

Frederick Douglass, Margaret Garner, and the Republican Party in 1856

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The Margaret Garner infanticide in Cincinnati in 1856 deeply affected Frederick Douglass as a former fugitive, newspaper editor, and political strategist in ways that have been unappreciated, in part because they have been difficult to research. Douglass experienced this event so intensely not only because he had been a fugitive slave, but because of his concern for the city of Cincinnati and the future of the nation.

Douglass had so many networking skills, such a strong emotional memory, and had traveled so widely from the time he escaped to the North in 1838 that some cities were important to him in ways untraced by most biographers or historians. Douglass made five significant visits to Cincinnati between 1850 and 1856, but these are unmentioned in the 888 pages of David Blight's comprehensive 2018 biography; they are also unknown to most Cincinnati historians. Douglass himself covered many of these visits very thoroughly in issues of his paper that have been largely unexamined, but the year 1856 presents special challenges to researchers.¹

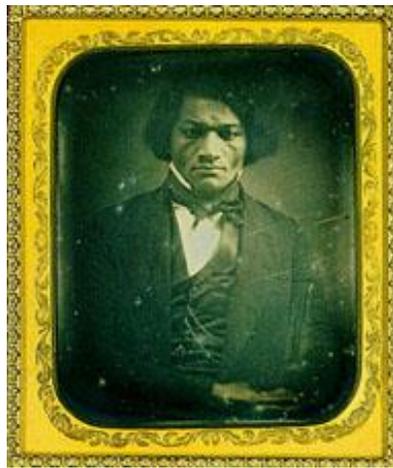


Figure 1. *Frederick Douglass*, photographer and city unknown, c.1850. Sixth plate daguerreotype. Copy of 1847 daguerreotype. National Portrait Gallery. Smithsonian Institution.

Douglass had arrived in Cincinnati for the first time on the Fourth of July 1850 (fig. 1). He gave eight talks in seven days before moving north to Columbus. He and the Garrisonians run out of New York City by a mob two months earlier, but he was warmly received by audiences of both races in Cincinnati. He wrote two letters for the *North Star* from Cincinnati and an essay about the Black citizens of the city on the way home. After returning to Rochester, he wrote in glowing terms

¹ Issues of his paper from 1856 are physically scarce. The Accessible Archives database, such a useful resource for studying both the *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, stops at 1855. My research for this essay has been possible only because the Frederick Douglass Papers Project at IUPUI has one roll of microfilm cobbled together from seven different sources that includes nearly every 1856 issue. These issues allow us to trace how the Margaret Garner infanticide on the Cincinnati side of the Ohio River in January influenced Douglass's response to the birth of the national Republican Party in February, leading eventually to his endorsements of its candidates in the Presidential Election in November.

about his meeting with the Black and White leaders of Cincinnati's antislavery community at a reception for him hosted by Sarah and Andrew Ernst.²

Sarah Ernst was head of the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Sewing Society in Cincinnati. Inspired by Douglass's visit, she held a bazaar every fall to raise funds for a three-day Anti-Slavery Convention every April. That soon became celebrated as the only national convention at which all elements of the antislavery community were free to speak. William Ringgold Ward was the featured speaker in 1851, Douglass in 1852, Garrison in 1853, Douglass and Lucy Stone in 1854, and William Wells Brown in 1855. Each featured speaker participated all three days along with a very impressive array of regional and local speakers diverse in race and gender.

In 1852, Douglass spoke four times in three days to huge audiences after arriving early to draw up all Conference resolutions with William Brisbane. A former South Carolina slaveholder, Brisbane was now a leading Cincinnati abolitionist who coordinated the annual conventions with Ernst. The 1852 Convention helped Douglass become a political activist; in August, he joined Brisbane, Samuel Lewis, and George Julian from the Cincinnati Convention as officers at the national convention of the Free Democratic Party in Pittsburgh. Douglass endorsed the Free Democratic Presidential ticket of John Hale and George Julian and actively campaigned for them in the fall.³

In 1854, Douglass and Lucy Stone attracted even larger crowds and more excitement than he had alone. In addition to networking with his Free Democratic colleagues and other abolitionists during the three-day convention, Douglass stayed in town to give a "Self-Help" talk to the local Black community at Zion Baptist Church coordinated by John Gaines and Peter Clark; these Cincinnatians had each been trusted and influential figures at the Colored National Convention Douglass hosted in Rochester the year before. Before leaving town Douglass renewed his friendship with J. P. Ball, already one of the nation's leading Black photographers. A week after returning to Rochester, he published a front-page engraving of Ball's Daguerrean Gallery of the West, the first illustration ever to appear in his paper (fig. 2).



Figure 2. *Ball's Great Daguerrean Gallery of the West* (Thomas Wentworth Higginson's copy). *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, May 5, 1854. American Antiquarian Society.

² Frederick Douglass, "Our Western Anti-Slavery Tour." *North Star*, date unknown; rpr. Salem (Ohio), 24 August 1850. For a detailed account of Douglass's engagement with Cincinnati up through 1852, see Robert K. Wallace, "Finding His Voice on the Road, in the Lecture Hall, and in His Newspaper: Frederick Douglass in Cincinnati in 1852," *New North Star* 1 (2019) 18–33.

³ Wallace, "Finding His Voice on the Road," 27–32.

Douglass returned to Cincinnati in late November 1854 to give an early version of the address on “The Anti-Slavery Movement” he published the next year. He was thrilled by the success with which antislavery candidates had mobilized voters in Northern states in the 1854 Congressional elections. But they had done so primarily by attacking the Kansas-Nebraska Act in the North, not by attacking slavery itself in the South. By the time Douglass published *My Bondage and My Freedom* in August 1855, he had become a founding member of the Radical Abolitionist Party. That party then seemed the only hope for true abolition. In September Salmon P. Chase was elected the first Republican governor of Ohio after pledging “not to touch slavery [in] the South.”⁴

Douglass faced two major challenges early in 1856: keeping his paper alive and keeping abolition alive within the antislavery movement. He addressed his paper’s desperate financial condition by delivering 42 talks during the first five weeks of the year, traveling through New England during an extremely frigid winter, soliciting subscribers and selling copies of *My Bondage and My Freedom* along the way. By mid-April he had given more than 100 lectures to more than 50,000 persons while traveling more than 4,000 miles between Bangor, Maine in the upper Northeast and Cincinnati, Ohio in the lower Midwest.⁵

Douglass’s editorial challenges were as severe as the financial ones. Julia Griffiths, the assistant editor who had managed his paper and stabilized its finances, had returned to her home in England with an uncertain date of return. Douglass had therefore brought young Peter Clark from Cincinnati to assist young William Watkins in editing and managing his paper during his long absences. Clark’s presence at the editorial desk made it possible for Douglass’s paper to cover the Margaret Garner infanticide and its excruciating aftermath as thoroughly as it did while Douglass himself was away lecturing.

Margaret Garner, her four children, her common-law husband Robert Garner, and his parents escaped from adjacent farms in Richwood, Kentucky, on the night of 27 January 1856. They traveled sixteen miles over the frozen landscape to the edge of Ohio River before walking across the ice to Cincinnati. There they walked several miles to the home of Margaret’s cousin, where Robert had already made plans for them to continue north on the Underground Railroad. When Margaret’s owner Archibald Gaines and a federal marshal arrived before the abolitionists did, Margaret began trying to kill all her children to save them from returning to a life of slavery. She injured them all before slicing the throat of two-year old Mary. The entire surviving family was arrested as fugitives and endured a one-month trial that got national attention. Archibald Gaines and the federal government demanded the immediate return of his property under the Fugitive Slave Law. Abolitionist lawyer John Jolliffe argued that Margaret should be tried for murder in an Ohio criminal trial that should take precedence over a federal civil trial.

National papers such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Tribune* gave the story continuous coverage from the time of the capture and killing on 28 January all the way through the legal proceedings that finally sent all surviving Garner family members back to enslavement on 28 February. Six daily Cincinnati papers that Douglass knew well from his previous visits to the city covered the case in even greater detail. Any future adjudication of the petition for a murder trial in Ohio depended on the ability and willingness of Governor Chase to successfully appeal to the Governor of Kentucky to return Margaret to Cincinnati for that purpose.

As a weekly, *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* could not of course keep up with the reporting of the national and local dailies. Its 1 February issue did include a short telegraphic report from the

⁴ Frederick Douglass, “The Anti-Slavery Movement” (as delivered in Rochester),” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 23 March 1855.

⁵ “Anti-Slavery Lecturing,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 18 April 1856.

New York Tribune about the tragic events in Cincinnati. Ironically, it also included a 21 January letter from its own Cincinnati correspondent Jabez (whose identity is currently unknown) declaring that the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law was “a dead letter” and that the freezing over of the Ohio was allowing more fugitives than ever to safely escape from Kentucky.⁶

Douglass set the tone for his coverage of the Garner case during the two weeks he spent in Rochester between his return from New England on 8 February and his departure for southwest Ohio on 20 February. From the 15 February issue through the middle of May, Douglass’s weekly paper had continuous coverage of the Garner tragedy with multiple stories in issue after issue. In addition to generous extracts from national, regional, and Cincinnati dailies, Douglass’s paper published its own original reporting from Jabez and John Gaines in Cincinnati, letters from loyal readers in Ohio and other states, and editorials expressing undying admiration for Margaret Garner as the “heroic slave mother” and for the lawyers who defended her.

In confronting Garner’s horrific, courageous act, Douglass’s emotional memory would have taken him directly to the letter from Cincinnati that his co-editor Martin Delaney had published in the *North Star* in June 1848. Delaney described the actions of two enslaved parents from northern Kentucky who were being held in the Covington jail before being sent down the river the next day. When they learned that they would have to leave their infant child behind, the mother killed the child, the father killed the mother, and tried to kill himself. Delaney’s letter celebrated their heroism and humanity for confronting the unspeakable evil of slavery in the bravest possible way. John Gaines, John Jolliffe, and Douglass himself were to do the same for Garner herself in Douglass’s paper in eight years later.⁷

At the same time that Douglass’s emotional memory would have taken him into that Covington, Kentucky jail cell in 1848, his strategic political mind would have taken him to the deliberations of those antislavery Republicans from various states who were meeting in Pittsburgh on 22 February to decide whether, and how, to create a national Republican political party in time to field candidates in the November Presidential election. Those delegates *did* decide to hold a national convention in June, but they postponed the creation of a party platform for a later date.

Douglass spoke in nine different cities in southwest Ohio before speaking in Cincinnati on 3 March, four days after the Garners were returned to enslavement in Kentucky. Looking back on his four months of strenuous lecturing in April, Douglass regretted that he had had no time to write about any of his travel along the way. The best account we have of his immediate response to the trial, conviction, and subsequent fate of the Garner family is from the continuous coverage that appeared in his paper. I will present that response in the sequence in which readers of his paper would have encountered it from one issue to the next. The legal, moral, and political implications of this case were to test all levels of government—and all sides of the antislavery divide—in new ways. One thing was clear from the beginning—Margaret Garner’s desperate act would help refocus national attention on the condition of the enslaved in the South.

I

Douglass’s paper began its extensive coverage of “The Cincinnati Slave Case” on 15 February in a reprint from the Cincinnati *Enquirer* providing a detailed summary of the first week of the federal trial in forty paragraphs of text. Federal Commissioner John L. Pendery began the

⁶ Jabez, “From our Cincinnati Correspondent” (for *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 21 January), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 1 February 1856.

⁷ M. D. R., “Letter from Cincinnati” (for the *North Star*, 20 May), *North Star*, 9 June 1848.

trial in a court room “jammed with eager spectators.” After preliminary motions by lawyers on both sides, Pendery decided to hear the case presented on behalf of James Marshall for the return of Mary and Simon Garner and their son Robert before turning to the claim presented by Archibald Gaines for the return of Margaret and her three remaining children. John Jolliffe on behalf of the enslaved defendants attempted to forestall the entire trial by arguing that Mary Garner, Robert Garner, and Margaret Garner should each be considered free by the courts of Ohio because they had each previously been brought into the state with permission of their owners. At the end of the hearing on Saturday, when the court adjourned until Monday morning, the *Enquirer* reported that “a number of Kentuckians” had formed “a double line of men from the Court-room door to the prisoner’s van” and had then “followed the omnibus to prevent a rescue,” vowing that they themselves are “prepared to carry the fugitives back to Kentucky” should that become necessary. The *Enquirer* did not mention that one of the U. S. Marshals officially charged with maintaining custody over the fugitives during the trial was Hiram Robinson, co-owner of the paper.⁸

The 15 February issue of Douglass’s paper also had two separate stories about Governor Chase of Ohio. His actions relating to the Garner case and its aftermath were to be carefully scrutinized for the rest of the year. One story reprinted Chase’s message urging the Ohio State Assembly to support “the admission of Kansas as a Free State” by actively helping citizens of that state resist a threatened invasion from Missouri. The second feature was a letter from a Black citizen of Ohio deeply disappointed that Governor Chase in his inaugural address had not reaffirmed his commitment to eliminating “distinctions on account of color” from the State Constitution. The author feared that this might be an “ominous foreshadowing” of the new Governor’s future policy on issues relating to race.⁹

The 22 February issue of Douglass’s paper had two highly significant accounts of the Garner trial. The one dated 10 February is a “Description of the Noble Heroine” that has been absent from the voluminous literature on the Garner case today because it was written specifically for Douglass’s now-difficult-to-find paper. Its author, “G,” is almost certainly John Gaines. The author “saw yesterday for the first time, the slave mother who cut her child’s throat from ear to ear...rather than see it returned to bondage...She is of medium height, hair short, complexion of a dark brown, nose flat, lips inclined to the heavy, cranium, and other peculiarities, of the pure negro type. So whatever of virtue, of intelligence, of a love of liberty, there may be in her...cannot...be attributed to a preponderance of Caucasian blood.” In the courtroom, Margaret appeared “as cold as ice.” As a witness from Kentucky testified against her, “she shook her head, as if to give a negative, and then her eye-brows fell, and a big tear was seen stealing down her cheek.” As the trial continued, Archibald Gaines, the man who claimed this mother and her three surviving children as his property, “approached Margaret, and gave her babe, that was sucking at her breast, a bit of candy and a sugar cake.” After this, he “took the tumbler which the Court was using, filled it with clear water, and helped each of his infant chattels. But when he proffered his hypocritical kindness to Margaret, she turned her head from him with contempt, and refused the sweetmeats of her oppressor.”¹⁰

⁸ “The Cincinnati Slave Case” (from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 15 February 1856; Steven Weisenburger, *Modern Medea: A Family Story of Slavery and Child-Murder in the Old South* (New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1998), 116–18.

⁹ “Gov. Chase on Kansas” (from the *Ohio Statesman*) and “Gov. Chase’s Inaugural Address” (Letter from A. J. A.), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 15 February 1856.

¹⁰ G., “The Cincinnati Slave Case—Description of the Noble Heroine” (for *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 10 February), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 22 February 1856.

As had Delany in the Covington case eight years earlier, G compares this “noble hearted woman” favorably with the fabled heroines of antiquity. He then explains for his reader the “double indictment” under which, if the Commissioner “decides against the defendants,” they might then be convicted under the murder charge from the State of Ohio, which would be “the only chance to save them from Southern Slavery, which, in itself, is worse than death.” It has been rumored that “it is the intention of the U. S. Marshal, in case of a favorable decision, to run the fugitives over into Kentucky; but he will be foiled his object.” G is confident that “the Sheriff will be on hand with a posse sufficiently strong to protect State sovereignty, and vindicate the laws of Ohio.” He is “glad to see the people spit upon the Fugitive Act every where.” G concluded by assuring readers that “the day is coming when it will be a moral impossibility to execute [that law] in Cincinnati.”¹¹

The second feature on “The Kentucky Slaves” in the 22 February issue was reprinted from the Cincinnati *Times* of 13 February. This was the “Fourth Day of the Trial of the Mother and her Children.” Margaret appeared “rather neatly arrayed, having a plaid shawl around her shoulders, and her head adorned with a black bonnet and veil.” Her children “played about the Court-room totally unconscious of the interest they excited in the breasts of spectators” (who were of “all colors and shades of colors”). After testimony that day, Commissioner Pendery said he would take as much time as necessary to “consider the whole case,” so he adjourned the court until 12 March.¹²

Immediately after the adjournment, Lucy Stone was allowed to reply to courtroom testimony that she had “provided a knife” to Margaret Garner in the course of a private interview. The deep sympathy she expressed for Margaret, reprinted in Douglass’s paper and many others, spread throughout the nation. No, Stone had not given Garner a knife, but she did defend Margaret’s right to take her own life as a way out of slavery. Lucy would herself without hesitation “point the slave to Freedom either through the gate of death or the highway over to Canada.”¹³

The 22 February issue of Douglass’s paper published a third substantial contribution addressing slavery and the State of Ohio, the letter that Gerrit Smith had written to Governor Chase on 30 January in response to Chase’s inaugural address. Smith presented at great length the critique that he, Douglass, and other Radical Abolitionists were now leveling at Chase and other Republicans who were willing to leave slavery untouched in the South while fighting it in Kansas and Nebraska. The cynical repeal of the Missouri Compromise had “prepared the masses for...a downright abolition party,” but the current result “was nothing better than the Republican party.” As embodied by Chase, this party “stipulates in advance, that from fifteen States liberty may be entirely banished, and that over the whole of the remainder of our guilty and cursed country slavery may forever hunt its victims” (as it was doing in Chase’s city of Cincinnati and state of Ohio during the week in which Smith wrote this letter and the month in which Douglass published it). Douglass wrote to Smith on the day before he left for southwest Ohio to thank him for having delivered “the true *word* in the true *time*” in the letter to Chase.¹⁴

The 29 February issue of Douglass’s paper was rich in responses to both the Cincinnati Fugitive Slave Case and the Organizing Convention for a National Republican Party held in Pittsburgh the week before. The primary feature from Cincinnati was an extremely detailed account of Jolliffe’s closing argument in defense of the Garners on the last day of the trial. A

¹¹ “Cincinnati Slave Case,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

¹² “The Kentucky Slaves” (from the *Cincinnati Times*, 13 February), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 22 February 1856.

¹³ “Kentucky Slaves,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

¹⁴ “Gerrit Smith to Gov. Chase” (from Peterboro, New York, 30 January), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 22 February 1856; Letter from Douglass to Smith from Rochester, 20 February 1856, John R. McKivigan, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 3: *Correspondence*, 2 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009–), 2:174.

separate editorial in Douglass's paper recommended that "our readers should not only read, but 'mark, and inwardly digest' the wholesome truths so forcibly and eloquently enunciated in the masterly *Christian* argument of Mr. Jolliffe." Jolliffe's motto was "NO LAW FOR SLAVERY." The basis of his argument was that "Every man on earth has the right to do everything that God has made it his duty to do." In making this argument, "the Bible was his text book, and no wonder the counsel for the kidnappers manifested their surprise at the novel and extraordinary course of his argument." It appeared to have made a "decided impression...upon the heart of the Commissioner, who refused to avail himself of the 'SUMMARY' feature of the Fugitive Bill" by which he could have turned the fugitives directly over to their claimants. The editorial concluded by declaring that "he who could listen to such an argument unmoved, must have a heart of steel." Douglass's paper was following the legalities of the Garner case, yes, but it was also trying to engage the sympathies of its audience as Stowe had done in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It had already done so by relating the direct impression Margaret had made on both "G" and Lucy Stone. It now did so here by reprinting an extremely detailed account of the highly humanistic speech with which Jolliffe concluded his defense of the Garners.¹⁵

Pointing to Robert's father, Jolliffe tells Pendery "you have a right to love that old man... as you love yourself, and to do to him as you would have him do to you, and it is your duty, sitting here in the temple of Justice, to exercise that right." Turning to the legalities of the case, Jolliffe reminds Pendery that his "oath to support the CONSTITUTION imposes an obligation" to support the entire document, not only a single article. Now putting his hand on young Robert's head, Jolliffe presents him as "a prisoner, guilty of no crime, his wife in jail in a delicate situation, needing her husband's aid...His three children, one an infant at the breast, demand his care, and you are asked to tear him from both wife and children that this man may take him into Kentucky, to sell his flesh, blood and bones, and soul, on the auction block. Do your duties as a Christian interfere with that? Can you do it and keep your conscience void of offense?"¹⁶

Pivoting again from humanity to the law, Jolliffe declares that the trouble with the Fugitive Slave Law is that "the Congress of the United States have endeavored to pass a law declaring that wrong was right." Now "putting his hand on old Mary's head," he applies Christ's injunction that "Whatsoever ye do to the least of these ye do it unto me" to Mary herself: "If you send her to slavery, you send the Savior—if you send her to the auction block you send Christ there." Jolliffe closed his argument by declaring to Pendery that "I now leave the religious liberty of the U. S. in your hands. Such a case has never before arisen, and if you separate these people it will be such a judgment as has never been given since Pontius Pilate sat upon the judgment seat."¹⁷

The religious element of Jolliffe's closing argument spoke directly to the third contribution about the Garner case in the 29 February issue of Douglass's paper, Mary A. Livermore's poem "The Slave Tragedy at Cincinnati." The speaker's "soul is sick and saddened with that fearful tale of woe." She praises the daughter's mother who could "thy precious soul set free: / Better for thee death and Heaven, than a life of slavery!"¹⁸

This same 29 February issue of Douglass's paper also had three separate features on the "Republican Convention" in Pittsburgh the week before. The first report was dated 22 February, the day the Convention began. Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* recommended "extreme

¹⁵ "Argument of Mr. Jolliffe," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 29 February 1856.

¹⁶ "The Cincinnati Fugitive Slave Case: Speech of Mr. Jolliffe," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 29 February 1856.

¹⁷ "Fugitive Slave Case," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

¹⁸ Mary A. Livermore, "The Slave Tragedy at Cincinnati" (from the *New York Tribune*), *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 29 February 1856.

caution in our movements,” but Joshua Giddings of Ohio and Owen Lovejoy of Illinois urged a more assertive course. Giddings and Lovejoy had taken prominent roles in the Free Democratic Convention in Pittsburgh in 1852. Two other Free Democratic leaders from 1852, George Julian of Indiana and Rufus Spalding of Ohio, were elected Vice Presidents on the opening day. Governor Chase of Ohio had been active behind the scenes in pushing for the creation of a National Republican Party, but the prominence of such men as Giddings, Lovejoy, Julian, and Spalding on the first day of the Convention suggested that this new party might be more willing than he to stand up to the Slavocracy of the South. On the second day, the Pittsburgh delegates authorized a National Convention to select a Presidential candidate to be held in Pennsylvania in June. A policy committee presented a detailed “history of the Slavery question,” much of which was “devoted to Kansas, and the conduct of the present Administration.” The question of whether, or how strongly, this party might declare itself opposed to Slavery itself—rather than its extension into the Territories—would have to wait for future developments.¹⁹

The editorial on “The Republican Convention” in the 29 February issue of Douglass’s paper is unsigned. Douglass was then lecturing in Ohio, so it may have been contributed by Watkins or Clark or both. A short preamble contrasted the “dignified proceedings” of the Republicans in Pittsburgh with the “tumult and discord” of the Know Nothings in Philadelphia. Greely was happy to see “the inauguration of a National party based on the principles of Freedom.” He had seldom seen such “unity of feeling” in a “political assemblage of this magnitude.” Giddings of Ohio made “a most brilliant speech” of a more personal nature. After having been “called a fanatic” for the last twenty years, he now feels that “years are condensed into hours” by the rapid progress in the cause of freedom. By the time the Convention was over, delegates from sixteen Free States were joined by those from eight Slave States (Missouri, Texas, Kentucky, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee). One of the Vice Presidents of the Convention was W. S. Bailey, an antislavery newspaper editor from Newport, Kentucky, next to Covington across the river from Cincinnati.²⁰

II

Events in Cincinnati had leaped far ahead of the publishing schedule of Douglass’s paper by the time he arrived in the city to speak in Smith & Nixon’s Hall on the evening of Monday, 3 March. By the time the above stories had come out in the 29 February issue, the trial of the Garners was decided in favor of the Kentucky slaveholders; Margaret and her surviving children were already back in the Covington jail as the property of Archibald Gaines in Richwood. Commissioner Pendery had decided the case well in advance of the 12 March date he had set for the resumption of the trial. He had acted in part owing to new initiatives by the defense team to keep the Garners in Ohio on the murder charge after all testimony in the federal case was heard. Various legal machinations were continuing up through Friday, 22 February, when the city of Cincinnati held a huge patriotic celebration to celebrate the birthday of George Washington. Governor Chase had come down from Columbus to head a parade that included members of the Ohio State Legislature, a regiment of the U. S. Cavalry, and armed local militia. When the parade stopped near Fifth Street Market Place, Governor Chase gave a long patriotic oration which included “neither a single mention nor even the most oblique reference to the Garner case” (even though the parade had passed right by the jail in which the Garners were still being held). Apparently, Chase did meet

¹⁹ “Republican Convention” and “The Republican Convention,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 29 February 1856.

²⁰ “Republican Convention” (editorial), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 29 February 1856.

sometime during the day with Sheriff Brashears and Joseph Cox, the city prosecutor who was leading the local effort to represent the rights of the State of Ohio in the case, promising that he would provide Sheriff Brashears “with all the force needed” in defending the rights of the state against any incursion by the forces under the control of the federal marshal.²¹

The standoff between the rival forces broke the following Tuesday, 26 February, when U. S. District Judge Humphrey Leavitt convened a hearing whose purpose was to resolve the conflicting claims of the federal and the state authorities. Outside of the court room before the hearing began, “angry crowds once again thronged the streets and traded threats with each other.” Levi Coffin and Lucy Stone were among the abolitionists inside the court room. Judge Leavitt said he would render his decision the next morning. That same afternoon Commissioner Penderly delivered his long-awaited decision on the federal case. He rejected claims made against the fugitives by the state of Ohio. He remanded the fugitives belonging to Marshall as well as those belonging to Gaines. But this decision could not take effect until Judge Leavitt ruled on the criminal request from Ohio. That request was further complicated the next morning when Jolliffe filed a new habeas request challenging the authority of Commissioner Penderly and the legality of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law itself.²²

On Thursday, 28 February, Judge Leavitt announced his decision, rejecting the argument that the criminal case in Ohio took precedence over the civil case in the federal fugitive hearing. He released the fugitives to Marshal Robinson, and Sheriff Brashears had to comply because the federal order took precedence over the local request. Moreover, Marshal Robinson’s armed force of four hundred vastly outnumbered the sheriff’s own staff, and the Ohio state militia support that Governor Chase had offered, if needed, a week before, had not materialized. The Sheriff had no choice but to allow Marshal Robinson’s forces to march all the Garner fugitives down to the ferry and across the river into the Covington jail. Now any attempt to try them under Ohio law would depend on the ability of Governor Chase to successfully petition Governor Morehead of Kentucky for their return from the custody of Marshall and Gaines that had now been restored.²³

While all the legal maneuvering, leading to this sudden denouement, was taking place in late February, Frederick Douglass was beginning his two-week speaking tour of Ohio, most of which was anchored in the southwest corner of the state. Current records indicate that he was lecturing in Ohio from 21 February through 6 March. He is known to have spoken in Columbus on 24 February and in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, respectively, on 3, 4, and 5 of March. Other speaking stops during this period were in Xenia, Bellbrook, Cedarville, Springfield, Dayton, Hamilton, and Painesville. Painesville is on Lake Erie east of Cleveland in Giddings’s district on the way back home to Rochester. The other six towns are in southwest Ohio along either the Miami or Little Miami Rivers. When Douglass passed through Springfield and Xenia on the Little Miami Railroad on his first visit to Cincinnati on 4 July 1850, he had realized that this lovely river valley was an actual “hunting ground” for fugitives escaping slavery in Kentucky. As he spoke in these and other nearby towns in late February 1856, the courtrooms of Cincinnati had become the official hunting ground for Margaret Garner and her surviving family, who were all sent from the Hamilton County jail back over into enslavement in Kentucky on 28 February, four days after Douglass had spoken in Columbus and four days before he spoke in Cincinnati. Wherever he was in southwest Ohio the week before he was to speak in Cincinnati, he would have heard daily about the latest developments in the Garner trial, about their being returned to their claimants in Kentucky, and

²¹ Weisenburger, 182–86.

²² Weisenburger, 188–92.

²³ Weisenburger, 193–200.

about legal, political, and journalistic aftermath that was to continue after the trial itself, much of it in his own paper.

Given Douglass's many connections in Cincinnati, it seems likely that he would have stayed in the city, if his schedule allowed it, a night or two before the March 3 date of his evening lecture at Smith & Nixon's Hall. The *Daily Gazette* reported that the topic of the lecture was "The Unity of the Human Race" and that it was "well attended, a good portion of the audience being colored." As reported by the *Gazette*, this talk closely resembled the address on the "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered" that Douglass had given in northern Ohio two years earlier. Douglass debunked those men of "more than common learning" who had "studied negro physiology, negro phrenology, and negro anatomy, even to the very kinks in their hair, and concluded that he was of a different race than the white man." The short report in the *Gazette* did not indicate whether or not Douglass had alluded to the recent rendition of the Garners, though it seems likely he would have.²⁴

In terms of Douglass's own intellectual trajectory, the "ethnological" emphasis in this speech might seem like a regression to a subject he had previously addressed, but the question of the Negro's relation to the rest of the human family had strong valence in Cincinnati owing to the failure of the State Legislature in Columbus to honor the fervent request, led by Jonathan Gaines and Peter Clark at the State Convention of Colored Men in January, to remove the word "white" from the clause granting voting rights in the Ohio State Constitution. In addition, the fluidity of ethnological distinctions between the black- and the white-classified had recently been highlighted in the "faded faces" of Margaret Garner's daughters Mary and Silla, each of whose whitish skin tones were much closer to those of Archibald Gaines, their likely father, than to those of their mother, as not only Lucy Stone but local newspapers had pointed out during the trial.²⁵

In Cincinnati, Douglass is almost certain to have met up with John Gaines and "Jabez," the Cincinnati correspondents for his paper. He is also likely to have met with such long-time associates as William Watson and J. P. Ball in the Black community and, if time allowed, with John Jolliffe, Levi Coffin, and Lucy Stone among White abolitionists. From any of these individuals he could have gotten good first-hand local accounts of the capture, trial, and return to Kentucky of the Margaret Garner family—along with informed thoughts about the future ramifications of this case legally, politically, and socially. The 7 March issue of Douglass's paper, published as he was presumably on the way home from Cleveland to Rochester, contained six separate features about the Garner case and related events in Cincinnati. Two of those contributions were written in Cincinnati before Douglass had arrived in town.

The feature "Washington's Birthday in Cincinnati" by "G" in the 7 March issue of the paper was dated 25 February, three days day after the celebration itself. This essay addressed the current condition of the Black community in the city in a way that showed there was still a need for Douglass to renew his "Claims for the Negro Ethnologically Considered." The Governor and

²⁴ "Fred. Douglass's lecture last evening at Smith & Nixon's Hall," Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*, March 4, 1856. This is so far the only review I have seen of Douglass's lecture. For "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," see *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 12 January 1855.

²⁵ The light complexion of Margaret's two daughters is unrepresented in the best-known image of the Garner tragedy, Thomas Satterwaite Noble's painting *The Modern Medea* (1867), which falsely depicted Margaret's husband Robert rather than her daughter Mary dead upon the floor. Those light complexions are also unrepresented in the mural of the Garner Family crossing the river painted by Robert Dafford on the floodwall on the Covington side of the Ohio in 2008. Archibald Gaines's likely paternity is discussed at length in Weisenburger, *Modern Medea*, 47–48, 88–89, and in Nikki M. Taylor, *Driven Toward Madness: The Fugitive Slave Margaret Garner and Tragedy on the Ohio* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2016), ch. 4.

other dignitaries in “fifty or sixty carriages” led “a grand union demonstration” featuring “the Irish, the Dutch, the Italian, the Frenchman, the Jew, the Saxon, the Anglo-American—men of all climes, and kingdoms, and tongues, and nations, except ‘niggers and dogs.’ What a country! what a people!” A sequence of armed militia included the Continentals from the state of Maryland and companies from Cleveland and Cincinnati in Ohio, but the request the Attuck Blues, Cincinnati’s black militia, to participate in the parade had not even been answered. Gaines deeply regrets that he currently lives in a city in which “any scape gallows from Europe, any convict from Van Dieman’s Land, if his skin be white, is placed in advance of genuine natives of the soil.” And this was written only a few days before the Garners were sent back over the river to Kentucky.²⁶

“Jabez” dated his letter on “Surrender of the Fugitive Slaves” the day after the Garners were returned to Kentucky. This “surrender of the seven fugitives back to hopeless bondage” was received with “amazement and outbursting indignation...The delivery was so sudden and entirely unlooked for, the mass of people knew nothing about it until too late.” Although “words fail to describe the deep heart-burning of this city, that their rights and those of our beloved State should be stricken down by that despotic tyranny, which has so long ruled the North,” Jabez is hopeful. He does feel that “the Slave Power is doomed to be overthrown.” If the Northern states can be “united in [their] efforts, we may place a faithful man in the Presidential chair.” Jabez is happy to report that “during the trial of the seven fugitives, over fifty slaves have passed through here *en route* to Canada!” And Benjamin Wade, Ohio’s incumbent anti-slavery Senator, “was re-elected today by our Legislature...This we regard as a noble triumph of Freedom.”²⁷

The letter from Jabez was accompanied on the same page of Douglass’s paper by a detailed rehearsal of the legal arguments relating to “The Fugitive Case” reprinted from the pages of the Cincinnati *Gazette* and the Cincinnati *Commercial*. Two shorter articles emphasized that slavery is worse than death. “A Slave Mother” revisited Lucy Stone’s powerful intervention on behalf of Margaret Garner. “The Cincinnati Fugitives” addressed the custody battle over “the Slave woman who killed her child to secure it from life-long slavery.”²⁸

The editorial on the “Rendition of the Heroic Garner Family” in the 7 March issue set the tone for the continuing coverage in Douglass’s paper for the next two months. By returning “the noble and heroic Garner family to their alleged owners,” Commissioner Pendery has ruled, in effect, that “freedom...is a something which is to be worn by one portion of Humanity...as a loose garment” to be thrown off “upon their return to Kentucky.” The entire situation “presents the State of Ohio, with a Free Soil Governor, before the world in a most humiliating aspect.” It returns “the noble and heroic Garner family to their alleged owners, who will have an opportunity of glutting their vengeance upon them, prior to their transportation to Vicksburg, Mississippi.” Douglass and his editors in Rochester were already aware of Gaines’s plan to send his slaves to the deep South even though he had promised to hold them in the event of a requisition from Governor Chase on the criminal charge. Yes, the Governor may “demand” them, and “be welcome” to them “if he can find” them. The ultimate fate of the Garners, and the complicity of Governor Chase in whatever that turned out to be, was to be an open and distressing question for some time to come.²⁹

²⁶ G, “Washington’s Birthday in Cincinnati” (for *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Cincinnati, 29 February), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 7 March 1856.

²⁷ Jabez, “From our Cincinnati Correspondent” (February 29), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 7 March 1856.

²⁸ “The Fugitive Slave Case: Before U. S. Commissioner Pendery: The Fugitives Remanded back to Slavery” (from the *Cincinnati Gazette* and the *Cincinnati Commercial*), “The Cincinnati Fugitives,” and “A Slave Mother,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 7 March 1856.

²⁹ “Rendition of the Heroic Garner Family,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 7 March 1856.

Whoever Douglass talked to for whatever time he spent in Cincinnati, he must have come away deeply troubled knowing that the entire Garner family, after making their courageous escape, were now back in the possession of their Kentucky enslavers. No longer could his correspondents Gaines and Jabez believe that the Fugitive Slave Law was dead. The overwhelming force of the local Democrat authorities, robustly supported by the federal administration of Franklin Pierce, unchallenged by the Ohio's newly inaugurated Republican Governor, had delivered the convicted fugitives back across the river without any significant resistance beyond that made by the city's legal community. John Jolliffe had defined the situation clearly in his 29 February letter published the next day in the *Daily Gazette*. Writing in response to a letter from Black Cincinnatians honoring him for his principled defense of the Garners, Jolliffe had asked "whether the people of Ohio will arise as one man and assert their rights, or tamely submit to outrages upon them that would drive many other people to the very verge of madness."³⁰

In the short term, the answer to this question would depend on whether Governor Chase would successfully petition the Governor of Kentucky to return Margaret Garner to Ohio to face the murder charge in Cincinnati. In a broader sense the rendition of the Garner family challenged the antislavery element of the city of Cincinnati. Could the city redeem itself? And could the newly formed national Republican Party bring itself to address the plight of the enslaved population in the South to which the Garners had now been returned? Douglass had much to think about as lectured in Columbus and Cleveland on the way home to Rochester and again had a chance to catch up with the weekly rhythm of his own newspaper. The one photograph of Douglass corresponding most closely to how he might have been feeling when leaving Cincinnati in early March 1856 is thought to have been taken in 1856, city and photographer currently unknown (fig. 3).³¹

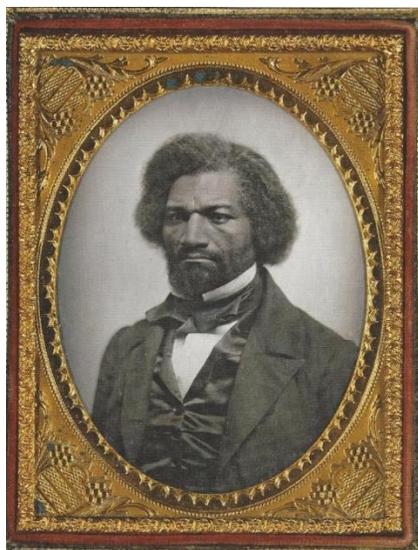


Figure 3. *Frederick Douglass*, photographer and city unknown, c. 1856. Quarter-plate ambrotype. daguerreotype. National Portrait Gallery. Smithsonian Institution.

³⁰ "Presentation to John Jolliffe Esq." (Cincinnati, 28 and 29 February), *Daily Gazette*, 1 March 1856.

³¹ This c. 1856 image of Douglass is plate 11, cat. 11, in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass* (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 2015). One wonders if J. P. Ball might have taken it during the 1856 visit to Cincinnati; Douglass had already visited Ball's studio in 1850 and depicted his gallery in 1854.

III

The first issue of Douglass's paper to be published after his return from Ohio included an editorial column that articulated in the clearest possible way the question that would challenge Douglass, his paper, and the nation for the rest of the year. Its argument began by announcing a "Mass Convention of Radical Abolitionists" to be held in Syracuse in late May. The circular proposing this event is attributed to Gerrit Smith, Lewis Tappan, James McCune Smith, and others, but it also speaks directly for Frederick Douglass as a founder of the Radical Abolitionist Party in 1855 and its most persuasive and visible advocate early in 1856. The circular states directly that the purpose of the Syracuse Convention is "to nominate candidates for President and Vice President of the United States, not merely Anti-Slavery candidates, but thorough Abolition candidates."³²

The editorial commentary, probably by Douglass himself, pivots on the declaration that "there exists no Political party in the country, save that of the 'Radical Abolitionists,' which proposes to *abolish* slavery." The Democratic party is "the supporter, defender, and protector of Slavery." The Know-Nothing party is "intensely pro-slavery," and those in its Northern wing "who profess to hate slavery...agree to 'let it alone 'where it now exists.'" The Republican Party offers as its motto "No more Slavery outside the Slave States." But it "does not propose to *abolish* Slavery." One of its most visible leaders (the unnamed Chase) has declared that "we will not interfere with Slavery in the Slave States." The Republican Party "*does well*, as far as it goes, but, unfortunately, it does not go far enough in the right direction," the result being that "it leaves the slave in his chains, to escape as best he can." For this reason, "the *present* generation of slaves...have nothing to expect from the non-extension policy of the Republican Party" (as was seen by the rendition of the Garners to Kentucky).³³

How then does the Radical Abolitionist Party intend to address situation? By placing the right men "in our Legislative Councils, and on the Judicial Bench, and in the Executive Chair." This argument challenges the Republicans to go all the way to Abolition, not to be satisfied with half-way measures. Douglass would himself continue to press that challenge all the way through to the Presidential election in November.³⁴

That same 14 March issue of Douglass's paper included a review of *My Bondage and My Freedom* by Harriet Beecher Stowe. She praised Douglass as a "writer and speaker" of unparalleled force who "stands now as a light-house to show the boiling shoals and eddies, the fearful yawning caverns of this great Maelstrom from which he scarcely escaped." Throughout 1856 Douglass continued to shed light as an editor by the articles he published as well as by the words he wrote and spoke. His 21 March issue did this with five separate stories relating to the Margaret Garner tragedy. Two of them were very long features direct from Cincinnati: "Presentation to John Jolliffe" reprinted from the 1 March issue of the *Daily Gazette* and P. C. Bassett's "A Visit to the Slave Mother who Killed her Child," reprinted from the *American Baptist*, a publication of the American Baptist Free Mission Society.³⁵

The "Presentation" to John Jolliffe was the letter, accompanied by a "purse," that five Black Cincinnatians had sent in appreciation for the pro bono work he had done on behalf of the

³² "Mass Convention of the Radical Abolitionists," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 14 March 1856.

³³ "Mass Convention," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

³⁴ "Mass Convention," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

³⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Anti-Slavery Literature," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 14 March 1856

Garners. Its authors were “compelled to witness upon our own *free soil* many of the most odious and most cruel features of the system of slavery.” Even so, “the great conflict between freedom and slavery must sooner or later come to a crisis” in which “truth and justice will ultimately triumph.” The letter Jolliffe wrote in response declared that the crisis had already arrived when “a whole family, to whom freedom is dearer than life, was taken from Ohio and delivered to their claimants in Kentucky, and this, too, by men sworn to support the Constitution of the United States and under the order of the District Court.” This was the letter in which he had asked “whether the people of Ohio will rise as one man and assert their rights.”³⁶

In contrast to legal and constitutional context of the “Presentation to John Jolliffe” is the personal and psychological dimension of the Bassett’s “Visit to the Slave Mother Who Killed her Child.” Bassett was granted an interview with Margaret by the Deputy Sheriff. His written recollection of this meeting is as severe an indictment of the system of slavery as the one Lucy Stone had given in public. Margaret had told him that when “the officers and slave-hunters” entered the house, “she caught a shovel and struck two of her children on the head, and took a knife and cut the throat of the third, and tried to kill the other.” She “would have killed them all... if they had given her time.” For herself, “she cared but little; but she was unwilling to have her children suffer as she had done.” When Bassett asked “if she were not excited almost to madness when she committed the act,” she replied, “No...I was as cool as I now am; and would rather kill them all at once, and thus end their sufferings, than have them taken back to slavery and murdered by piece-meal.” When she spoke of her own “days of suffering...bitter tears coursed their way down her cheeks, and fell in the face of [her] innocent child as it looked smiling up, little conscious of the danger and probable suffering that awaited it.” After having interviewed Margaret’s mother-in-law too, Bassett noted that “these slaves...have resided all their lives within sixteen miles of Cincinnati. We are frequently told that Kentucky slavery is very innocent. If these are its fruits, where it exists in a mild form, will someone tell us what we may expect from its more objectionable features?” Bassett’s interview with Margaret, like Jolliffe’s response to the “Presentation” letter, is a call to arms for Northerners to address slavery in the South as well as in the Western Territories.³⁷

Three other responses relating to the Margaret Garner case in the 21 March issue came from locations far distant from the city of Cincinnati. One is a reprint from the Ashtabula *Sentinel*, the paper in northeastern Ohio closely associated with Joshua Giddings. Its editorial “Ohio Disgraced” rejects the entire premise of the Fugitive Slave Law and suggests that “the people of Ashtabula county...would have retained the murderess and permitted the Judge to go into Slavery.” This paper “calls on the Republican party” to meet such “servility” head on, confident that “one short year shall see a Republican President occupying the Executive chair.” The letter that J. W. Duffin, a Black resident of Geneva, New York, wrote directly to Douglass’s paper is not so confident. The “circumstances and details” of the Garner case are so “heart-rending” that “if we should not speak, the very stones in our streets would cry out.” But Duffin’s concerns go far beyond that. He was “not prepared to believe that with her Free Soil Anti-Slavery Governor, a fugitive slave could be taken” from the State of Ohio. Nor would he “have believed that the colored men and women of Cincinnati would have suffered that poor woman... to be carried back again.” Imagining the federal Marshal and “his two hundred miserable Satellites” marching the Garner family to the riverbank without resistance, Duffin asks, “to what purpose are the free people of

³⁶ “Presentation to John Jolliffe, Esq.,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 21 March 1856.

³⁷ P. C. Bassett, “A Visit to the Slave Mother who Killed her Child” (Cincinnati, 12 February, from the *American Baptist*), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 21 March 1856.

color living in this country? We spend much time and money holding conventions” and passing resolutions, but “would to God that we had the courage when occasion required to fight for our rights.” If Sharp’s rifles are to be used to defend “the rights of free white men in Kansas, let us use them to defend free black men upon free soil.” Douglass’s reprint from the *Republican Standard* calls out Governor Chase directly: “If he persists in compromising with Slavery, by giving it fifteen States, and the privilege of hunting down Fugitives, in the remaining sixteen, we cannot support him.”³⁸

Two features in the 4 April issue brought new attention to the Garner case and to politics in Ohio. The new story on “The Kentucky Fugitive Slaves,” reprinted from the *Ohio Columbian* of two weeks earlier, deepened the tragedy for Margaret Garner and heightened the scrutiny of Governor Chase. This story reprinted the official report that Joseph Cooper submitted to Governor Chase after being sent by Chase to serve a requisition on Governor Morehead of Kentucky for the return of Margaret, Simon, Robert, and Mary Garner to face the murder charge brought by the state of Ohio. Chase had waited several days to authorize the requisition, and by the time Cooper was on a train to Lexington, en route to the Governor’s office in Frankfort, the four slaves to be requisitioned were on the same train, en route to Louisville and a steamboat that would take them into the deep South. Governor Morehead accepted the requisition in Frankfort, but by the time he acted on it the next morning, Margaret and the rest of her family were “on board the Henry Lewis” en route to a Garner family plantation in Arkansas. Was that not tragedy enough, the *Henry Lewis* “was run into by another boat and sunk,” downstream from Evansville, Indiana. Cooper’s report concluded by informing Chase that “some 25 passengers perished; and among the rest was Margaret’s babe...The remainder of the negros were re-shipped on another boat for Arkansas, to which place they are now on their way.” The *Ohio Columbian* offers Cooper’s report as another example of a “want of faith” by Archibald Gaines, who had promised keep his living property in the northern Kentucky until a requisition was served, but even worse was the way this new development was yet another “mockery of the rights and dignity of Ohio.”³⁹

In his editorial on “The Republican Party and its Candidates” in the same issue, Douglass initiated a formal analysis of the Republican Party that he would continue to revise and refine all the way up to the Presidential election in November. He is glad to have the Republican Party as an antislavery ally. Yet he “cannot be blind to the fact of its utter inadequacy as an effective agent in *abolishing* Slavery...It is absurd and ‘unconstitutional’ for the Republican party, to declare that the Slaveholder shall not take his slaves into...Kansas...*if that party concede his Constitutional right to his Slaves as property.*” The current crop of Republicans then being discussed as potential Presidential candidates—Francis P. Blair, Thomas Benton, and Judge McLean of Ohio—illustrate how the party seems “willing to lower its standard, day after day, until it is sufficiently low to attract the attention and support of the multitude.” Although the nation needs “a thorough-going *Abolitionist* at the helm,” the Republican Party is not yet considering stronger men such as Seward or Sumner for the nomination. If the Republicans are content to nominate “a Benton or Blair, or McLean, for President,” Douglass would himself prefer having “a Pierce, or a Douglas, or a Fillmore.” One of the latter would at least prevent “the people of the North from relapsing into that cold apathy and indifference, to which they are apparently constitutionally predisposed.” For now, the Radical Abolitionists offer the only viable alternative as an antislavery party. An editorial in

³⁸ “Ohio Disgraced” (from the *Ashtabula Sentinel*); “The Cincinnati Slave Case” (letter from J. W. Duffin, Geneva, New York); and “Gerrit Smith to Gov. Chase” (from the *Republican Standard*), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 21 March 1856.

³⁹ “The Kentucky Fugitive Slaves” (from the *Ohio Columbian*, 19 March), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 4 April 1856.

the next week's issue directly addressed the growing perception that "Republicanism is the White Man's Party."⁴⁰

The 18 April issue was the one in which Douglass published the column on "Anti-Slavery Lecturing" in which he looked back over the 100 lectures he had given to more than 50,000 people while traveling more than 4,000 miles between Bangor, Maine, and Cincinnati, Ohio, since the beginning of the year. He also noted that assistant editors Watkins and Clark have "this day" begun their own joint lecture tour in Western New York. The fact that "young men of our own race...have the heart, as well as the eloquence necessary, to plead the cause of our bleeding people, greatly enhances our hope for the future." Douglass was now in his late thirties, Watkins and Clark each a decade younger. Douglass announced in this same issue that he will himself be lecturing again in Ohio during the first two weeks of June.⁴¹

In the same 18 April issue, Douglass also published a critique of the current state of "Republicanism in Ohio." He was still willing to declare that "Ohio is a noble State! Nowhere did the seeds of truth, sown by the devoted friends of freedom, in the early periods of the Anti-Slavery struggle, fall on better ground, or give promise of bringing forth better fruit." But the leading Republicans of this state, in their "too great haste to command majorities," have been too willing to compromise their anti-slavery principles. Their "extreme solicitude" for the crisis in Kansas has allowed them to mobilize voters thus far, but what will they stand for when that crisis is over? The "legislature has adjourned without any action that would mark them as an Anti-Slavery body." Its members "steer clear of personal liberty bills...lest they should damage their prospects in the Presidential campaign." For the same reason, they have refused to act on the petition from colored Ohioans to "remove distinctions made at the ballot-box on account of color." This "compromising policy" seems to have "infected" Governor Chase, upon whom so many "had relied to do great deeds in behalf of our enslaved brethren." If "the freedom of Kansas is the solitary item" by which the emerging Republican party chooses to define itself, with a Presidential candidate to match, "then let them cease to claim votes as an Anti-Slavery party, which they are not." Douglass still hopes to see a party "that declares for freedom everywhere within the Republic...We would then feel some ray of hope that the abolition of slavery was among the probabilities of the times."⁴²

One week later, Douglass reported news that was worse than before for the Garners and Governor Chase. A reprint from the Cincinnati *Gazette* reported the doubly surprising news that Margaret Garner had *once more* been back in the Covington jail—and had *once again* been spirited away by Gaines before representatives from Governor Chase in Columbus arrived to serve the requisition for her return to Ohio. Improbable as it had seemed to many, Governor Morehead had monitored her passage all the way downriver into Arkansas and ordered her back to the Covington jail so the Ohio authorities could serve their warrant to arraign her on the murder charge. But again, for the second time, through some combination of sleight of hand by Gaines and delay by Chase, she was again out of jail and again on her way to Louisville and the deep South before the warrant was served. A second reprint from the *Gazette* about "The Slave Mother Margaret" reported in detail how Gaines had sent the Covington sheriff to Arkansas to retrieve Margaret and had promised Morehead he would "surrender her to the requisition of Gov. Chase, as soon as she could be brought back"—after which he had removed her from the jail "the night before" Chase's warrant was served. A third reprint on "The Gaines Case," from the Louisville *Democrat*, assured

⁴⁰ "The Republican Party and its Candidates" and "Republicanism is the White Man's Party," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 4 & 11 April 1856.

⁴¹ "Anti-Slavery Lecturing," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 18 April 1856.

⁴² "Republicanism in Ohio," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 18 April 1856.

its readers that Gaines had been true to his word, with the Ohioans simply having arrived too late. In a fourth story about the Garners in the April 25 issue, the Cincinnati *Columbian* tried to resolve the disputes in various Cincinnati papers over exactly how much money was spent to hire all the extra Marshals who were used to guard “four or five grown slaves and, we believe, three children.” The estimated cost of the Garner trial “to the Government was over \$30,000 and perhaps nearer \$40,000.”⁴³

Those four stories reminding readers of the role of the Federal Government and its Fugitive Slave Law in sending the Garners back into slavery, and of the repeated inability of the Republican Governor of Ohio to do anything about it, provided additional ballast for the argument Douglass sets forth in his editorial in the same issue entitled “What is my Duty as an Anti-Slavery Voter?” Here he situates the upcoming contest between the Radical Abolitionist and the Republican Parties within the context of the prior history of political abolitionism in the United States. The first truly antislavery party was the Liberty Party in the 1840s. “But the Buffalo platform of ’48 was lower than that of the Liberty Party.” And “the Pittsburgh platform of ’56 is lower than that of ’52.” Thus far in 1856, the Republican Party has taken the movement backwards. Not only was the year’s Pittsburgh Convention presided over by a slaveholder (Blair of Maryland); its current platform is Know-Nothing only, saying nothing about either the Fugitive Slave Bill or slavery in Washington, D. C. The only “warm and living position” this party currently embraces is “freedom for Kansas.” As of now, “we shall look to Syracuse rather than Philadelphia,” for “principles are more precious than numbers.”⁴⁴

Douglass does recognize that significant electoral support for the Radical Abolitionists over the Republicans could result in a Democratic victory. Even so, “it is by no means certain that Kansas can be saved by the Republican Party, even with the votes of Abolitionists. Freedom in Kansas depends, less upon politics, than upon the Anti-Slavery sentiment of the North.” His “duty” as an antislavery voter is therefore to support the one party for which “Slavery is a sin now, a sin at all times, and a sin everywhere.” Only the Radical Abolitionists are willing to declare that “the whole Slave population of this country—whether in States, Territories, dock yards, or on the high seas, must be emancipated.”⁴⁵

News that Margaret Garner was brought back to the Covington jail only to have Archibald Gaines outmaneuver Governor Chase once more was yet another blow to the hopes of the Black community in Cincinnati. Another dimension of their plight emerged from the very extensive review of a dramatic reading that John Gaines (as “G”) contributed to the 18 April issue of Douglass’s paper. Mary Webb was a Black actress who was becoming famous for her readings and impersonations from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Gaines praises the entire range of characters and scenes she represented from that drama, but he will never forget the scene in which Tom is dying and “the angel Eva is trying to put him in the light.” As Tom died, “and the curtain fell,” the audience was “baptized in tears.” But not enough of those tears were from the eyes of White Cincinnatians. Scattered among the “colored elite” which made up the great majority of the audience, Gaines had counted only “six white persons” on the first evening and “twenty-five or thirty on the last.” He laments this “cold treatment from those who claim to be our especial friends and well wishers,” these being “the Abolitionists, alias the Republicans of this city.” Gaines has

⁴³ “The Slave Mother Margaret taken Down South Again” and “The Slave Mother Margaret” (both from the *Cincinnati Gazette*), “The Gaines Case” (from the *Lexington Democrat*), and “The Slave Case—Curious Developments” (from the *Cincinnati Columbian*), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 25 April 1856.

⁴⁴ “What is my Duty as an Anti-Slavery Voter?,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 25 April 1856.

⁴⁵ “Duty as an Anti-Slavery Voter?,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

come to feel that “the prejudice against the free people of color in the North, when they essay to be the equals of white, *is actually more exclusive than it is in the South.*”⁴⁶

How sad it must have been for Douglass to see an upbeat colleague such as Gaines so depressed about this lack of support for Black elevation among the city’s leading White abolitionists. Adding to this was the rendition of Margaret Garner and her family back to Kentucky without any effective resistance from Governor Chase, the White anti-slavery community, or even its Black counterparts.

On 21 April, three days after Douglass published the review of the Mary Webb reading in Cincinnati, John Gaines led seven other Black Cincinnatians in making a new “Presentation” to John Jolliffe and his legal team in appreciation for their defense of the Garner family. Their gift of \$161 “in the name of the colored people of the Queen City of the West” was accompanied by an extensive letter to which Jolliffe wrote a highly appreciative response the next day. Douglass printed both these letters, along with his own extensive commentary, on the editorial page of his 16 May issue. In giving this much space to the two letters and his own commentary, Douglass was keeping the brutal reality of slavery in the South alive for his readers while also highlighting the eloquence with which a Black community was honoring a White lawyer for the work he had done not only for the Garners and their own community but for America itself.⁴⁷

In addition to rehearsing Jolliffe’s arguments against slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law, Gaines and his colleagues looked forward to the day when residents of Kentucky, “the birth-place of the Garner family,” will live in freedom. Jolliffe in turn predicted that one day Kentucky “will remember with pride that she gave birth to the Garner family, our unfortunate clients.” This deeply felt exchange in Douglass’s paper was modeling black-and-white reciprocity in a real-life story whose deep humanity echoed some of the fictional reciprocity that Harriet Beecher Stowe had imagined along the same Ohio River shore.⁴⁸

The editorial that accompanied this exchange was Douglass’s own verbal “Presentation” to Jolliffe as a man who represented all that was most honorable and principled in antislavery activism. John Jolliffe had never taken money for this work. He had never even counted up the number of antislavery cases he had taken on. Douglass, probably with the assistance of Peter Clark, found “at least forty-five cases in which this truly good man has spoken for those, whom the laws of this country have stricken dumb, and delivered, bound hand and foot,” across the river. This all leads, of course, to “the last case, that of Margaret Garner, the heroic mother whose hand was reddened with the blood of her little one,” which is “one of the grandest episodes in American history.” Garner’s case was notable not only for the way she stood up against slavery itself; she was also a mother who had “endured the compelled and hated embraces of her master.” Even so, the “demoralized citizens of Cincinnati...who are blatant about resisting border ruffianism in Kansas” had failed to protect her. This summary of the trial of the Garners ends by declaring, “Woe to the nation which drives mothers to shelter their babes in the asylum of the grave.” Addressing the inhumanity of slavery more broadly, this editorial concludes by arguing that “all measures are justifiable against the slaveholder.”⁴⁹

IV

⁴⁶ “G,” “From our Cincinnati Correspondent” (for *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 9 April), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 18 April 1856.

⁴⁷ “Presentation by the Colored People” (Cincinnati, 21 April), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 16 May 1856.

⁴⁸ “Presentation Colored People,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

⁴⁹ “Presentation to John Jolliffe, Esq.” (editorial), *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 16 May 1856.

The big dates for Douglass on the upcoming political calendar were 28 May, for the Nominating Convention of Radical Abolitionist Party in Syracuse; 17 June, for the Nominating Convention of the Republican Party in Philadelphia; and 4 November, for the national Presidential Election. During the week before the Radical Abolitionists met in Syracuse, the political landscape was altered by two dramatic events: Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts was nearly beaten to death by Preston Brooks of South Carolina on the floor of the U. S. Senate, one day after a pro-slavery mob in Kansas had “burned and pillaged the free-soil settlement of Lawrence.” In retaliation, though the delegates in Syracuse did not yet know it, John Brown, who had helped to found their party the year before, led a group of men who “cut the throats of five unarmed pro-slavery settlers” in Pottawatomie, Kansas. Certainly it seemed to those gathered in Syracuse that a “radical” approach to abolition was needed more than ever. Gerrit Smith was chosen as the Presidential candidate for the Party. Frederick Douglass had been nominated for Vice President, but Samuel McFarland from Pennsylvania was finally chosen, in part to avoid having two candidates from the same state of New York.⁵⁰

By the time Douglass formally endorsed Smith and McFarland in the 20 June issue of his paper, he had published the “Crime against Kansas” speech by Sumner that had prompted the attack by Brooks in two successive issues of his paper; James Buchanan was chosen as the Democratic Presidential candidate at their Nominating Convention at Smith and Nixon’s Hall in Cincinnati; and Douglass had himself returned from a two-week lecture tour in central and northern Ohio. His formal endorsement of Smith and McFarland reiterated points Douglass had made before: the Radical Abolitionists were the only party which “proposes to abolish Slavery”; they propose to do so by “placing men in office who will interpret the Constitution aright, and *act* accordingly”; and “Slavery must either be abolished peaceably or forcibly, by the ballot-box or by blood.” A companion editorial in support of “Our Candidates” emphasized the perceived weakness of the Republican Party, calling it “a heterogeneous mass of political antagonisms, gathered from defunct whiggery, disaffected democracy, and demented, defeated, and disappointed Native Americanism.” Even more dismissive was another companion piece, the official “Address of the National Convention of Radical Abolitionists” in which Gerrit Smith went considerably farther than Frederick Douglass would have been willing to do by dismissing the Free Democratic Party of 1852 as “an absurd party, which died speedily,” only to be succeeded “by another and more absurd party,” the Republicans.⁵¹

The above caustic dismissals were offset somewhat by an interim report on the “Republican Nominating Convention” in the same 20 June issue. However heterogeneous, this party had nominated John C. Fremont as its Presidential candidate on the first ballot in a largely “harmonious” process. The platform was stronger than might have been expected by taking a principled stand against slavery per se, though it did not presume to directly attack slavery in the Southern states. After the Convention completed its business the next day by nominating William L. Dayton of New Jersey as its Vice Presidential candidate, one would not have expected Frederick Douglass to abandon the candidacy of Smith and McFarland in order endorse that of Fremont and Dayton, but that is exactly what he was to do, surprising many, eight weeks later, in the 15 August

⁵⁰ John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 20–22.

⁵¹ “How do the Radical Abolitionists propose to Abolish Slavery,” “Our Candidates,” and “Address of the National Convention of Radical Abolitionists,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 20 June 1856.

issue of his paper. In the meantime, he and his assistant editors continued to give a great deal of attention to Cincinnati and the state of Ohio.”⁵²

While Douglass was speaking in northern and central Ohio during the first two weeks of June, his paper was covering a number of events in Cincinnati. One of these was the National Convention of the Democratic Party that had just chosen James Buchanan as its Presidential candidate and adopted a pro-slavery platform at the same Smith and Nixon’s Hall at which Douglass had spoken in early March. The 13 June issue, before Douglass himself had returned from Ohio, announced that his two assistant editors, Watkins and Clark, would be holding meetings in Ohio for four successive weeks beginning in Cincinnati on 24 June. After three meetings in Cincinnati, they would be traveling through thirteen cities in counties throughout southwestern Ohio before concluding with two meetings in Columbus. These meetings were part of a statewide drive to “deluge the Legislature with petitions” that would grant voting rights to free Blacks in Ohio. On 27 June, soon after his young co-editors had left Rochester for Cincinnati, Douglass wrote an editorial in support of their month-long “mission.” Given the general “temper of the Anti-Slavery mind in Ohio,” and the “desire to elect Fremont” in the immediate wake of the Republican convention, there is currently “little disposition to hear any truth which transcends the Republican platform.” But that is all the more reason to preach “true Abolitionism” even though it means to “travel over the hot and dusty roads of Ohio, under a burning sun, from day to day—speaking two or three hours daily,” as Douglass knew himself all too well.⁵³

Douglass revealed the long-term strategy behind his targeting of Ohio in the summer of 1856 in a companion essay about his own experiences during “Fourteen Days in Ohio” earlier in the month. His own tour through the central part of the state was in “every way gratifying.” It allowed him to once more see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears how much had changed since his first visit to Ohio in 1843:

Thirteen years ago, negro hate was rampant in the central and southern part of the State... It is not always given to Reformers to see the gratifying results of their own endeavors. The glimpses they get of them are generally by an eye of faith...But such has been the progress of Anti-Slavery principles in Ohio...that we can now lay side by side, in pleasant contrast, the toils of seed time, and the joys of harvest...A few Abolition presses flung into the river—a few violent mobs—a few heated denunciations of Abolitionists—a few fines and imprisonments, for harboring and sheltering fugitive slaves—and suddenly the whole face of things is changed; a violent pro-slavery State is converted into a free soil State, and an Anti-Slavery Governor sits at the head of affairs.

There was still much, of course, that remained to be done. Only a few of the “foremost men” in Ohio have as yet “planted themselves upon the impregnable ground that *Slavery cannot be Legal*,” but that remains the ultimate goal. “When the pending election is over, and the liberal public will have “elected, or failed to elect, Fremont and Dayton, the people of Ohio will be more disposed to hear the whole truth on this higher and bolder, and more effective Anti-Slavery position.”⁵⁴

Douglass devoted the rest of this very substantial essay to what he had observed of the “tone, conversation, and conduct” of the Black population in the cities he had visited, praising not

⁵² “Republican Nominating Convention,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 20 June 1856.

⁵³ “The Democratic Nominee and Platform,” “Free Suffrage Meetings in Ohio,” “Wm. J. Watkins and Peter H. Clark,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 6, 13, & 27 June 1856.

⁵⁴ “Fourteen Days in Ohio,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 27 June 1856.

only the greater civic awareness but also the dramatic rise in property ownership. The self-help ethos he had preached at Zion Baptist only two years earlier in Cincinnati was prospering as never before throughout the state.⁵⁵

Douglass announced his support of the Republican Presidential ticket of Fremont and Dayton in a carefully calibrated editorial in the August 15 issue. He enumerated his reasons for doing so in seven substantial paragraphs. Only the strongest considerations could cause him to depart from “the genuine, unadulterated Abolitionism” embodied by Gerrit Smith. But “right Anti-Slavery action is that which deals the severest, deadliest blow upon Slavery that can be given at that particular time.” To vote for Fremont and Dayton in this election is not to “abandon a single Anti-Slavery Truth or Principle” but rather to “uphold” those truths and principles “in the very ranks of the Republican Party.” Nobody doubts that “the commanding and vital issue with Slavery in the approaching election, is the extension or limitation of Slavery.” This issue must be won before others can be successfully addressed to a wider public. Douglass will support the Republican Party in this election because they are in a position to “inflict” the most powerful blow upon “the Slave Oligarchy.” In truth, there are only two viable parties in this battle between “Freedom or Slavery,” and Douglass wants to be on the right side. His seventh and last paragraph acknowledges that the Republican nominees “do not declare any purpose to abolish Slavery by legislation, in the States.” But this party has “laid down principles” that “directly tend to the Abolition of Slavery,” so voting for them in this national election can do more good “than the few votes of the isolated Radical Abolitionists.” This pragmatic decision to support the Republican Party was in this sense a natural extension of the decision to support the Free Democrats in the 1852 election, with the difference that this was a national party with a true chance of winning, if not in the 1856 Presidential election, in the one to follow.⁵⁶

Right next to his dramatic endorsement of Fremont and Dayton, Douglass published the second installment of his account of his fourteen-day tour of Ohio in early June. The fact that he was so persistent in sharing this information with his readers even two months after the fact indicated how important such trips were to his concept of the mission of his paper. As he traveled, his primary goals were to encourage, energize, and, when necessary, to educate the Black communities in each city.

Douglass travelled relatively little between his endorsement of Fremont and Dayton on 15 August and Election Day in November, but at the end of August he made one more foray into southern Ohio, campaigning for the Republican ticket in Ripley and other towns across the river from Kentucky before returning home in early September. His next important appearance was in Syracuse, where he attended a Liberty Party meeting on 15 September and then the Jerry Rescue Celebration on 1 October, which this year was immediately followed by a three-day State Convention in Syracuse to mobilize against the “unconstitutional statute” that prevented most Blacks in the State from voting. This was a direct extension of the campaign that Watkins, Clark, and Douglass were conducting in Ohio in June and July, and their three names were the first among the twenty-five individuals who signed this Call for this Convention (many of whom were active participants in the National Colored Convention in Rochester three years earlier). Douglass introduced several resolutions at the Jerry Celebration which were not passed, but which got a great deal of attention far beyond Syracuse. One of them declared that “we should rejoice in a successful slave revolution which would teach slaveholders the wrong and danger involved in the act of slaveholding.” Another declared that “the Slaveholder should be made to dream of death in

⁵⁵ “Fourteen Days,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

⁵⁶ “Fremont and Dayton,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 15 August 1856.

his sleep,” and to fear death “in his dish and tea pot.” When pressed to explain his motives in proposing such incendiary resolutions, Douglass claimed that he his goal was not to “stir up the slave to insurrection” but to “help to stir up the slaveholder against himself.”⁵⁷

By the end of October, Douglass’s incendiary words had spread all the way to Chicago, where he gave a major address at Metropolitan Hall on 26 October after having spent a week campaigning for Fremont and Dayton in Wisconsin. To travel that far West at the height of the Presidential election season was another sign of his current devotion not only to the Republican candidates but to the importance of the Western states in this and future elections. In Wisconsin, Douglass spoke in Milwaukee before moving on to Beaver Dam in Dodge County. But it was his appearance in Metropolitan Hall on 26 October that drew the most coverage, even in Wisconsin. According to the *Chicago Tribune* the crowd of “perhaps twenty-five hundred people” represented “all shades of political opinion” in Chicago, including the “very cream of the Fremont party” and the “very cream” of the Buchanan party. On this occasion Douglass was able to speak to slaveholders directly, because “hundreds of Southerners were there; Kentuckians abounded in all parts of the hall—many with wives and daughters.” This gave Douglass the perfect opportunity to attack those Democrats who “denounce the Abolitionists, as being amalgamationists!” He pointed out that “less than a century” ago, “a mulatto could scarcely be found. Now, there is hardly one of my race left. The whole African population has been bleached into mulattoes, by [the] whole system of concubinage established by the slaveholders, who prefer black women to those of their own color.” He extended this incendiary observation directly to those in the hall, adding that “the best blood of the first families of Virginia and Kentucky flowed in the veins of colored people; that the blood of the Lees, the Masons, the Breckenridges, the Marshalls could be found in a part of his audience.”⁵⁸

Those pointed comments on amalgamation were apparently prompted in part by his recognition of Colonel Preston in the audience, a Kentuckian who had been describing Negroes as “an inferior race” at a Buchanan rally a few days earlier. Douglass’s comments on amalgamation provided plenty of ammunition for papers like the *Chicago Daily Times*, which pictured a hall full of “white men and sooty wenches, and black men and white women, all listening with open mouths to this Negro, who boasted that white and black people were disappearing, and that mulattos were fast increasing.” Such characterizations had soon spread from Chicago as far west as Burlington, Iowa, and as far south as Macon, Georgia—much as the resolutions Douglass proposed in Syracuse had spread to Chicago.⁵⁹

Douglass, in his 7 November issue, was just learning the scope of the Democratic victory in the Presidential election, but he was already looking ahead to 1860 after the very strong showing the Republican Party had made it in its first year as a national party. When the final results were in, the Republicans had won eleven of the sixteen free states, losing only New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Illinois, and California. A win in Pennsylvania and either Indiana or Illinois would have given them the victory. Douglass emphasized that this was “the first time in the history of Anti-Slavery agitation that a party as imposing in numbers as the Republican party, has set itself

⁵⁷ “Partial Speaking Itinerary,” John W. Blassingame et al, eds., *Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 1: *Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, 4 vols. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 3:xxv; “Know Nothing Misrepresentation,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 10 October 1856; “The Slaves Rising,” *FDP*, 19 December 1856.

⁵⁸ “Meetings,” *Milwaukee Free Democrat*, 3 October; Mike Miller and Kevin Dier Zimmel, “Douglass speeches drew cheers and jeers,” *Madison Capital Times*, 20 October 2000, 4a; “Douglass in Chicago” (from the *Chicago Tribune*), *Richland County Observer*, Richland Center, Wisconsin, 18 November 1856.

⁵⁹ I draw here upon clippings and transcriptions Kevin Dier-Zimmel has provided from the *Chicago Daily Times*, the *Chicago Democrat*, the *Burlington Daily Gazette*, and the *Macon Georgia Telegraph*.

up as a barrier to further encroachments of slavery, and we could do no less than we did by Hale & Julian—give our hearty support.” The Republican party has “most gloriously battled for the right.” Because there is “about our cause an inherent vitality, a recuperative energy which defies defeat,” he expects “our heaven-born Principles” to “blaze forth more brightly than ever” in 1860. In the meantime, there would be four successive years of very difficult challenge, not only for the nation and for the Republican Party, but for the survival of Douglass’s newspaper. In Douglass’s December prospectus for what would be its Tenth Volume, he admitted that while he was “out upon the stump, doing our best for Fremont and Freedom,” his paper had “narrowly escaped *suspension*” for “the want of a few hundred dollars” which miraculously arrived just in time. His endorsement of the Republican candidates had opened up a wider pool of potential subscribers than had his earlier support of the Radical Abolitionists.⁶⁰

Douglass was deeply encouraged that the Republicans, in their first year as a national party, nearly won the Presidency in 1856. In his celebrated West Indian Emancipation address the next year, he famously declared that “power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” He gave as his first example “every mother who, like Margaret Garner, plunges a knife into the bosom of her infant to save it from the hell of our Christian slavery.” Garner’s infanticide had cut deeply into Douglass’s own experience as a fugitive from slavery, sharpening his awareness as a newspaper editor and political strategist of how to express the need of the new Republican Party to address the unspeakable sin of slavery in the South.⁶¹

⁶⁰ “The Republican an Anti-Slavery Party” and “The Presidential Contest,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 7 November 1856; “Xth Volume,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 12 December 1856.

⁶¹ “West Indian Emancipation,” Canandaigua, New York, 3 August 1857, in Philip S. Foner, *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago, Ill.: Lawrence Hill, 1999), 367.