

## 2d – Paper Trails

On July 4, 2000, the *Hartford Courant* ran a startling front-page story recounting the paper's role in the slave trade during the 18th and 19th centuries. The story, titled "A Courant Complicity, An Old Wrong," detailed the *Courant's* history of running ads - many signed by Thomas Green, the paper's founder - for the sale of slaves and the capture of runaways.

As the oldest continuously published newspaper in the U.S., the *Courant* felt compelled to apologize for its involvement: "We are not proud of that part of our history and apologize for any involvement by our predecessors at the Courant in the terrible practice of buying and selling human beings that took place in previous centuries." The apology came on the heels of a *Courant* story from the previous March about the decision by Aetna, a Hartford-based insurance company, to apologize for having sold policies to slave owners insuring the lives of their slaves in the 1850s. Following that article, reporters conducted a four-month investigation of the newspaper's own archive and discovered that from its beginning in 1764 well into the 19th century, "*Courant* publishers ... acted as slave brokers."



The *Courant* was not the first newspaper to acknowledge its involvement in the slave trade, nor will it likely be the last. In 1993, The *New Orleans Times-Picayune* revealed how it had run advertisements for slaves and runaways when it was known as the *Daily Picayune*. Following the *Courant* apology, other newspapers were reportedly preparing similar articles. Historians and civil rights activists expressed hope that news organizations would not only apologize for past actions but also acknowledge more recent failings and be able to speak more clearly to their readers about the complex issue of race.

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