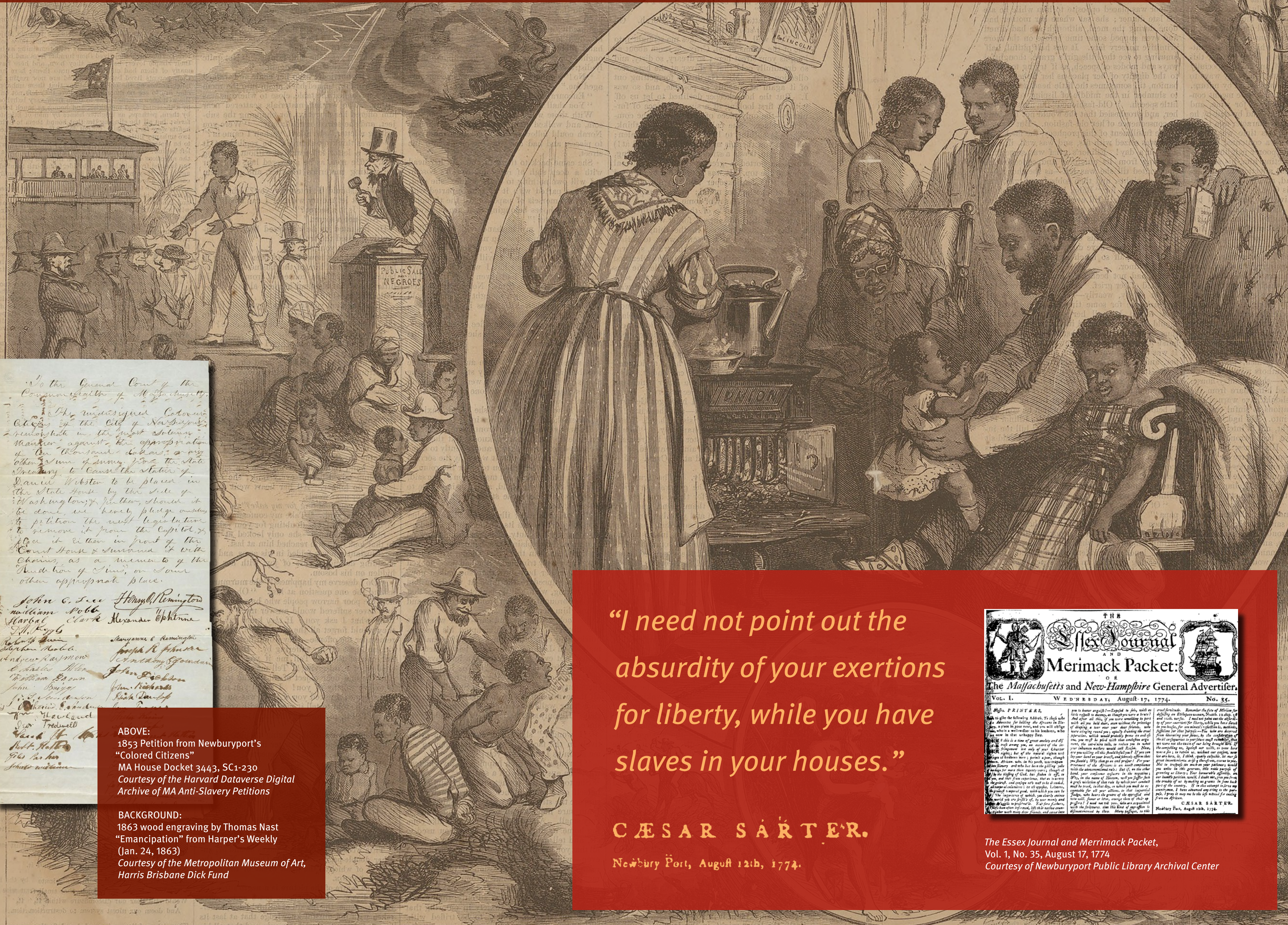


# Grant Us Our Liberty

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Black activists from Newburyport filed lawsuits, wrote editorials, and petitioned in the effort to end slavery. Their tireless activism helped to build one of the greatest social movements in United States history: abolition.



To the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
The undersigned Colored Citizens of the City of Newburyport respectfully petition in the most solemn manner against the appropriation of the Commonwealth's money for the purchase of a statue to be placed in the State House by the sale of Washington's plantation, and to petition the most honorable Legislature to remove it from the Capitol, and to return in front of the Court House a monument to the memory of a man to the honor of a man, in some other appropriate place.

John C. Lee    Hugh Remington  
William Cole    Alexander Hopkins  
Harriet Clark    Alexander Hopkins  
John C. Lee    Hugh Remington  
William Cole    Alexander Hopkins  
Harriet Clark    Alexander Hopkins  
John C. Lee    Hugh Remington  
William Cole    Alexander Hopkins  
Harriet Clark    Alexander Hopkins

ABOVE:  
1853 Petition from Newburyport's "Colored Citizens"  
MA House Docket 3443, SC1-230  
Courtesy of the Harvard Dataverse Digital Archive of MA Anti-Slavery Petitions

BACKGROUND:  
1863 wood engraving by Thomas Nast  
"Emancipation" from Harper's Weekly  
(Jan. 24, 1863)  
Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
Harris Brisbane Dick Fund

"I need not point out the absurdity of your exertions for liberty, while you have slaves in your houses."

CÆSAR SÄRTER.  
Newbury Port, August 12th, 1774.



The Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet, Vol. 1, No. 35, August 17, 1774  
Courtesy of Newburyport Public Library Archival Center

**BLACK NEWBURYPORTERS HELPED SHAPE THE ABOLITION MOVEMENT**, combining anti-slavery advocacy with demands for equality, dignity and justice.

The early wave of abolitionism promoted anti-slavery sentiments through the courts, in the press, and in the pulpit. Caesar Hendrick of Newburyport filed one of the early freedom lawsuits in 1773 and won his freedom from his enslaver Richard Greenleaf. Hendrick went on to fight in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Three years later, Pomp Somerset also sued Greenleaf and won his freedom. Jenny Slew, Sier Kimball, Adventurer, and others filed freedom lawsuits too. In 1774, Caesar Sarter, a Newburyport resident who had been enslaved for more than 20 years, published an impassioned anti-slavery essay in the weekly newspaper *Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet*. As colonists agitated for their freedom from England, Sarter condemned their hypocrisy, calling it "absurd" as they denied freedom to the enslaved. All of these acts of resistance accelerated the legal end of slavery in Massachusetts in the 1780s.

The pivotal second wave of abolitionism came before the Civil War as tensions grew between the North and South. In 1834, Andrew Raymond, a young Black barber and resident of Newburyport's 'Guinea' neighborhood, participated in the New England Anti-Slavery Convention. By 1847, he was president of the Newburyport and Vicinity Anti-Slavery Society. In marked contrast, Massachusetts Senator Daniel Webster emphatically argued for the passage of the Compromise of 1850 in his famous Seventh of March speech. Webster condemned the abolition societies for producing "mischief" and offering "nothing good or valuable." The Compromise of 1850 allowed slavery into new western territories and strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act, which compelled Northern states, officials, and ordinary citizens to participate in capturing self-emancipated slaves. While the Act outraged many in New England, hundreds of white men in Newburyport circulated a public letter in the spring of 1850 praising Webster's leadership. When a statue honoring Webster was proposed for installation at the State House, Andrew Raymond and 80 Black residents delivered a petition to the legislature in 1853 opposing the appropriation of funds for the statue. The controversy delayed the installation of the statue for six years, and the fight became a lightning rod in state and national politics, similar to political struggles over Confederate statues in the 21st century.

Andrew Raymond died at the age of 56 on January 8, 1857, and did not live to witness the abolition of slavery. His death announcement in the *Newburyport Daily Herald* described him as a "gentleman, a good citizen, and a Christian." Raymond was a courageous abolitionist, and, like other Black men and women, helped lay the groundwork for freedom. *Text by Geordie Vining, Kabria Baumgartner, and Cyd Raschke (2023)*