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Finding His Voice on the Road, in the Lecture Hall, and in His Newspaper: Frederick Douglass in Cincinnati in 1852

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AVOIDING CINCINNATI IN 1843

My Cocoon tightens—Colors tease—
I'm feeling for the Air—
A dim capacity for Wings
Demeans the Dress I wear—

Emily Dickinson, c. 1866[1]

As with the physical battle with Edward Covey through which young Frederick Bailey had regained the "elasticity of spirit" that slavery had taken from him, young Douglass's early visits to the western states above the Ohio River had threatened his body in the process of emancipating his spirit. Douglass had moved from New Bedford to Boston in 1841 after William Lloyd Garrison had "discovered" him in Nantucket and invited him to work as an agent for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. In 1843, Douglass was among the Garrisonians who undertook a tour of the "Western and Middle States" in which they conducted "One Hundred Conventions" in cities large and small. Douglass made it as far west as Pendleton, a small town near Indianapolis, where he was almost killed by a mob that drove him and his fellow speakers off the stage with clubs and brickbats, leaving Douglass himself "prostrate on the ground," with his "right hand broken, and in a state of unconsciousness," as he recalled in his *Life and Times* half a century later.[2]

Douglass had planned to visit Cincinnati in a series of Conventions the Garrisonians had scheduled as they headed back east along the Ohio River bordering the Kentucky shore. He was deterred from doing so by his Massachusetts companions who, especially after what had happened in Pendleton, convinced him that an appearance in the city of Cincinnati would put him danger of being "kidnapped" and "spirited to the Kentucky side of the Ohio, and doomed to a life of slavery." Recalling this decision seven years later, when Douglass finally did make it to Cincinnati as editor of *The North Star*, he was still chafing at not having made that first visit. "I saw the danger," he confessed to his readers, "and I shunned it; yet I felt a certain slavish feeling quite galling to my spirit…To dread the serpent, the hyena, the tiger, and other ferocious inhabitants of the untamed forest, is natural. We shrink from these instinctively. But to be afraid of OUR BROTHER MAN…adds to the pang of fear an intense mortification, a sense of degradation, too painful to be described."[3]

The 1843 visit of the entourage from Massachusetts had had been anticipated by Cincinnati abolitionists in a welcoming spirit tinged with wariness. Most of the abolitionists in Cincinnati

[1] Ralph W. Franklin, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 1246.
[2] John R. McKivigan, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 2: *Autobiographical Writings* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999–2012), 3:179–80.
[3] Frederick Douglass, "Letter from the Editor, Cincinnati, July 5, 1850," *North Star*, 18 July 1850.

were Liberty Party members who believed in political action and had strongly supported James G. Birney as that party's candidate for President of the United States in 1840. Birney had courageously defended his antislavery newspaper *The Philanthropist* against the mob that had attacked the office of his paper as well as the Black community of Cincinnati in 1836. Gamaliel Bailey, who succeeded him as editor, had been equally courageous in defending both *The Philanthropist* and the Black community against even more virulent rioting in 1841. Garrison and his followers in Massachusetts offered moral support when abolitionists in Cincinnati were brutally attacked by vicious mobs, but they differed entirely in antislavery strategy, believing that political action such as that advocated by the Liberty Party had no chance of success, and only siphoned off energies from the battle against slavery that could be won by moral suasion alone. On 22 July 1843, when *The Philanthropist* announced that Garrisonians in Massachusetts were about to embark on a Western campaign, many of whose "One Hundred Conventions" would presumably be in Ohio even though "no consultation has been had with the Executive Committee of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society," Bailey's paper urged its readers "to let Ohio rally all her forces." The Easterners "promise many speakers, some of them eloquent. We believe they are all opposed to the Liberty movement, and some of them have been in the habit of making war upon it. Never mind. We may teach them better in Ohio." Maybe these visiting Garrisonians will learn "to direct their batteries, not at friends, but foes."[4]

It is not clear how much, if anything, abolitionists in Cincinnati would have known about Frederick Douglass when *The Philanthropist* announced in July 1843 that a number of Garrisonians from Massachusetts would be conducting One Hundred Convention in Ohio and other western states. Douglass was mentioned by name, however, when the 20 September issue announced, "at the request of our Eastern friends," the schedule of those conventions "yet to be held in the State." The speakers in Cincinnati on 11 and 12 October were to be George W. Bradbury of Massachusetts and "Wm. White and S. H. Gay of the same state." This series of conventions was to continue east along the shore of the Ohio River through New Richmond, Ripley, Portsmouth, and Marietta to Mount Pleasant in Jefferson County. "Fred. Douglass" was included among the "*Second Series*" of speakers taking a more northerly route through the center of the state. They were scheduled to speak in Franklin, considerably north of Cincinnati, before moving on through Jamestown, Bloomingburgh, Greenfield, Zanesville, and Millwood before reaching Lloydsville, in Belmont County, near the Pennsylvania border. The other speakers along this more northerly route were to include C. L. Remond and James Munroe, but "at all these meetings we will have no doubt additional speakers from among our Ohio friends…Such an opportunity, has probably never before occurred in Ohio, to batter down the old Bastile of slavery…The visit of our Eastern friends has given evidence, wherever they have been, that no cause exists why Eastern and Western abolitionists may not cordially co-operate."[5]

According to *The Philanthropist*, the visitation of the Easterners in Cincinnati was less than successful. Their Cincinnati convention was "thinly attended." This was in part "owing to bad weather" and its being scheduled against a Liberty Party election. But it was "thinly attended" even by themselves. Mr. Bradburn was "unable to attend, owing to sickness." Mr. Monroe "left the city without speaking." Cincinnatians did hear from C. L. Remond, a "colored lecturer" who had previously been listed among those who would speak along the more northerly route. Remond

[4] "One Hundred Conventions," *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, 23 July 1843.

[5] "Great Anti-Slavery Conventions: Continuation of the Series of One Hundred," *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, 20 September 1843.

"is an educated man of fine talents," but "while it is human to show resentment, let not our colored friends forget, that it is christian to forgive."[6]

And how did Douglass do in the more northerly cities and towns? Here is the first report in *The Philanthropist* about his speaking ability: "Frederick Douglass, the famous fugitive from slavery, who is said by the Eastern papers generally to be a powerful speaker, lately addressed the good people of Lloydsville in this State. He soon obtained the command of their feelings, and set them to laughing or weeping at will."[7] And how did he do at the Presbyterian church in Putnam, near Zanesville? After "an audience composed of about one hundred and fifty persons of both sexes" heard Wm. A. White deliver a "spirited address" in Zanesville, "sufficient interest was created to bring a larger number over at night to Putnam to listen to a masterly address from F. Douglass." Many of the citizens of Zanesville "regret that they did not hear Douglass, and the opinion of those living there, is, that were he to return, no house in either Putnam or Zanesville would be large enough to hold the audience that would crowd together to hear him."[8]

On this more northerly route through central Ohio, Douglass and his colleagues did not encounter the kind of virulent treatment they had received in Pendleton, Indiana. There was apparently some "little mobbing" east of Zanesville, and at Millwood one protester acted so badly that "even slavery itself must have been ashamed."[9] To judge from the above reports in *The Philanthropist*, Douglass had shown impressive resilience during the arduous tour through central Ohio, fully recovering any "elasticity of spirit" he may have lost after being nearly beaten to death in Pendleton, Indiana. He had perhaps lost a bit of self-respect by letting the fear of his Garrisonian colleagues convince him to avoid Cincinnati and the rest of the riverside route through eastern Ohio. But perhaps he had gained some new self-respect—along with that of his eastern companions and western audiences—when speaking along the more northerly route. By the time he was making his audience in Lloydsville "laugh and weep at will," and those who had heard him in Putnam hunger for more of the "mastery" he had shown, we might imagine that the physical assault he had suffered from the mob in Pendleton, like the one he had endured from Edward Covey in Maryland, had helped the young Garrisonian from Massachusetts find a stronger, and more personal, voice as an abolitionist speaker than he had as yet found along the Eastern Atlantic shore.

We seem to have no contemporary record from Douglass himself of his return through Ohio after the excursion into Indiana. The only surviving letter from the period of the One Hundred Conventions is the one he wrote to Maria Weston Chapman, a close associate of William Lloyd Garrison in Boston, from Cambridge, Indiana, on 10 September 1843, five days before he and his colleagues were assaulted in Pendleton. His main concern in this lengthy letter is to defend himself and C. L. Remond against complaints that fellow Garrisonian John A. Collins had brought against them in relation to the meetings that had been held in Syracuse, New York, in late July. This complaint had been relayed by Chapman, on behalf of Garrison's board of managers, in a letter that had "come to hand" when Douglass was lecturing in Oakland, Ohio, on 8 September. After dealing at length with all the nuances of the charges Collins had brought, young Douglass closes with a plea of assistance for his wife Anna, who is caring for their children at home during this long absence. "I have received a few lines from my wife," he writes Mrs. Chapman, "asking for

[6] "Anti-Slavery Convention," *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, 16 October 1843.
[7] "Pretty Good," *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, 15 November 1843.
[8] "Conventions," *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, 27 December 1843.
[9] "Conventions," *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, 27 December 1843.

means to carry on household affair[.] I have none to send her[.] Will you please see that she is provided with $25 or $30. Excuse my writing—in great haste—F. Douglass."[10]

Douglass's Massachusetts colleagues did have good reason to fear that he might be "kidnapped" and "spirited across the river" if he lectured in Cincinnati. Not only fugitive slaves but free Blacks were in such danger. One such case was reported in *The Philanthropist*. The victims were "a family of colored persons, consisting of a man, his wife, and 4 children, residing on the farm of Mr. Penn, on Indian Creek" in Clermont Country, near New Richmond (the next stop of the Garrisonians upriver from Cincinnati). This family "had their house broken open about the hour of midnight, and some half dozen or more white villains entered, who seized the husband, and bound him with cords, and then took the wife and children, the youngest child nine days old, and carried them no one knows where, but it is supposed into Kentucky." The parents, "who were married in Clermont country, had been citizens and inhabitants of that county about eighteen years. Their children were all born there. The wife and her sister had been brought into this county by a maiden lady as her slaves, and by the lady formally manumitted. The husband was also free, & it is said that their free papers are recorded in the county."[11]

WELCOMED IN CINCINNATI IN 1850

A power of the Butterfly must be—
The Aptitude to fly
Meadows of Majesty implies
And easy Sweeps of Sky.

Dickinson, stanza 2[12]

In 1844, after Douglass had returned from the Western tour with fellow Garrisonians, his increasing eloquence as a speaker had caused many in his Massachusetts audiences to doubt that he had ever been a slave. In 1845, he and his Garrisonian mentors addressed that issue by publishing the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. This publication authenticated his personhood, but it also made the former Frederick Bailey, still a fugitive slave, more subject than ever to recapture by the Auld family who had enslaved him in Maryland, since Douglass had now "outed" himself as their slave. His Garrisonian friends were now afraid that he would be claimed in Massachusetts by agents of the Aulds, against whom, as Wendell Phillips pointed out in his introduction to the book, "the whole armory of Northern Law has no shield for you."[13] Douglass therefore sailed for Great Britain in August 1845, lecturing there very successfully until his return to America in 1847, where his transformation into a much more independent antislavery agent was seen in the blistering attack on American institutions that he delivered at the opening session of the annual meeting of Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York on 11 May 1847.

[10] John R. McKivigan, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 3: *Correspondence* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009–), 1:10–13.
[11] "Another Slavery Outrage," *Cincinnati Philanthropist*, 12 November 1842.
[12] Franklin, *Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 773.
[13] Wendell Phillips to Frederick Douglass, Boston, 22 April 1845, in McKivigan, *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ser. 3, 1:11.

This new recognition of his own powers became even more evident at the end of the year, when he freed himself from the Garrisonian cocoon that had protected and nurtured him in Boston and moved with his family to Rochester, in upstate New York, where he founded *The North Star* newspaper whose name he changed to *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in 1851 and published from Rochester for the rest of the decade. Once Douglass became a newspaper publisher in Rochester, antislavery developments in the Western states became as important to him as those along the Atlantic seaboard, putting Cincinnati back on the young editor's ever-widening radar screen. As Douglass was now no longer a fugitive slave (his freedom papers from the Auld family having been purchased by supporters in Great Britain), he would now be able to visit Cincinnati with less fear of slavecatchers or kidnappers from across the river in Kentucky. Douglass's interest in Cincinnati and the Western States was also quickly augmented by Martin Delany, his co-editor at *The North Star*. In 1848 Delany, an African American who had himself edited an antislavery newspaper in Pittsburgh, undertook a "Western Tour for the *North Star*" during which he wrote and published twenty-three letters from Western cites in which he was seeking subscribers. Three of those letters are addressed in detail, and with great admiration, in "The Character and Condition of the Colored People of Cincinnati."[14]

A new sequence of reports from Delany in 1849 announced that preparations were being made for Douglass's first-ever visit to Cincinnati, scheduled to coincide with that year's 1 August celebration of West Indian Emancipation. Among those preparations was the conversion of Dumas House, a Black boarding house that had been attacked by the White mob in 1841, into Dumas Hotel, the first hotel to offer public accommodations to Black visitors to the city. Douglass was planning to arrive in Cincinnati after a month-long lecture tour beginning in Detroit and moving south through Ohio, but he came down with a fever during the tour just as Cincinnati was being hit with the most deadly cholera attack in memory (the one that was soon to take the life of Harriet Beecher Stowe's beloved son Charley). So Douglass, for reasons of his health, had once again to deny himself the "long-desired" pleasure of visiting Cincinnati, as he announced in *The North Star,* promising his readers, and the citizens of Cincinnati, that he would visit that city as soon as his health and his schedule allowed.[15] That first visit was finally to come in July 1850, but again it was preceded by bodily violence in another state.

Douglass had remained a Garrisonian in theory after founding his own newspaper in Rochester. He still believed in moral suasion, rather than political action, as the best way to combat slavery, and he still shared Garrison's conviction that the U. S. Constitution was a pro-slavery document that offered no wiggle room for antislavery interpretation. Douglass continued to attend the annual meetings of Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society, and he was now a featured speaker at each year's opening ceremony at the Broadway Tabernacle. The highlight of the 1849 meeting had been a two-day debate between Douglass and Samuel Ringgold Ward over the U. S. Constitution, Douglass firmly explicating and defending the Garrisonian point of view, Ward advocating the position of Gerrit Smith and other Liberty Party activists that the Constitution and its Preamble can be given an antislavery construction that authorizes antislavery legislation. This debate had been so brilliantly conducted by both Douglass and Ward that Garrison's organization had given these two Black orators the most prominent positions in the opening ceremony of the next year's meeting at the Broadway Tabernacle on 6 May 1850.

[14] Robert S. Levine, "Western Tour for the *North Star*," in *Martin Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 92–99.
[15] Frederick Douglass, "The First of August Celebration at Cincinnati." *North Star*, 27 July 1849.

Before either of them could speak at that ceremony, the authorities in New York had allowed a large group of Tammany Hall rowdies led by Isaiah Rynders to harass Garrison, Phillips, and other early speakers. When Douglass rose to speak, Rynders confronted him directly by shouting, "You're only half a nigger!" To which Douglass had immediately replied, "And so half-brother to you yourselves." Douglass parried other thrusts by Rynders with cool and caustic wit, thereby saving the day and enabling himself and Ward to address their audience more or less as planned. The next day's meetings in the lecture room of the nearby New York Society Library did not go nearly so well. This time the authorities allowed the White mob to shout down the speakers and shut down the meeting, aborting this year's annual meeting and in effect running Garrison's organization out of New York City the next few years.[16] To make matters worse for Douglass, he was brutally attacked, when walking with two White women near the Battery, before leaving New York City for Rochester.[17] This was the second time he had been violently attacked in a Northern city shortly before a planned visit to Cincinnati.

As editor of *The North Star* in 1850, Douglass had every reason to hope he would find the city of Cincinnati more receptive to his visit than New York had recently been. The same 16 May issue that described the actions of the mob that driven the Garrisonians from New York City the week before also printed a long extract from a speech that Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire had given in March against the expansion of slavery into the new territories in the West. Hale, after discussing the mob violence that had been condoned in Cincinnati in 1836 and again in 1841, praised its antislavery forces for having persisted "until the public opinion in the city was so changed that there is now no large city in the Union in which the Anti-Slavery sentiment is more decided and more controlling."[18] We know quite a bit about Douglass's real-time response to his visit to Cincinnati in 1850 because he wrote four separate pieces about that visit to be published in *The North Star*.

His first "Letter from the Editor" described his arrival in Cincinnati on the Fourth of July after he had crossed Lake Erie from Buffalo to Sandusky by steamboat, and taken an overnight train on the Mad River Railroad from to Springfield, Ohio, after which had taken the Little Miami Railroad the rest of the way to Cincinnati. His second "Letter from the Editor" mentioned that he had given eight addresses during his first five days in the city, with special emphasis in the two lectures he had given in College Hall the day after his arrival. These two letters were published side-by-side in the 18 July issue of his paper, when he was already heading toward Pittsburgh from Columbus, where had completed an essay on the "The Character and Condition of the Colored People of Cincinnati" while also speaking at the Ohio State House. Douglass had then revealed even more about his visit in Cincinnati the essay on "Our Western Anti-Slavery Tour" that he published after returning to Rochester. We do not know when the last two essays were first published because the issues of *The North Star* in which they appeared are no longer extant. We know of their contents only because they were each reprinted in *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, a Garrisonian newspaper in north-eastern Ohio. Here we have space to show only a few of the ways in which his self-reporting of this trip to Cincinnati was helping him to develop an integrated voice—and experience—as a traveler, orator, and author.

The first "Letter from the Editor," written on 5 July, the day after Douglass arrived in Cincinnati, shows his instinctual ability to see the good in spite of the bad. Boarding the steamship *Alabama* for the all-day ride across Lake Erie from Buffalo to Sandusky City, he was only

[16] "Am. Anti-Slavery Society," *North Star*, 16 May 1850.
[17] Frederick Douglass, "At Home Again," *North Star*, 30 May 1850.
[18] J. Hale, "Speech of Mr. Hale on the Territorial Question," *North Star*, 16 May 1850.

reluctantly granted the first-class accommodations for which he had paid. During the voyage, he was "required to take my meals alone." Even so, he marveled at the beauty of this expansive waterway whose forested shorelines "presented a view of beauty and grandeur seldom surpassed" and he agreed to give an impromptu hour-long disquisition on antislavery themes. After a sleepless night from Sandusky to Springfield on rails "so irregularly laid as to jostle the cars from side to side like a ship encountering adverse waves," he was nevertheless able to savor the beauty of the Little Miami Valley through which the train carried him to Cincinnati on the Fourth of July. "No lover of Nature can pass thro' this valley without being soothed and charmed by its tranquil beauty. The trees reminded me of some of the best cared-for woods of British noblemen."[19]

As visually inspiring as the wooded valley were the small towns "whose neat villages and luxuriant fields broke upon me at intervals, and varied the pleasant view." When Douglass thought of the "hard-handed farmers" who were carving new lives out of this wooded wilderness, he felt that "these people might well celebrate the Fourth of July. They have some reason to do so. I could almost have joined them, if I were not checked and saddened by the recollection that even this beautiful valley is but common hunting-ground for men—that even here, the panting slave may be chased, caught, chained, and hurled back into interminable slavery." This double consciousness, contrasting what the Fourth of July is to the fugitive slave as opposed to the Little Miami Valley farmer, anticipates the central insight of the lecture Douglass was to be delivering in Rochester two years later. The sentence that follows, in the "Letter from the Editor" Douglass wrote from Cincinnati on the Fifth of July, anticipates the stinging, satirical language of the 1852 address: "With this thought, I could not but look upon the parade and noisy demonstrations which met us at every village, as hollow mockery—deceitful show."[20]

The next "Letter from the Editor" that Douglass dated four days later indicated that he had already given eight talks in Cincinnati in five days. Five were at College Hall near Fourth and Walnut, one was at Walnut Hills, and two were at Baker Street Baptist, a Black church that gave Douglass a gala farewell dinner on 11 August, his last night in Cincinnati before heading east for other speaking engagements on the way home. Three Cincinnati newspapers published accounts of his College Hall lectures, but Douglass's own account of the back-to-back lectures he gave in College Hall on the Fifth of July is the most extensive record we have of any of these appearances. As he was to be in Rochester two years later, he is very aware of the patriotic sentiments of his audience. He also gauges, early on, that he is dealing with a much more sympathetic audience than he and his colleagues had recently faced in New York.

> As might have been expected, so soon after the fourth of July, when the great deeds of our venerated and revolutionary sires were fresh in every man's memory, it was difficult to speak with any force or faithfulness without giving offence to some patriotic souls who heard me. In my first speech I did this. My sentiments stirred up the elements of wrath in a couple of gentlemen from Louisville, Kentucky. Their chivalrous spirit was dreadfully ruffled, and they spoke right out in the meeting! One of them bravely told me that I ought to be in the penitentiary, and that if he had it in his power he would put me there, and many other similar complimentary expressions. Their impertinent and vulgar interruptions were exceedingly annoying to the hearers, but not very embarrassing to me. They were turned to the account of freedom, and perhaps did as much good as anything I could have said during the time occupied by the interrupters. I observed that these gallant Kentuckians

[19] Douglass, "Letter from the Editor, Cincinnati, July 5, 1850."
[20] Douglass, "Letter from the Editor, Cincinnati, July 5, 1850."

> received very little encouragement from the citizens of Cincinnati. If I mistake not, the citizens of the 'Buckeye State' have nearly come to the conclusion to let the man stealers of old 'Kentuck' do their own mobbing and other dirty work…accordingly one of the citizens stepped toward the uproarious slave holding dandies and gave them to understand that if they did not cease their mobocratic demonstrations, they might possibly get their cloth soiled and perhaps otherwise marred. They were told that if they did not behave, they would be put out of the house. This sober admonition had the desired effect; the gentlemen became orderly, and all has gone smoothly since.

The fifth of July was the hottest day of the year so far, ninety-seven degrees, and the town was beset by another serious cholera epidemic, which was taking fifty victims a day, but Douglass spent a very active week in the city, meeting with a number of Black entrepreneurs and holding several informal meetings at Baker Street Baptist in preparation for the extensive survey of the "Character and Condition of the Colored People of Cincinnati" he would send to his newspaper a few days later from Columbus.[21]

The essay on "Our Western Anti-Slavery Tour" that Douglass published after returning to Rochester recapitulated the entire trip he had taken across Lake Erie, down to Cincinnati, and back through Columbus, where he was physically threatened by a mob that disrupted the second of two addresses he gave in the Ohio State House on 15 July. In addition to the gala farewell reception at Baker Street Baptist in Cincinnati, this essay described, in nearly rhapsodic terms, the reception Douglass had been given by Sarah and Andrew Ernst at their Spring Garden estate on the western edge of the city.

Sarah Otis Ernst (1809–1882) was a young Garrisonian in Boston who had moved to Cincinnati in 1841 after marrying Andrew Ernst, a horticulturalist and civic leader. As Douglass recalled, their Spring Garden estate is "situated on a fine sloping hill, covered with magnificent trees of the finest foliage," and "it overlooks the whole city and valley of Cincinnati. We have never seen, in this country, a garden so large and tastefully laid out, and abounding with so great a variety of fruits and flowers…It was a little surprising to meet with an abolitionist in such a place as that. Sympathy for despised and enslaved humanity does not often appear envisioned by wealth and luxury; yet we know that many a fugitive's heart had been made glad by the benevolence of the excellent friends in question."[22]

Soon after arriving at Spring Garden, Sarah Ernst had founded the Cincinnati Ladies' Anti-Slavery Sewing Society to make clothes for the fugitives who were streaming through the city from the South. In June 1849, now the mother of three children, she wrote her Garrisonian friend Anne Weston in Massachusetts of her desire to do more than clothe the fugitives; she wanted to find new ways by which her group could rouse Cincinnatians to a "deeper feeling upon the sin of slavery than had hitherto existed."[23] One of the first ways she did this was to bring Frederick Douglass to the city for his week of lectures in 1850. Another was to introduce Douglass, during his one week in the city, to the leaders of Cincinnati's antislavery community both Black and White, at the reception in her Spring Garden home. We know about this reception—and some of its guests—only because Douglass recalled this event in the retrospective essay he wrote for *The North Star* after returning to Rochester (which we know today only from the reprint on the front

[21] Frederick Douglass, "Letter from the Editor—No. 2, Cincinnati, July 9, 1850," *North Star*, 18 July 1850.
[22] Frederick Douglass, "Our Western Anti-Slavery Tour," *North Star*, date unknown; repr. *Salem* (Ohio) *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, 24 August 1850.
[23] S. O. Ernst to Anne Warren Weston, 18 June 1849, MS.A.92, vol. 6, no. 3, Boston Public Library.

page of *The Anti-Slavery Bugle* on 24 August 1850). In addition to the Ernsts themselves, Douglass singled out these "esteemed friends" he remembered from the reception at Spring Garden: "Dr. Brisbane, Levi Coffin, W. W. Watson, J. Gaines, and W. Casey. There were others also present, whose names escape our recollection. In company with such a band, days were but hours, and hours but minutes."[24]

Douglass had never been to Cincinnati but he had already become familiar with each of these persons as editor of *The North Star*. Dr. William H. Brisbane was a former South Carolina slaveholder and Baptist preacher who had freed his former slaves while becoming a Liberty Party activist and abolitionist preacher in Cincinnati from the early 1840s; Douglass's *North Star* had reviewed Brisbane's book *Slaveholding Examined in the Light of the Holy Bible* in 1848 and championed his incendiary pamphleteering against his former South Carolina slaveholding friends in 1849. Levi Coffin was a Quaker abolitionist who had moved from Indiana to Cincinnati in 1847 to become the de facto "president" of the city's Underground Railroad; in 1843 Coffin had provided shelter for Douglass and his fellow Garrisonians in his Indiana home. William W. Wilson was former Kentucky slave whose barber shop and bath house had made him one of Cincinnati's leading Black entrepreneurs; Douglass had described a visit by Watson and his wife to Rochester in 1848 and listed him as an agent of his paper in 1849.[25] John Gaines was a young stevedore and orator who had emerged as a leader of the Black community in response of the riots of the 1841; he was another Cincinnati agent for *The North Star* in 1849, when Douglass had reprinted part of Gaines's West Indian Emancipation Day address.[26] William Casey, the last of the "esteemed friends" whose names Douglass recalled after returning to Rochester, was a "boatman" known for his skill and courage in rowing fugitives safely across the river from the Kentucky shore; Douglass had featured Casey's exploits in the same issue of *The North Star* that described the visit of Watson and his wife to Rochester.[27]

Coming only two months after the brutal treatment Douglass and his fellow Garrisonians had received in New York City, the week in Cincinnati had buoyed his spirit and helped to reestablish his faith in the American people and the future of the antislavery movement. This long-awaited first visit to Cincinnati was to be the first of five visits to the city between 1850 and 1856. The reception Sarah Ernst had arranged for him with the "esteemed friends" whose names he recalled was only a foretaste of the sequence of interactions with Cincinnati abolitionists that would help to sustain and inspire him in the trying years to come. As editor of *The North Star* in 1850, he had met with new friends (the Ernsts, Brisbane, Casey) and re-united with old friends (Coffin, Watson, and Gaines) who would all be increasingly important to him during the 1850s. As an orator, he had gotten sustained exposure to audiences both Black and White in a city with a strong antislavery community on the border of Southern slavery. As writer of editorial letters and essays, he had processed the rich experiences of this "Western Anti-Slavery Tour" in the immediate wake of the events themselves, attaining knowledge of himself as a journalist and person he could have achieved in no other way. If the May 1850 visit to New York City had been shockingly traumatic, even for a realist like Douglass, the July 1850 visit to Cincinnati had been surprisingly therapeutic, from the "beauty and grandeur" of Lake Erie and "soothing and charming beauty" of the Little Miami Valley all the way through to reception at Spring Garden with that "band" of Western abolitionists among whom "days were but hours, and hours but minutes." In

[24] Douglass, "Our Western Anti-Slavery Tour."
[25] "With Pleasure We Announce the Visit," *North Star*, 11 August 1848.
[26] "Selections: Extracts," *North Star*, 7 September 1849.
[27] "Cincinnati Correspondence," *North Star*, 11 August 1848.

such expansive moments as these, at least, the former fugitive from Maryland was finding within himself, in the western states, far from the Atlantic, a new, expanded sense of how "A power of Butterfly must be / The Aptitude to fly."

EMBRACED IN CINCINNATI IN 1852

So I must baffle at the Hint
And cipher at the Sign
And make much blunder, if at last
I take the clue divine—

Dickinson, third verse[28]

Douglass's second visit to Cincinnati in April 1852 was even more welcoming and therapeutic than the first one in July 1850. It was more welcoming because of everything Sarah Ernst, William Brisbane, and their Cincinnati colleagues had been doing since Douglass had first met with them at Spring Garden. It was more therapeutic because of all the challenges Douglass and the antislavery movement had been facing since the *Bugle* had reprinted "Our Western Anti-Slavery Tour" on 24 August 1850.

Sarah Ernst had been very happy with Douglass's 1850 visit in spite of challenges posed by the suffocating heat and the return of the cholera. "They all liked Douglass," she wrote to Anne Weston soon after his visit. He would have had even more success with other speakers to "sustain and relieve him," so she now envisioned an "annual Anti-Slavery conference" every spring to be financed by an Anti-Slavery Bazaar conducted by her Sewing Society every fall.[29] Her first three-day Anti-Slavery Conference in 1851, featuring Douglass's old debating partner Samuel Ringgold Ward, was a great success. This was largely due to Ward's compelling gifts as an orator, but also to the wide range of local, regional, and national speakers who had shared the stage, representing all facets of the anti-slavery movement from Garrisonians on one extreme to Free Soil and Liberty Party activists on the other.

This 1851 Cincinnati conference was very thoroughly covered by *The Anti-Slavery Bugle* in northeastern Ohio, both of whose writers were deeply impressed by the wide range of antislavery opinions that were freely expressed—and by the power of Samuel Ward, a very dark-skinned Black man, to convert even the most resistant of White-skinned listeners. This Convention was amply financed by Ernst's Sewing Society. It was ably orchestrated by William Brisbane, who was widely respected by abolitionists of all stripes both locally and throughout the Northern states even though he was a lifelong political activist who had identified strongly with the Liberty Party and Free Soil manifestations of the antislavery movement. By the time of the inaugural Convention in April 1851, Brisbane was very active in the formation of a Free Democratic Party in Ohio that would combine the strongest features of Liberty Party and Free Soil activism. Ernst's Garrisonian idealism and Brisbane's pragmatic activism, energized by Ward's mesmerizing oratory, prepared the city for the even more ambitious Convention they planned for April 1852, when Frederick Douglass was to return to Cincinnati as its featured speaker.

Whatever expansiveness Douglass felt from his Western Anti-Slavery tour in July 1850 had been quickly deflated by the passage of the new Fugitive Slave Law by Congress in September.

[28] Franklin, *Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 773.
[29] S. O. Ernst to Anne Warren Weston, 28 July and 10 August 1850, MS.A.92, vol. 24, no. 16, Boston Public Library.

With the rights of slavecatchers enhanced, and any Northerner who helped a fugitive escape threatened with jail, the Northern states had immediately become much less safe for all variety of Blacks in the North, who, as Douglass told an audience in Boston in October, were already heading for Canada in record numbers. As Douglass surveyed the national scene, he came to see Garrison's ideological devotion to moral suasion as increasingly ineffective, and the more proactive view of the U. S. Constitution advocated by Gerrit Smith and Samuel Ward in upstate New York as much more efficacious. When Douglass announced his conversion to that point of view at the annual meeting of Garrison's association in May 1851—which was being held in Syracuse because New York City would not allow Garrison and his followers to return—Garrison immediately retaliated by having the name of *The North Star* removed from a resolution commending all newspapers that were furthering the true anti-slavery cause. This repudiation, combined with the financial challenge of publishing *The North Star* as a self-sustaining paper, caused Douglass to change its name to *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, with the blessing of Gerrit Smith, in June 1851. This initiated a new round of retaliation from Garrison that was to last for years.

One of the most devastating moments in early months of editing Douglass's newly named paper was having to announce in October that Samuel Ward—whom he had originally hoped could be his new co-editor—had abruptly moved with his family to Canada. Because of his role in helping the fugitive known as "Jerry" escape slavecatchers in Syracuse, Ward had become subject to arrest under the new Fugitive Slave Law. As Douglass was adjusting the strategy of his newly named paper in response to the rift with Garrison as well as the impact of the new Fugitive Slave Law (one of his most poignant editorials was entitled "Colored Americans, Come Home"), Douglass traveled and lectured much less than usual. After the encounter with the Garrisonians in Syracuse in May, he made only one out-of-state trip (to Rhode Island) the rest of the year. His first out-of-state trip in 1852 was as the featured speaker in Ernst's three-day Conference in Cincinnati in late April.

Douglass described this 1852 visit in the essay "Jaunt to Cincinnati" he published in his paper after returning home to Rochester. This year the steamboat ride from Buffalo took him straight to Cleveland, where there were now excellent rail connections through Columbus to Cincinnati. The steamboat ride itself was "exceedingly tedious and far from agreeable," as "fields of ice hedged up the way, and grated on the bottom of our steamer." Things quickly improved once he boarded the railway that took him from Cleveland to Cincinnati. He was amazed at the speed of the "fiery iron steed" which in "a few hours' ride…placed us where 'winter was over and gone.'" Douglass notes that "Spring, at Cincinnati, is full three weeks in advance of that at Rochester. Apples and peaches were all in blossom there, on the 26th of April; and the forest in the vicinity was rapidly putting forth its summer foliage."[30]

William Brisbane's diary for Monday, 26 April, notes that he "spent the evening with F. Douglass at the Dumas House." He was delighted that Douglass "had prepared an excellently written series of resolutions for the Committee." The three-day Conference was held at Smith and Nixon Hall, the city's newest, largest, and most prestigious venue. For the next three days, Brisbane and Douglass worked side-by-side so continuously that Brisbane was hardly able to touch his diary again until this entry of 29 April: "The Convention closed tonight. It was crowded to a perfect jam. It has been the greatest Anti-Slavery Meeting ever held in Cincinnati, O. I dined at Mr. Ernst's in company with several of our Anti-Slavery speakers."[31]

[30] Frederick Douglass, "Jaunt to Cincinnati," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 13 May 1852.

[31] William Henry Brisbane, "Manuscript Diary, Cincinnati, March 17–December 31, 1852," 26, 29 April 1852, MSS VD 10, William Henry Brisbane Papers, Library-Archives Division, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisc.

In addition to Douglass, the out-of-state speakers included C. C. Burleigh from Connecticut, George W. Julian from Indiana, Henry Bibb from Canada, Joseph Treat from Massachusetts, and John Fee from Kentucky. They were augmented by John Mercer Langston and E. H. Nevin from northern Ohio, and John Gaines, Samuel Lewis, John Jolliffe, and John Rankin from the Cincinnati area. The contributions of all of these speakers, session by session and day by day, were covered minutely in the Cincinnati *Gazette*, whose documentation, and celebration, of the entire Convention was reprinted verbatim in the 6 May issue of *Frederick Douglass's Paper*. The *Gazette* gives great praise to William Brisbane for orchestrating the entire convention, and to Sarah Ernst and the women of her Sewing Society for conceiving of this event and financing it, and it presents Douglass as an incredibly articulate, cogent, spellbinding, inspirational, collegial, and humorous catalyst for all that was said and done. Nearly all of the resolutions that Douglass had brought to Brisbane at Dumas House the night before the Convention were passed, in most cases unanimously, and with little or no change.[32]

The two major subjects of the 1852 Convention were the role of the Christian churches in the antislavery battle (an issue Garrison had disdained by castigating nearly all Christian believers as deplorably irremediable on the slavery issue) and the role of the U. S. Constitution in allowing the kind of political activism that Douglass was now seeing as the only way to actually defeat slavery. The fact that Douglass was now taking a position much closer to that of the Liberty Party / Free Soil / Free Democratic activists who had long surrounded Ernst in Cincinnati must have given her pause, as she was still a staunch Garrisonian. But Ernst and Brisbane, like Douglass, were entirely devoted to the principle that all abolitionists must work together for the common good if the movement was to succeed. Their three-day Convention in 1853 was to right any imbalance by featuring Garrison himself as the featured speaker. Ernst, Brisbane, and their Cincinnati associates worked hard to ensure that Garrison, who by that time was viewed as toxic and counterproductive by most local activists, received a respectful hearing.

Two weeks in advance of the 1852 Conference, Douglass had personally invited Gerrit Smith to attend the forthcoming meeting of "the abolitionists of the West." Smith was not able to attend, so Douglass sent a report from Rochester on 7 May, saying he was "none the worse for my jaunt to Cincinnati, although somewhat hoarse from constant speaking." Douglass "was quite satisfied with the proceedings of the convention in every respect" and "the resolutions adopted were for the most part drawn up by myself. You will see them in this week's paper."[33] Douglass had hoped to "supply" readers of his paper "with letters fresh from the stirring scene," but he explained in the "Jaunt to Cincinnati" that he published in the 13 May issue that "I make myself entirely too much a part of the proceedings of an anti-slavery meeting, and have my feelings too deeply excited to attend to the cold drudgery of penmanship. He who can coolly sit down in such meetings, sharpen his quill, unscrew his ink, and unfold his paper-case, to write out the proceedings of such an occasion, has a power of refrigeration which I do not possess. I can write resolutions, addresses, or what not, for the use of a Convention, but to write down the warm facts of its history on paper, when they come glowing from brave hearts all around me, I can't do it, and my readers must not expect it."[34]

Now, in retrospect, Douglass can give full credit to Sarah Ernst and her Ladies' Sewing Society and to the rare feat they had achieved in bringing all factions of the antislavery movement

[32] "Spirit of Cincinnati Press in Regard to the Anti-Slavery Question," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 6 May 1852.
[33] Frederick Douglass to Gerrit Smith, Rochester, N.Y., 15 April and 7 May 1849, in McKivigan, *Frederick Douglass Papers*, ser. 3, 1:529, 534.
[34] Douglass, "Jaunt to Cincinnati."

together in common purpose. "The Convention was the fruit of their sagacity, faith, zeal, and industry, and but for them, would not have been held. They had faith to believe that there was sufficient unanimity in a common object, to bring together the friends of liberty, of all schools; and such proved to be the case. Free Soilers, Garrisonians, and Liberty Party men, met and mingled their voices in a united and harmonious effort against the dark spirit of human bondage."[35] Such a spirit had not prevailed, unfortunately, in the annual meeting of Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society that Douglass had himself been hosting in Rochester during the week in which his "Jaunt to Cincinnati" appeared.

Still unwelcome in New York City, Garrison's Society held its Eighteenth Annual Meeting in Rochester's Corinthian Hall from 11–13 May. Any "warm facts of history" that transpired during the official business of this annual meeting were quickly chilled by the "powers of refrigeration" directed at Douglass himself at an informal meeting of the Society on the second morning of the gathering. As Douglass explains in the personal account of the events of the week that he published in the 20 May issue of his paper, he had felt during the first day of business that "I was in effect hailed as no longer a friend of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and was regarded as little better than an enemy." Thinking such cold treatment might come from a "misapprehension" of his motives in "reaching my present conclusions, in regard to the Constitution," he offered to convey directly to the group how he had reached his current belief on the matter. His guests responded with a volley of vituperation from nearly everyone present much more bitter and gratuitous that he could have imagined. He was told that in departing from the "platform" of the Society he had become "*self*-exiled." He had compounded this condition by placing himself "in close association with avowed enemies of the American Anti-Slavery Society." Not only that. He had "allowed himself to be patted on the shoulder at the Buffalo Convention" by a "deadly enemy" of the Society. And he had "accepted a donation of ten dollars to my paper" from that same person. Added to these complaints were those of two African American members of Garrison's Society who now showed themselves ready to "seek the destruction of the only paper in the United States conducted by a man of their own color," one of them, by falsely accusing him of having "favored colonization in Cincinnati."[36]

More surprising, perhaps, than the level of vituperation that the guests in Rochester directed at their host was the self-assurance with which Douglass met it in choosing the typeface in which he now made this declaration of independence: "I CONTEND THAT I HAVE A RIGHT TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANYBODY, WITH EVERYBODY, FOR THE OVERTHROW OF SLAVERY IN THIS COUNTRY, *whether auxiliary or not auxiliary to the American Society*, when I am PERMITTED TO DO SO WITHOUT SANCTIONING THAT WHICH I DISAPPROVE, OR SACRIFICING WHAT I DO APPROVE, AND WITHOUT WITHHOLDING ANY PART OF MY ANTI-SLAVERY TESTIMONY."[37] This clarifying sentiment was no doubt easier to feel, and to articulate, after having returned from the Cincinnati conference in which all manner of "anti-slavery of testimony" was welcomed from any person devoted to "the overthrow of slavery." It was also easier to express of after having written the "Jaunt to Cincinnati" he had published the week before on the day the Garrisonian meeting concluded. In that essay, before praising the Ladies' Sewing Society that had sponsored the convention, and the freedom of speech they had fostered among all elements of the anti-slavery

[35] Douglass, "Jaunt to Cincinnati."
[36] Frederick Douglass, "The Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 20 May 1852.
[37] Frederick Douglass, "Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society."

movement, Douglass had devoted what would otherwise seem an inordinate amount of space to the behavior of a "carrot-headed waiter" who had wished to remove him from the breakfast room of the Cleveland's Forest City Hotel on the morning after his steamboat had made its "tedious" way through the ice from Buffalo.

The incident in the breakfast room was nothing unusual for Douglass. The waiter had approached and said, "You must leave this table." When Douglass asked why, he had said, "We will serve you in your room. It is against our rules." After the young waiter had left the room, ostensibly to get help in removing him, Douglass had asked for a cup of coffee from another waiter and had been able to "partake of my morning meal without further annoyance." This particular indignity had been overcome more easily than most, but this experience had made Douglass wonder why "I am unable to travel in any part of this country without calling forth illustrations of the dark spirit of slavery at every step…My pro-slavery neighbors tell me that the fault is in me; that I am saucy, insolent, and presumptuous, continually assuming rights and privileges which are denied me by the general voice." Such people ask Douglass why he "should subject myself to such buffetings" when it would be so much easier to "travel as other colored men do, walking in the prescribed limits fixed by the wisdom of our enlightened public sentiment." His answer in "Jaunt to Cincinnati" is to declare this "rule of my conduct": "that whatever rights or privileges may be enjoyed innocently by white men, may as innocently be enjoyed by men of color. Taking this as incontrovertible, I move about among my fellow-men, thinking no more of them because they are white, and no less of myself, because I am colored; and paying very little regard to what I know to be the existing prejudices about me."[38]

Two days before publishing the above "rule of my conduct" in response to the "carrot-headed waiter" in "Jaunt to Cincinnati," Douglass had faced a much more mortifying, yet liberating, challenge in the battery of attacks from his Garrisonian guests. The self-actualizing clarity with he declared his personal and ideological "RIGHT TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANYBODY, WITH EVERYBODY, FOR THE OVERTHROW OF SLAVERY" in the next issue of his paper is a key moment in his coming of age as leader of the antislavery moment. It is also a key moment in showing how his interrelated activities as an author, editor, orator, and traveler were becoming increasingly intertwined.

Less than a month had passed between the day Douglass had landed in Cleveland on the way to the Anti-Slavery Conference in Cincinnati and the day he published his account of the Garrisonian meeting in Rochester. All of his growth during those few weeks helped to prepare him for the major step he was to make as a public intellectual in delivering his address "What to the Slave in the Fourth of July?" in Corinthian Hall less than two months after the Garrisonians had concluded their business there. Douglass published the address as a separate pamphlet as well as in his paper, and he wrote Gerrit Smith after delivering it that he had "taken up much of my extra time for the last two or three weeks" deciding exactly what to say.[39] He was now well on the way toward becoming a more deliberate orator, aware of the weight of every word.

One month after delivering the Fourth of July address, Douglass was in Pittsburgh for the National Convention at of the newly christened Free Democratic Party that was trying to build a national organization capacious enough to embrace antislavery activists ranging from die-hard Free Soil veterans at one end of the spectrum to the most tenacious of the Liberty Party purists at the other. The "abolitionists of the West" with whom Douglass had met in Cincinnati in April were

[38] Frederick Douglass, "Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society."
[39] Frederick Douglass, "Character and Condition of the Colored People of Cincinnati," *North Star*, date unknown; repr. *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*.

a major force in the new party, whose leadership included William Brisbane and Samuel Lewis from Cincinnati and George W. Julian from Indiana. Douglass himself served as an officer of this National Convention that nominated John P. Hale and Gorge W. Julian as its Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates. Hale and Julian did not win any electoral votes, but they kept the dream of a truly national antislavery party alive until the Republican Party arose in 1854 and nominated John C. Fremont for President in 1856.[40]

Brisbane was elected national chairman of the Free Democratic Party in Pittsburgh and Douglass and his paper endorsed the party in November election. Much of the national platform adopted by the Free Democrats in Pittsburgh was based on the resolutions that Ernst's Cincinnati Convention had adopted after being introduced by Douglass and Brisbane following their working session at the Dumas House. One highlight for Brisbane in Pittsburgh was having lunch with Douglass, Gerrit Smith, and local organizers of the Free Democratic convention on 11 August. One highlight for Julian in Pittsburgh was the opportunity of working again with Douglass. He later wrote that in spite of having been a U. S. Congressman representing the Free Soil Party from Indiana, he had never had a chance to work professionally with a Black man until he worked with Douglass at the Anti-Slavery Conference in Cincinnati in April 1852. Julian, like Douglass and Brisbane, was to be a highly effective antislavery activist through to the end of the Civil War.[41]

EPILOGUE

Douglass's growth as an orator, editor, author, and activist between 1850 and 1852 was only the beginning of what the challenges of the 1850s would require. Throughout 1853, his inclusive approach to antislavery advocacy was bitterly attacked by two of his former colleagues, Martin Delany, who wanted American Blacks to leave the nation, and Garrison, who wanted abolitionists to leave the Union. Cincinnati remained a refuge and an inspiration for Douglass in these divisive years. In April 1854 he and Lucy Stone were the featured speakers at another three-day conference in Cincinnati whose influence was even wider and deeper than the one in 1852. In November 1854 he returned to Cincinnati to deliver an early version of the comprehensive address on "The Anti-Slavery Movement" that he was to deliver and publish in Rochester early in 1855. By March 1856, when Douglass spoke in Cincinnati shortly after the infanticide and trial of Margaret Garner, he had published his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. He was now working with Gerrit Smith, John Brown, and James McCune Smith in creating the Radical Abolitionist Party as a way of pressuring the newly mobilized Republican Party (for which he *did* campaign in the Western states in the fall) to take a more principled antislavery position.

In June 1856, James Buchanan was chosen as the Presidential candidate of the Democratic Party at its National Convention in Cincinnati (in the same Smith & Nixon Hall at which Douglass held forth in 1852). Buchanan's election in the fall diminished the likelihood of any political or legislative progress for antislavery forces until the 1860 election. Douglass's next documented visit to Cincinnati was in January 1867, when he spoke to a clamorous audience of White and Black women and men in Mozart Hall. When the victory of the North in the Civil War, guaranteeing the emancipation of all slaves, was followed by the ratification of the 14th

[40] Richard H. Sewall, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), chapter 10.

[41] Patrick W. Riggleberger, *George Washington Julian, Radical Republican: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Politics and Reform* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1966), 88–89.

Amendment, granting citizenship to Black Americans, Douglass had seen two of his deepest dreams come true. Brisbane, too, had lived to see his dreams come true. During the War, he was appointed by Lincoln's Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase—his former friend from Cincinnati antislavery days—as a federal commissioner to collect taxes and confiscate property from his former South Carolina slaveholding friends. On 1 January 1863, Brisbane had the high honor of reading President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation to Union soldiers in the African American regiment commanded in South Carolina by Thomas Wentworth Higginson.[42] Higginson, eight months earlier, had answered the now celebrated letter from the unknown Emily Dickinson asking "Is my poetry alive?" Brisbane, like Douglass and Dickinson, had to "cipher at the sign" throughout the War, as during the decade before it, but each did, in the end, "take the clue divine."

[42] Thomas W. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, ed. R. D. Madison (1870; New York: Penguin Classics, 1997), 30–31.