



Rebels in Paradise: Sketches of Northampton Abolitionists

Bruce Laurie

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Long ago dubbed the "Paradise of America," Northampton, Massachusetts, is also known as the home of visionaries—from the Reverend Jonathan Edwards, father of the First Great Awakening, to George W. Benson, brother-in-law of William Lloyd Garrison and a founder of the utopian Northampton Association for Education and Industry. During the mid-nineteenth century the town became a center of political abolitionism and a hub in the Underground Railroad. In this book, Bruce Laurie profiles five rebellious figures who launched Northampton's abolitionist movement—Sylvester Judd Jr., John Payson Williston, David Ruggles, Henry Sherwood Gere, and Erastus Hopkins. Through their individual stories he traces the evolution of the antislavery movement in western Massachusetts and links it to broader developments in economics, civil life, and political affairs.

Northampton's abolitionists were a heterodox group, yet most were intrepid devotees of democracy and racial equality, idealists who enjoyed genuine friendships and political alliances with African Americans. Several even took the bold step of hiring African Americans in their businesses. They avoided the doctrinal rivalries that sometimes troubled the antislavery movement in other places, skillfully steering clear of the xenophobic nativism that infected Massachusetts politics in the mid-1850s and divided the Republican Party at large. Although a prohibitionist faction disrupted the Northampton abolitionist movement for a time, the leaders prevailed on the strength of their personal prestige and political experience, making the seat of Hampshire County what one of them called an abolitionist "stronghold."

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