not go unnoticed. Allen reported that the Supplement caused a "considerable rumpus" among white Methodist leaders who were displeased by Bethel's bold showing of Black autonomy.[57] The Supplement severed the union between Bethel and St. George's completely. Counsel for St. George's claimed that the Supplement was grounds for "prosecution at law" and "utterly void." In fundamentally changing the 1792 articles without authorization and notice, lawyer John Hopkinson claimed that Bethel's African Supplement was "conducted with circumstances of misrepresentation, concealment and a want of good faith that seem to indicate a consciousness of wrong."[58] If true freedom from the white Methodists would not be granted benevolently, Bethel was required to take it with force. Without the encroachment of the white Methodist committee, Bethel could forge its own free destiny as a Black-run institution, one whose first major test of moral regulation would come only a year after the Supplement's passage when Allen would use the moral lessons learned from Joyce and Matthias' trial to rouse a new generation of Black people within Bethel.

Allen was, above all else, a man committed to order and propriety, which can be seen in he and fellow Bethel preacher Jacob Tapisco's publication of The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1817. The Doctrines and Disciplines set forth a strict form of governance within the African Methodist religion and included stringent provisions on member discipline, complete with a three strikes system for expelling members "in cases of neglect of duties of any kind, imprudent conduct, indulging sinful tempers or words, or disobedience to the order and discipline of the church."[59] In Bethel's disciplinary trials, charges of misconduct included serious offenses, such as theft and murder, which were investigated and tried within the church. Lesser infractions, such as the use of profane language or unfriendly behavior towards other parishioners also warranted trial proceedings. The smaller offenses were of equal concern, as they could be precursory to deeper expressions of immorality. Allen wrote of abiding by moral "resolutions" in Confession, professing that, "'In God's name and strength, I will never more attend a frolic. Drunkards and swearers, Whoremongers and Sabbath breakers, I have done with you for ever.'" Discipline became central to Bethel in the years following the Supplement's acceptance as law, in part large due to the public moral failings attributed to the free Black community in the Joyce and Matthias trial. If misconduct could be handled by the church privately and with grace, then the free Black community could be reined in with little to no white interference.

For Allen and other religious leaders, temporal punishments like imprisonment and execution paled in comparison to the eternal spiritual punishment that awaited sinners in the afterlife, emphasizing the need to live piously while existing on the temporal plane. "'Whoremongers and adulterers,'" Allen exclaimed in his address in Confession, "'God will judge.' Go not to the tavern; the song of the drunkard will soon be changed to weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. Drunkenness hurls reason from the throne, and when she has fallen, Vice always stands ready to ascend. Break off, O young man your impious companions. If you still grasp their hands they will drag you down to everlasting fire."[60] In 1809, a little over a year after Joyce and Matthias were executed, Allen and Jones, along with wealthy Black ship maker James Forten, founded the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality to "visit the more dissipated parts of Philadelphia and offer advice, instruction and persuasive measures" to expand moral regulation beyond their religious communities.[61] Free Black leaders saw the moral failings of Joyce and Matthias as a path for moral revitalization in their communities. However, perhaps with more shrewd intentions in mind, Black religious leaders might have also acknowledged the trial as an opportunity to enlist more members for their free Black religious flocks, offering the promise of protection from the same fates the publicly condemned men suffered.

As the political and economic milieu for free Black people living in Philadelphia changed throughout the early 19th century, the mission of Black freedom and self-determination remained particularly important, as these two things became increasingly fragile. Allen would later die in 1831, the same year that slavery and abolition would explode as national issues in the face of a calamitous nullification crisis and a consequential slave rebellion in Virginia. "If," Allen cried out in his 1794 address to his fellow people of color, "we are lazy and idle, the enemies of freedom plead it as a cause why we ought not to be free, and say we are better in a state of servitude, and that giving us our liberty would be an injury to us and by such conduct we strengthen the bands of oppression and kept many who are more worthy than ourselves. I entreat you to consider the obligations we lie under to help forward the cause of freedom."[62] The "pious preacher" — who had dreamt for so much for himself and the community he built with his two hands — left behind a legacy of moral regulation that marked the early emergence of "respectability politics" in Black religious communities. In the great battle towards guaranteeing freedom for his fellow free Blacks, Allen left no man behind, walking with them to the gallows of freedom and eternity beyond.[63]

1 Joyce, John., and Matthias, Peter, "The Fate of Murderers: Faithful Narrative of the Murder of Mrs. Sarah Cross, With the Trial, Sentence & Confession of John Joyce & Peter Mathias, Who Were Executed Near Philadelphia On Monday 14, March 1808." Philadelphia, [Pa.]: Printed for the purchasers, 1808, 8. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

2 Ibid, 11.

3 Joyce and Matthias, "Fate of Murderers," 12. "Joyce was arrested the same evening. Peter was taken up the next day, a mile or two out of town…"

4 Joyce and Matthias, "Fate of Murderers," 14.

5 Joyce and Matthias, "Fate of Murderers," 15.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Launched into eternity" was a commonly-used term to describe execution, with its origins dating back to 18th-century England when the Church took an emphasized role in public executions according to Vic Gartrell's, The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1775-1868, Oxford [Uk.]: Oxford University Press, 2013.

9 Scratch 'Em, Toby. The Tickler, "Life & Adventures of John Joyce & Peter Matthias." Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Written by George Hembold under the pseudonym Toby Scratch 'Em, The Tickler was a satirical newspaper in Philadelphia that began publishing in 1807.

10 Joyce and Matthias, "Fate of Murderers," 15.

11 Nash, Gary B., Forging Freedom: the Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840. Cambridge, [Ma.].: Harvard University Press, 1988, 2. Even thirty-five years after the publication of Nash's Forging Freedom, Nash's work remains the leading authority on Philadelphia's free Black population during the early republic. ; Ibid, 137, from published federal censuses of 1790-1820. Included in

the city are the adjacent urbanized areas of Northern Liberties, Southwark, Moyamensing, and, for 1820, Spring Garden and Kensington.

12 Ibid, 143. By 1810, 9,653 free Black people lived in Philadelphia, as compared to the 82,221 white people living in Philadelphia at the time. While white Philadelphians still outnumbered their 10 to 1, the Black population in Philadelphia decadally increased 210% in 1800, as compared to the white population's 51% decadal increase. By 1800, black people in Pennsylvania were four times more likely to live in Philadelphia than their white counterparts.

13 Branagan, Thomas, Serious Remonstrances, Addressed to the Citizens of the Northern States, and Their Representatives: Philadelphia, [Pa]: Printed and published by Thomas T. Stiles, 1805.

14 Geggus, David Patrick (2002). Haitian revolutionary studies. Indiana: Indiana University Press. p. 72.

15 Committee for Improving the Conditions of Free Blacks Minute Book, 1790-1803, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, ser. 1, reel 6, Philadelphia [Pa.]: Sept. 20, 1791; Feb. 28, 1792, 37-43. Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

16 Salinger, Sharon V., "Spaces, Inside and Outside, in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 26, no. 1 (1995): 8, 14, 26–27, 30–31; Lapsansky-Werner, Emma J. Neighborhoods in Transition: William Penn's Dream and Urban Reality. New York: Garland Pub., 1994. Print.

17 DeLombard, Jeannine Marie. In the Shadow of the Gallows: Race, Crime, and American Civic Identity. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fj0kq. ; Melish, Joanne Pope, Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 204, 206.

18 Scratch 'Em, The Tickler.
19 DeLombard, In the Shadow of the Gallows, 143.
20 Allen, Confession, 6.
21 Allen, Confession, 36.
22 Allen, Richard, 1760-1831 The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen. To Which is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord 1793: With an Address to the People of Colour in the United States. Philadelphia: Martin & Boden, Printers, 1833, 5.
23 Allen, The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours, 5.
24 Ibid, 7.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid, 12.
27 Ibid,
28 Ibid, 14, 15.
29 By 1805, Allen's religious flock comprised 457 members.
30 Carey, Matthew, A short account of the malignant fever, lately prevalent in Philadelphia: with a statement of the proceedings that took place on the subject in different parts of the United States. Philadelphia [Pa.]: Printed by the author., 76, November 14, 1793.
31 Ibid, 77.
32 Ibid.
33 The use of the term 'black' in this context may not solely refer to race in this context. Throughout literary history, 'black' has meant wicked, evil, or dirty, which served more as a reflection of one's morality than of their skin color. For a full analysis of the semantic development of the word 'black', see Joyce A. Joyce. "Semantic Development of the Word Black: A History from Indo-European to the Present."

Journal of Black Studies 11, no. 3 (1981): 307–12. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2784182. However, Allen could be also using the word 'black' in a racialized, rhetorical context, responding to the prevailing stereotypes of Black immorality invoked in Carey's attack. Thus, Allen and Jones might instead be rejecting that notion that Black immorality was endemic among all Blacks at the time, thereby distancing himself and others from the "vilest of Blacks" Carey refers to as committing immoral acts during the yellow fever epidemic.. For a full discussion on the rhetorical structure of Allen and Jones's pamphlet, see Bacon, Jacqueline. "Rhetoric and Identity in Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's 'Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, during the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia.'" The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 125, no. 1/2 (2001): 61–90. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20093427;Jones,Absalom,and Richard Allen. A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People: During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793: And a Refutation of Some Censures, Thrown Upon Them in Some Late Publications. Philadelphia: Printed for the authors, by William W. Woodward, at Franklin's head, no. 41, Chestnut-street, 1794.

34 Jones and Allen, Awful Calamity.

35 Newman, Richard S. Freedom's Prophet : Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers, 130. New York: New York University Press, 2008.
Cohen, Daniel A., Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860, 4, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006; DeLombard, In the Shadow of the Gallows, 153.

36 Allen, Confession.

37 Newman, Freedom's Prophet, 130.

38 Cohen, Daniel A., Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture, 1674-1860, 4, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.

39 Allen, Confession, 4.

40 Ibid, 12.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Allen, Confession, 30.

44 Newman, Freedom's Prophet, 201.

45 Articles of Association of African Methodist Episcopal Church of the City of Philadelphia, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (called Bethel Church)," Sept. 17, 1796, Letters of Attorney, 458–65, RG-17, ser. 17.419, Volume 8, Box 7. Records of the Land Office, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

46 Gordon, Sarah Barringer, "The African Supplement: Religion, Race, and Corporate Law in Early National America," 2015. Faculty Scholarship at Penn Carey Law. 1575. https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/faculty_scholarship/1575

47 Allen, Richard to a Presiding Elder, Apr. 8, 1807, in J. Manning Potts, Elmer T. Clark, and Jacob S. Payton, eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury in Three Volumes, vol. 3, The Letters (London, 1958), 367.

48 Articles of Association, 1796.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 An Act to Confer on Certain Associations," Apr. 6, 1791, chap. 27, sec. 4, Acts of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania, 40–43, esp. 41 ("objects"), 43.

52 Gordon, "The African Supplement," 403.

53 Allen, The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours, 18-19.
54 Newman, Freedom's Prophet, 131, 132.
55 African Supplement, "Articles Improving, Amending, and Altering the Articles of Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church," March 28, 1807, Letters of Attorney, 1-5, RG-17, ser. 17.419, Volume 5, Box 15. Records of the Land Office, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.
56 Articles of Association, 1796.
57 Newman, Freedom's Prophet, 135.
58 Letter from Joseph Hopkinson, April 24, 1815, "African Church" file, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
59 Richard Allen and Jacob Tapisco, The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church African Methodist Episcopal Church First Edition. (Philadelphia: John H. Cunningham, Printer, 1817), 65.
60 Allen, Confession, 5.
61 Nash, Forging Freedom, 134, 221.
62 Allen, The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours, 48.
63 Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks (1993). Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.