JAY SATTERFIELD: Welcome back to *Hindsight is 20/19*, the podcast where we look at 250 years of Dartmouth’s history through 25 objects from the Library’s archival collections, one per decade. I’m Jay Satterfield and I’ll be your host for this episode.

In November 1862, a member of the Dartmouth Faculty published a letter in a Boston newspaper expressing his opinions on one of the hottest topics of the day. The letter was republished as the pamphlet I am holding here. It quickly went viral and stirred controversy across New England. Local politicians fumed and churches across New Hampshire condemned him and called for his dismissal. The conservative trustees of one of the oldest schools in America found his views abhorrent and the public outcry an embarrassment. They decided enough was enough and moved to censure him and he resigned his post. At the time, the concept of Academic freedom was not fully embraced, so stating an opinion counter to that of the College could get you fired.

This sounds pretty bad: a faculty member being ousted for forcefully arguing his position on a major issue of the day. But wait, see if this changes anything: the faculty member was the president of Dartmouth, and the positon he was arguing was that slavery was a divine institution and that the Civil War was caused by misguided abolitionists. Oh man, now it has gotten complicated… really complicated.

You see President Nathan Lord had long held the belief that the Bible legitimated the institution of slavery. He did not hide his opinion, and it had caused controversy on campus for nearly a decade. Back in 1855, he published an essay, innocuously title *A Northern Presbyter’s Second Letter to the Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations on Slavery*. But there was nothing innocuous about his argument. Lord contended that slavery was sanctioned by God and, simply put, that those who opposed it, opposed God’s will.

Nathan Lord was a Dartmouth institution. He became president in 1828. During his long tenure, he guided Dartmouth through chronic financial difficulties, instituted various reforms, and, notably began admitting a handful of African-American students. While he rarely taught, he conducted chapel each week, so he was well known to all of the students. He had the strange habit of hiding behind green tinted glasses, so students could never tell for certain where he was looking. He was feared, generally respected, and had a reputation for kindness.

But the 1855 pamphlet touched a nerve and Dartmouth students responded in the student-run lampoon newspaper, *The Dartmouth Oestrus*. On the front page of the July 1855 issue, there is an article calling for the dismissal of Lord. The student authors suggest Lord apply for work as an overseer on a Southern plantation where he would be in an excellent position to use his Sunday pulpit to explain to his flock why God intended them to be enslaved. But then there is something else—one of the most disturbing things in the archives. On the last page, down it the corner is a mock advertisement for a slave auction to be held on the Green on July 27, 1855. The sale of slaves had been outlawed in New Hampshire in 1820 and by 1850 there were no longer any slaves in the state, so any contemporary reader would have seen this as satirical. It is brutal. It leads with the names of three individuals offered for sale: “The Girl Betsy,” “Sarah,” and “the Boy Frank.” I don’t have the stomach to read you the descriptions of Betsy, Sarah and Frank, but you can be pretty sure the language used is overtly offensive, steeped in racism and deeply derogatory. It makes you feel queasy just to read it. The kicker here is that Betsy, Sarah and Frank were members of Nathan Lord’s family. The students were determined to make this personal.

Below the names is a listing of other objects to be auctioned off. Among the symbols of the institution of slavery are plantation whips, branding irons, pistols, hand-cuffs and blood hounds. The last item hammers home their not-so-subtle message: also for sale are 300 copies of Lord’s pro-slavery essay. The seller is a fictional Nero Legree, a name that alludes to a tyrannical, out-of-touch emperor, and the villain of the best-selling abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

We live in an era of call out culture where things can turn very ugly, very fast. But it is still hard to imagine students using rhetoric like this to attack someone they personally know. Even by Twitter standards, this is pretty bad.

So, when Lord published his letter in Boston *Daily Courier* in November of 1862 titled “A True Picture of Abolition,” his basic argument about slavery was fairly well known. What reignited the public’s indignation was his contention that the full blame for the Civil War rested on the members of the abolitionist movement; a group of people he called arrogant and “intoxicated by the airy pantheism of France and Germany.” In his letter, he chronicles a kind of weird utopian history of the early republic destroyed by misguided abolitionists who had twisted the scriptures to fit their misguided belief that slavery is wrong, when, in Lord’s view, the Bible unquestionably supports the institution. Summing up, he goes on a tirade that starts:

Abolitionism is at fault. It is false and wrong. It destroys the ancient landmarks. It obliterates the old paths. It puts its heel on constitutional relations. It sunders what God has united, and unites what God has sundered.

Sure sounds like a man of the pulpit.

You just can’t get away with that in a Boston newspaper in 1862—especially if you represent a college where students and alumni were literally on the front lines fighting for the Union. You know he had to expect some kind of blowback. It came the following June when the letter was republished as a pamphlet for wider distribution. Various newspapers and political figures across New England had already used the letter to attack Lord and Dartmouth, but then the Merrimack Country Conference of Congregational Churches reacted with a set of resolutions. First that Dartmouth is an asset to the people of New Hampshire; second that while they have regard for Lord as a person, they write that they cannot abide “his particular views touching public affairs,--tending to embarrass our government in its present fearful struggle, and to encourage and strengthen the resistance of its enemies in arms”; and finally, the resolve, “that in our opinion it is the duty of the Trustees of the College to seriously inquire whether its interests do not demand a change in the Presidency; and to act according to their judgment in the premises.”

That same month, when the Trustees met, the committee on Honorary degrees goaded Lord by suggesting just one degree be award that year, to Abraham Lincoln. When Lord voted “no” on the resolution, an argument ensued over his right to vote except in the event of a tie, and the meeting was adjourned to consider the situation. The next day, a majority report authored by Lord’s opponents was brought to the Board of Trustees. It called for the publication and distribution of a pamphlet condemning President Lord while expressing the majority view that “American slavery, with all its sin and shame, and the alienations, jealousies, and hostilities between the people of different sections, of which it had been the fruitful source, may find its merited doom in the consequence of the war which it has evoked.”

Lord would not stand for this official rebuke, but his stance was purely from the realm of academic freedom. He wrote:

I take the liberty respectfully to protest against their right to impose any religious, ethical, or political test upon any member of their own body or any member of the College Faculty, beyond what is recognized by the Charter of the Institution, or express statutes of stipulations conformed to that instrument, however urged or suggested, directly or indirectly, by individuals or public bodies assuming to be as visitors for the college, or advisors of the Trustees.

He goes on:

The action of the Trustees, on certain resolutions of the Merrimack County Conference of Churches, virtually imposes such a test, inasmuch as it implicitly represents and censures me as having become injurious to the College, not on account of any official malfeasance or delinquency, for, on the contrary, its commendations of my personal and official character and conduct during my long term of service, far exceed my merits; but, for my opinions and publications on questions of Biblical ethics and interpretations, which are supposed by the Trustees to bear unfavorably upon one branch of the policy pursued by the present administration of the government of the country.

Lord was, in a word, pissed. He was being censured not for messing up his job, but for expressing his scholarly interpretation of Biblical ethics that just happened to fly in the face of the opinions held by the students, faculty, and trustees of Dartmouth, but also by the government of the United States.

But he also recognized that he, in modern parlance, had become a distraction undermining the goals of the College, so he ended by tendering his resignation. After 35 years as President of Dartmouth, he was done.

Call it irony or karma, but when Dartmouth created the first African American house in the late 1960s, the space given over to the students was the house that was once occupied by none other than Nathan Lord.

*Hindsight is 20/19* is a production of the Dartmouth College Library, and is produced as part of the celebration of Dartmouth’s 250th anniversary. This episode was written and directed by Jay Satterfield, and produced by Morgan Swan, our sound engineer was Julia Logan. Thank you for listening and we hope you will continue to enjoy *Hindsight is 20/19*.

JULIA LOGAN: Hey, podcast listeners. This is Julia Logan, sound engineer for this episode. The following songs were used in this episode: “[Surfing Day](http://freemusicarchive.org/music/Marcos_H_Bolanos/Unchained_Melodies_Vol2/Surfing_Day_master)” by [Marcos H. Bolanos](http://freemusicarchive.org/music/Marcos_H_Bolanos/) , "[Living in A Dream](http://freemusicarchive.org/music/Twin_Guns/Live_on_WFMUs_Three_Chord_Monte_with_Joe_Belock_-_May_30_2016/Twin_Guns_-_07_-_Living_In_A_Dream)” by [Twin Guns](http://freemusicarchive.org/music/Twin_Guns/)and “[Droves](http://freemusicarchive.org/music/Black_Agnes/Tales_From_Black_Agnes/Black_Agnes_-_Tales_from_Black_Agnes_-_04_Droves)” by [Black Agnes](http://freemusicarchive.org/music/Black_Agnes/). All songs were sourced from the Free Music Archive.