NEW NORTH STAR

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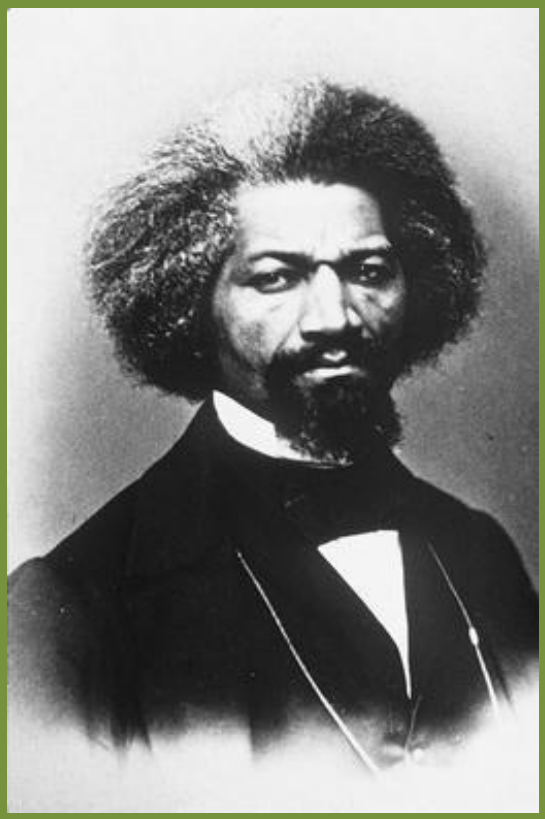

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NEW NORTH STAR

John R. McKivigan and Jeffery A. Duvall, Editors

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Our Aims and Scope

The ***New North Star*** is an open-access online journal featuring new scholarship on the activities and ideas of nineteenth century African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the world with which he interacted. Articles also are desired that assess Douglass's impact on events following his lifetime, including current events. The journal is looking for articles in a broad range of disciplines, from history to literature, communications to anthropology. As in the spirit of its namesake, works of fiction and poetry on topics pertinent to Douglass also will be considered for publication. The *New North Star* will feature interviews with authors of new scholarship on Douglass as well as reviews of that recently published literature. The journal is intended for teachers and students as well as scholars, hoping to help bridge the gap between new scholarship and the classroom. Articles describing new techniques on teaching about Douglass and his world are welcomed. The *New North Star* will be maintained by the staff of the Frederick Douglass Papers at IUPUI and hosted on that project's website. Instructions for submitting articles to the *New North Star* can be found on the journal's website.

NEW NORTH STAR

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Echoing Greatness: Douglass's Reputation as an Orator

John Ernest
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Possibly one of the most revealing facts about Frederick Douglass's public career is that Douglass burst upon the scene with a powerful oration that we know only by the reactions it provoked. Douglass's speech in Nantucket in 1841 was by all accounts deeply moving and memorable, and it launched one of the most remarkable careers in American history, but it is not a speech available for careful study. It is appropriate, though, that we approach this speech through the eyes and ears, the reconstructions and recollections, the memories and memoirs, of people like William Lloyd Garrison, James N. Buffum, Samuel Joseph May, or John A. Collins, and that we encounter the speech, indirectly but with real power, in the ongoing legends of Douglass's modest beginnings and in accounts by such writers as R. R. Raymond or James McCune Smith.[1] This speech, and its subsequent legend, remind us that a significant aspect of Douglass's career as orator involved not only his eloquence and rhetorical skills but also the occasions and forums for his public performances, the social environment in which they operated, the print culture in which they were recorded, celebrated, or dismissed, and the responses they generated. Something important is lost about Douglass's oratory when his public speeches are removed from their public dynamics, from the oratorical performance itself, for Douglass himself was deeply attentive to those dynamics, and deeply aware of the extent to which the significance of each speech had to do with how it reframed not only the speaker but even the platform on which he spoke. To fully appreciate Douglass's career as orator, then, we need to pay attention to those who witnessed and responded to his performances on the public stage.[2]

We can begin with someone who claims to have anticipated Douglass long before he ever spoke in public. Douglass's presence was so powerful that R. R. Raymond, a White Baptist minister very active in abolitionist and other reform efforts in Syracuse, anticipated it even before he ever actually encountered Douglass in person. Looking back to the "castle-building day-dreams" of his youth, Raymond recalls, "A favorite image of my creation was an Africo-American for the time,—a colored man, who had known by experience the bitterness of slavery, and now by some process free, so endowed with natural powers, and a certain degree of attainments, all the more rare and effective for being acquired under great disadvantages,—as to be a sort of Moses to his oppressed and degraded tribe."[3] Raymond emphasizes the unlikelihood of ever encountering such a being, one "gifted with a noble person…and refinement of manners, and some elegance of thought and expression," observing that "by what unprecedented miracle such a paragon was to be graduated through the educational appliances of American slavery, imagination did not trouble

[1] Responses to Douglass's inaugural antislavery speech are included in John Ernest, *Douglass in His Own Time* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 49, 109–111, 177.

[2] I agree with Andrea Deacon concerning the strange absence of a full body of scholarship focused on Douglass's career as an orator, and I agree to some extent as well that "although this dearth of critical analyses, coupled with Douglass' reputation, is indeed curious, one possible reason for this lack of serious attention may stem from Douglass' rhetoric being perceived merely as epideictic or ceremonial in nature." Andrea Deacon, "Navigating 'The Storm, The Whirlwind, and the Earthquake': Re-Assessing Frederick Douglass, the Orator," *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 57 (January 2003), 65.

[3] Robert R. Raymond, "Outline of a Man" (1853), in Ernest, *Douglass in His Own Time*, 56.

herself to inquire. She was painting fancy-pieces, not portraits."[4] Miraculously, though, Raymond encountered just such a paragon in 1844 on Hartford's Main Street, at an assembly of the American Anti-Slavery Society. "The orator," he reports, to no one's surprise, "was FREDERICK DOUGLASS, the most remarkable man of this country, and of this age; and—may I not dare to add—the almost complete fulfilment of my early dream!"[5] While I don't wish to detract from Raymond's achievements as a clairvoyant, I think it's safe to take this imaginative account as an example of the force of Douglass's presence.

Raymond might have been ahead of the game, but he had a pretty good sense of what Douglass faced in his career. There were many among Douglass's audiences who knew exactly what Douglass needed to say and who he needed to be, and there were many who opposed Douglass on the same grounds before he ever said a word. It's not surprising, then, that the records of Douglass as orator speak of a man intensely aware of the performative dimension of oratory, including the occasion of his appearances, the theatre and staging of orations, the audiences with whom he needed to interact and whom he sometimes needed to convert for his own safety, and the reviews that would follow the oration. "To be fully appreciated," James Gregory observed in 1893, a time when Douglass had long since moved from primarily extemporaneous speeches to written ones, "Mr. Douglass must be seen and heard. The fire and action of the man could not be transferred to paper."[6] In 1853, Raymond made largely the same point, suggesting that Douglass's "addresses lose a large proportion of their effect in reading. They require the living voice, and the magnetic presence of the orator."[7] Raymond, though, takes the point further, observing that "Douglass is not uniform in his performance, but is quite dependent on his surroundings, and the inspiration of the moment."[8] Raymond is right to take in the entire scene, to locate Douglass's greatness as an orator within a dynamic scene of complex variables, and to suggest that an understanding of the occasion for and environment of Douglass's public appearances are essential to understanding Douglass's achievements as an orator.

Of course, it is not surprising that both Douglass's environment and his self-presentation, his performance not only as an orator but as a Black man and former slave on the antislavery stage, were very much at the foreground of his attention. Whatever his rhetorical gifts, Douglass needed to work with and against the impression made by his physical and symbolic presence. What mattered, in effect, was not only what he said, but also how he played the role he was forced to play and how he interacted with the assumptions and expectations of those around him. And at that, he was something of a genius. As William Wells Brown observed, identifying Douglass as "one of the best mimics of the age, and possessing great dramatic powers," Douglass often had reason to think carefully about his environment and reception. "He often travelled with others," Brown observes,

> but they were all lost sight of in the eagerness to hear Douglass. His travelling companions would sometimes get angry, and would speak first at the meetings; then they would take the last turn; but it was all the same—the fugitive's impression was the one left upon the mind. He made more persons angry, and pleased more, than any other man. He was praised,

[4] Raymond, "Outline of a Man," 56.
[5] Raymond, "Outline of a Man," 57.
[6] James M. Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator. Containing an Account of His Life; His Eminent Public Services; His Brilliant Career as Orator; Selections from His Speeches and Writings* (Springfield, Mass.: Willey & Co., 1893), 92.
[7] Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 59–60.
[8] Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 60.

> and he was censured. He made them laugh, he made them weep, and he made them swear. His "Slaveholders' Sermon" was always a trump card.[9]

It is, of course, not at all surprising that any practiced orator is, in fact, practiced, or that he might have a trump card. A jazz performer will work long hours to prepare for a few minutes of improvisation, and will not be able to help noting what works and doesn't work with his audiences. Similarly, Douglass was aware of himself as performer, and he prepared carefully for his extemporaneous speeches.

For Douglass, preparation for a speech was a matter not simply of planning the substance of his remarks but also of guarding his public image. This is not at all unusual for those who find themselves frequently in the public eye, but we do not always account for the ways in which Douglass worked on his image in planning his public appearances. His former Rochester neighbor, Jane Marsh Parker, offered in a reminiscence published in 1895 a revealing glimpse into Douglass's consideration of his speaking style. She reports that Douglass stated once, "One of the hardest things I had to learn when I was fairly under way as a public speaker was to stop telling so many funny stories. I could keep my audience in a roar of laughter—and they liked to laugh, and showed disappointment when I was not amusing—but I was convinced that I was in danger of becoming something of a clown, and that I must guard against it."[10] Douglass's preparation to be in the moment, Parker suggests, was his greatest strength as an orator. "His keen sense of the ludicrous saved him from many a mistake," she observes, and "his quick wit in repartee could effectually silence his antagonists."[11] But Douglass's careful calibration of these strengths was an essential dynamic in his ongoing efforts to control his image. Each speech was another opportunity to strengthen his response to racist assumptions and degrading caricatures, but each speech therefore also carried with it the dangers that came with exposing himself once again to a threatening social environment ready to exaggerate his least fault.

Physical presence and performance were so central to Douglass's success as a public speaker that many found him lacking when he turned from extemporaneous to written orations. Parker, for example, was clear in her assumption that Douglass needed the moment and the cause to realize his potential greatness as a speaker. "Composition was never easy for him," she wrote, "unless his soul was stirred in its depths; nor was public speaking, unless his tongue was on fire."[12] Indeed, for Parker, Douglass's success in life came at some cost to his oratorical skills. "His literary lectures upon subjects foreign to his personal experience were largely disappointing," she stated, adding, 'The Honorable Frederick Douglass' was never the orator that 'Fred Douglass' had been in the old pre-emancipation days."[13] William Wells Brown agreed, and suggested that the difference had to do with extemporaneous speeches versus written lectures. "Mr. Douglass has obtained a position in the front rank as a lyceum lecturer," Brown noted in a biographical sketch of his former colleague on the antislavery lecture circuit; "his later addresses from manuscripts, however, do not, in our opinion, come up to his extemporaneous efforts."[14] This was the opinion as well of James M. Gregory, who concluded in his study of Douglass's career as orator, "Mr.

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[9] William Wells Brown, *The Rising Son; or, The Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race* (1864; repr., Westport, Conn.: Negro Universities Press [Greenwood Press], 1970), 436–437.
[10] Jane Marsh Parker, "Reminiscences of Frederick Douglass" (1893 [in Ernest, 2014]), 1893, 48–49.
[11] Parker, "Reminiscences," 49.
[12] Parker, "Reminiscences," 49.
[13] Parker, "Reminiscences," 49–50
[14] Brown, *Rising Son*, 438–439.

Douglass, as an extemporaneous speaker, was much more impressive than he has been since he began to write out his speeches and deliver them from manuscript."[15]

Even those who praised his more formal speeches did so in a way that highlighted his improvisational style of delivery. Looking back in 1880 at Douglass's early career, when he lived in Lynn, Massachusetts, David N. Johnson observed, "He was not then the polished orator that he has since become."[16] But when Johnson describes Douglass's early speeches, one wonders whether "polished orator" is actually intended as the compliment that it seems to be. Johnson highlights Douglass's physical presence, his "majestic form" and "flashing eye," and a voice "that rivaled Webster's in its richness, and in the depth and sonorousness of its cadences," all of which "made up such an ideal of an orator as the listeners never forgot."[17] Johnson highlights as well Douglass's performance, observing that "his eyes would now flash with defiance, and now grow dim with emotions he could not control; and the roll of his splendid voice, as he hurled his denunciations against the infamous system, would pass to the minor key whose notes trembled on his tongue."[18] Moved by the bluesy modulations of this imagined speech, it is difficult to be satisfied by any polish we might find in Douglass's later orations.

For others, what was great about Douglass was the larger story of his rise from slavery to the public stage, a story that is almost never told without some degree of racial condescension. I have in mind, for example, the assessment Samuel J. May offers in his 1869 memoir, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict*. Recalling Douglass's career following his 1841 inaugural speech in Nantucket, May observed, "Mr. Douglass henceforth improved rapidly. He applied himself diligently to reading and study. The number and range of his topics in lecturing increased and widened continually. He soon became one of the favorite antislavery speakers."[19] For May, Douglass is a study in ongoing development, and you can hear in his praise the ongoing surprise that someone born in slavery could go so far towards accomplished oration. Other admirers similarly emphasized Douglass's ongoing education as an orator. In 1895, J. E. Rankin observed that as Douglass traveled abroad, "it was his privilege to hear such men as Cobden and Bright and Disraeli and O'Connell and Lord John Russell and Lord Brougham. These men Mr. Douglass studied, admired, analyzed. His more elaborate addresses, too, show the influence of that first and greatest of New England orators—Daniel Webster."[20] What distinguishes Douglass from these established models? "The quality of fervor and fire."[21] In other words, even for those who emphasize Douglass's development over time, what matters is the fire for which he was known from the beginning.

I don't mean by this to undervalue Douglass's fervor; I mean only to note that almost any speech he gave was going to meet with a loaded assessment. The nineteenth century was not, after all, a time of enlightened perspectives on Black ability, even among White abolitionists who counted themselves the most devoted allies to the African American cause. I needn't go over here the many examples of racism in the antislavery movement, and I needn't linger long over Douglass's complaint in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, "I was generally introduced as a 'chattel'—a 'thing'—a piece of southern 'property'—the chairman assuring the audience that it

[15] Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 93.
[16] David N. Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn, Or, The Changes of Fifty Years* (Lynn, Mass.: Thos. P. Nichols, 1880), 230.
[17] Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn*, 230.
[18] Johnson, *Sketches of Lynn*, 230–231.
[19] Samuel Joseph May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869), 294.
[20] Jeremiah E. Rankin, "Frederick Douglass's Character and Career" (1895), in Ernest, *Douglass in His Own Time*, 170.
[21] Rankin, "Frederick Douglass's Character and Career," 170.

could speak," nor do I need to underscore the significance of Douglass's inclusion of some of his addresses as an appendix to that autobiography.[22] As Frances Smith Foster has observed, many even today think of nineteenth-century African American writers as something like "the dog who walks on two legs": "the wonder is not what or how well they wrote but that they wrote at all."[23] The sister sentiment of this perspective is that African Americans had natural presence and power, something in danger of fading when too much education or refinement enters the picture. Between Uncle Remus at the end of the century and the fumbled attempts at eloquence by the dandies on the blackface minstrel stage earlier in the century, the possibilities for understanding African American eloquence were firmly contained.

It is important, then, that in addition to White assessments of Douglass's natural power, his ongoing education, and his standing among the most notable White orators of his time, African Americans weighed in on oratory generally and on Douglass specifically. One of the most striking attempts to establish African American authority over the oratorical field was William G. Allen's address "Orators and Oratory," presented on 22 June 1852 at New York Central College, where Allen was a professor. In this remarkable speech, Allen argues that "the art of oratory is consequent upon the introduction of sin."[24] Following that line of argument, Allen finds in the condition of oppression both the necessity and the proper subject of oration. For since "the art of oratory is consequent upon the introduction of sin," Allen argues, "and since the sin of sins is the oppression of the weak by the strong, it follows that no other subject can beget the highest efforts of oratory than that of personal or political liberty."[25] By this means, Allen locates the United States as the home of true oratory, and he implicitly identifies African Americans as the truest orators. "Orations worthy the name must have for their subject personal or political liberty," Allen asserts, "and orators worthy of the name must necessarily originate in the nation that is on the eve of passing from a state of slavery into freedom, or from a state of freedom into slavery. How could this be otherwise? Where there is no pressure, the highest efforts of genius must lie undeveloped."[26] With this as his framework, Allen examines various examples of oratory, from the times of Cicero to the present moment of Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, and Frederick Douglass.

An earlier consideration of African American oratory was William J. Wilson's 1849 sketch, "A Leaf from My Scrap Book," in which Wilson offers a comparative analysis of the oratorical skills of Samuel Ringgold Ward and Frederick Douglass. It was a reasonable pairing. Ringgold, like Douglass, had been born in slavery and later became a well-known lecturer and newspaper editor, one of the most admired Black men of his time, known for his eloquence. Like many others, Wilson finds power in Douglass's presence, though his take on that power offers an interesting contrast to what others observe. In Douglass's "very look," Wilson writes, "in his whole manner, there is so much of genuine, earnest eloquence that they leave no time for reflection. Now you are reminded of one rushing down some fearful steep, bidding you follow; now on some delightful stream, still beckoning you onward."[27] Those in the audience who follow this beckoning

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[22] John W. Blassingame, John R. McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 2: *Autobiographical Writings* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999–2012), 2:207.

[23] Frances Smith Foster, "Introduction," in *"Minnie's Sacrifice," "Sowing and Reaping," "Trial and Triumph": Three Rediscovered Novels by Frances E. W. Harper*, xi–xxxvii, ed. Frances Smith Foster (Boston: Beacon, 1994), xx.

[24] William G. Allen, "Orators and Oratory" (1852), in *Lift Every Voice: African American Oratory, 1787–1900*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Robert James Branham (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 231.

[25] Allen, "Orators and Oratory," 231.

[26] Allen, "Orators and Oratory," 232.

[27] William J. Wilson, "A Leaf from my Scrap Book," in *Autographs for Freedom*, ed. Julia Griffiths (Auburn, N.Y.: Alden, Beardsley & Co., 1854), 166.

momentarily "forget the justness or unjustness of [Douglass's] cause and obey the summons," but they are not necessarily satisfied at the end of their journey.[28] Ultimately, Wilson suggests, Douglass's presence, his rhetorical and performative force, becomes the main point, and presence can only go so far. "At last," Wilson writes, "the cataract which roared around you is hushed, the tornado is passed, and you find yourself sitting upon a bank," where you are left to wonder "why, amid such a display of power, no greater effect had really been produced."[29] So while Douglass has a power "rarely to be found in any other man," for Wilson that power ultimately falls short of its purpose.[30]

For Wilson, then, Ward emerges as the more substantial speaker, and in that way is a reminder that Douglass should not be celebrated for singular achievements. While Wilson continually acknowledges Douglass's power of presence, and his power over words, he also continually draws attention to the presence of Ward's ideas, the power of his arguments. Of the two, Ward is the one, for Wilson, who puts his rhetorical gifts at the service of his reason, for "ideas form the basis of all Mr. Ward utters. Words are only used to express those ideas."[31] "Douglass says much, at times, you regret he uttered," Wilson states, but he finds this quality to be part of Douglass's charisma: "This, however, is the real man, and on reflection you like him the better for it. What Ward says you feel to be but a necessity, growing out of the case,—that it ought to have been said—that you would have said precisely the same yourself, without adding or diminishing a single sentence."[32] In the end, then, Wilson's admiration for Douglass is clear, but he sounds more like a cheerleader for Douglass than a genuine admirer of Douglass's oratorical abilities. "If Douglass is not always successful," he concludes, "in his attempts to heave up his ponderous missiles at his opponents, from the point of his descent, he always shows determination and spirit."[33]

My point is not to assess the merits of Wilson's conclusions but rather to note the significance of the comparison itself, the attempt to respond to the culture that anticipated Douglass, positioned him, celebrated him, contained him. Like William G. Allen, Wilson was determined to establish the authority of African American oratory and orators, and in doing so to fight against the tendency of the dominant culture to view Douglass and others as wholly exceptional individuals, two-legged dogs who had made it to the public stage. Even in the nineteenth century, African Americans were rightly suspicious of the early version of the still-persistent practice of praising African Americans for being articulate and educated. They were aware as well of the need to battle the tendency to marvel over African American physical presence. While they didn't want to in any way diminish the public appreciation for Douglass's rhetorical talents and imposing physical presence, they worked against any assumption that Douglass was alone in his ability to wield such power. For Wilson, Douglass's presence was certainly part of the power of his oratorical style, but it was a power that, in Wilson's estimation, Douglass relied upon too heavily, at least when compared to another African American orator, Samuel Ringgold Ward. In his comparison of Douglass and Ward, Wilson shifts both speakers

[28] Wilson, "A Leaf from my Scrap Book," 166.
[29] Wilson, "A Leaf from my Scrap Book," 167.
[30] Wilson, "A Leaf from my Scrap Book," 167.
[31] Wilson, "A Leaf from my Scrap Book," 168.
[32] Wilson, "A Leaf from my Scrap Book," 170.
[33] Wilson's essay was published five years after he wrote it, so he added this closing thought: "Note.—It has been some years since the above sketch was drawn; and though my impressions, especially of Mr. Douglass, has undergone some slight change since,—seeing in him enlarged, strengthened, and more matured thought, still I think, on the whole, the careful observer will attest substantially to its correctness." Wilson, "A Leaf from my Scrap Book," 172–173.

into the framework of African American oratory, where Allen locates the heart of oratorical purpose and power. Wilson and Allen worked to claim authority not simply over oratory but over the cultural theaters in which oratory functioned, the environment Douglass found himself addressing in virtually every speech he delivered.

Wilson's critique, however extreme it might seem, can give us a way to understand why Douglass's extemporaneous speeches were so greatly favored over his more formally prepared orations. James Gregory identifies the turning point in Douglass's oratorical career as starting initially in 1854 and expanding in 1860, when Douglass began to write most of his speeches, a turning point that was, for Gregory, not only one of performance but also of substance. "His former style is what we call extemporaneous," Gregory explained, "but we do not wish to convey the idea that he spoke without preparation. On the contrary, he gave much thought to the topics which he intended to discuss, and then prepared notes under the different divisions of his subject. By not being confined to his manuscript, he caught the inspiration of his audience. This inspiration, so essential to true eloquence in the orator, can never be secured by the essayist, however finished and perfect he may be."[34] The problem with the later speeches was not merely that Douglass was not a good reader, as he acknowledged once to Gregory. The problem was that written orations required a different kind of preparation, of logic, of organization, and of eloquence than could be managed through an extemporaneous approach. More to the point, though, the extemporaneous speech was simply better suited to the complex situation Douglass faced as the most prominent African American of his time, the first Black man to enter into social and political arenas from which African Americans were largely excluded. How does one account for the contradicting and even paradoxical logics required for the maintenance of a White supremacist system? How does one confront racism while also appealing to one's audience as potential allies? How does one function within a nation that had abandoned all philosophical coherence and stability for the sake of racial dominance? For Douglass, the extemporaneous speech provided the right balance of focus and flexibility he needed for his nearly impossible position.

But while one can appreciate the strategic advantages of being able to account for the dynamics in the room, making those dynamics part of one's speech, integrated into one's message, it would still be a great injustice to identify Douglass's greatest achievements as moments that cannot be fully captured. What I am suggesting instead is that we read his orations with a greater emphasis on the conditions from which they emerged and the environments within which they functioned.[35] Some speeches make such readings eminently possible, including comments from audience members and Douglass's engagement with those responses. Virtually all of Douglass's speeches, though, carry the traces of Douglass's ongoing attempts to build and manage his reputation. Reading the orations in this way, one can be appreciate the fact that Douglass was an avid admirer of photography, as John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier have observed, and "the most photographed American of the nineteenth century."[36] Douglass was easily

[34] Gregory, *Frederick Douglass the Orator*, 93.

[35] In one of the best of the surprisingly few sustained considerations of Douglass as orator, Sarah Meer observes, "Seeing Douglass's oratory as part of ongoing discussions between abolitionists and their opponents, we grasp more of his contribution – not only to the antislavery movement, but also to the social, cultural, and political possibilities for African Americans in the United States." Meer demonstrates that there is a close relation between Douglass's editorial work and his speaking career, and I would simply extend that analysis to the many dimensions of Douglass's public life. Sarah Meer, "Douglass as Orator and Editor," in *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass*, edited by Maurice S. Lee (New York: Cambridge, 2009), 57.

[36] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright, 2015), ix.

one of the great students of photography in the nineteenth century, and he was also one of photography's most careful subjects. He thought carefully about how to pose, with what props, if any, and for what kind of effect. "His portraits," Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier observe, "suggest that he understood his role as an artist or performer, part of a pas de trios with the photographer and camera."[37] Similarly, I am suggesting that his speeches can be read as revealing but highly posed snapshots of his handling of his public career, artistic renderings which he achieved in concert with the audience, the immediate environment, the historical moment, and his own reputation. As with the photographs, he is always deeply aware of the potential for misrepresentation, even racist caricatures, and at the slightest misstep. Accordingly, he crafted his performances carefully, incorporating into them his genius for measuring the moment and taking stock of the crowd. To remember Douglass as orator is—or, at least, should be—to remember the world that received him, responded to him, rejected him, denounced him, celebrated him. When we do so, we rediscover the heart of his genius as an orator.

[37] Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass*, ix.

New North Star, 2019; 1:9–17

Unsettling Agency: Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*

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Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* follows the enslaved Black man Madison Washington in his fight for freedom, fulfilling Douglass's wish to bring a slave hero out of "darkness" and into the political history of the United States.[1] Douglass's cunning and industrious hero is blessed by Providence; consequently, the slave rebellion Madison leads aboard the ship *Creole* is not only admirable but spiritually justified. Madison's nobility contrasts with racist characterizations of slaves, which would otherwise portray him as ignorant, immoral, and cowardly. To aid Madison's courageous escape and successful revolt at sea, Madison's wife supplies him with stolen provisions while he waits for the right conditions to escape. But Madison's wife's efforts appear in stark contrast to Madison's estimations of the "cowardly acquiescence" of other slaves unwilling to resist slavery's coercion. These slaves are so deeply content with slavery that Madison fears they will thwart his efforts to escape.[2] This master text of "black antislavery heroism" captures important categories of slaves: the revolutionary in Madison; the everyday resister in Madison's wife; the content plantation slaves; and the ambiguous but ultimately rebellious collective aboard the *Creole*.[3] In *The Heroic Slave*, slaves either resist or they succumb to the powers of enslavement.

Slavery scholarship parallels Douglass's oppositional description. Across a variety of periods, geographies, and contexts, scholars reveal the cultural niceties of slaves' performances, efforts to gain political leverage, and strategies of self-education as well as other modes of self-fashioning. Yet scholars tend to couch these discoveries in terms of agency, power, damage, resistance, and/or social life and death.[4] For example, Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* unveils slaves' individual self-fashioning in Black Atlantic cultures;[5] in a review of Gilroy's book, a suspicious Colin Dayan asks, "What is this agency?"[6] Lawrence Levine, Eric Sundquist, and Sterling Stuckey contend that slave folk tales, singing, and worship contain the nascent origins of Black Nationalism and politics.[7] Saidiya Hartman argues the opposite, that slave expressive

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[1] Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, ed. Robert S. Levine, John Stauffer, and John R. McKivigan (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2015).
[2] Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 15.
[3] William Andrews, "Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative," in Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 203.
[4] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850–1910* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006); Stephen Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles In the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside an Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Heather Andrea Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Christopher Hager, *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[5] Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*, 40.
[6] Joan Dayan Colin, "Paul Gilroy's Slaves, Ships, and Routes: The Middle Passage as Metaphor," *Research in African Literatures* 27, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 7–14, 13.
[7] See Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion: 'The*

cultural performance does not contain oppositional agency; for Hartman, slave culture only reinforces masters' coercive powers.[8] Vincent Brown's and Walter Johnson's essays and books state that, whether implied or directly stated, the oppositional abstractions that shape American slavery studies remain central to current critical discussions. One cannot deny that key terms like *agency* have helped scholars locate and articulate the richness of slaves' resistance and the elastic power of slavery's regimes. In this brief essay, I am interested in two questions: what does looking at slave life through the prism of agency and power keep hidden from view? How can Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* encourage slavery studies beyond these firmly entrenched oppositions?

Douglass's novella is not a historical or sociological examination of slavery, yet the story can help scholars rethink social and epistemological aspects of slave social life—beyond slave rebelliousness or White masters' power to quell it. In this essay, I submit that Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* discloses the social truth that human action is, as David Scott emphasizes, "open to unaccountable contingencies" that exceed the explanatory force of abstractions like agency, resistance, and power.[9] My argument stems from the most significant event in Madison's fictional life: the slave insurrection he leads. The revolt indubitably depicts slave resistance, but what else? I advance the idea that the fact of insurrection also points to an undeniable reality of slavery: despite every effort to know and control slaves, slaves' interiority cannot be fully acquired by either Whites in power or their fellow slaves. Douglass's text, then, affirms that no one can know what a slave is thinking; this also means that, to some degree, masters are always subject to slaves and slaves subject to one another in unforeseen and unaccountable ways. Whether in Madison's revolt, his apprehensive thoughts about cowardly slaves, or his wife's trials and investments, *The Heroic Slave* repeatedly points to an ongoing sense of the intractability of the social environment of the slave. Through the prism of Madison's unanticipated rebellion, this novella encourages scholars in slavery studies to consider putting the unknown, unforeseeable, and contingent at the center of their thinking about slave life.

This essay unfolds in two major sections. The first section shows that while there has been a proliferation of slavery scholarship with different oppositional lexicons such as social life/death or agency/power, there remains unbelievable continuity in the way many slavery scholars frame the significances of slave life. The first section concludes with a few examples from recent scholarship that point us toward other rubrics that transcend older slavery dogmas. I use recent scholars' embrace of "unaccountable contingencies" to pivot to my reading of Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*, where I find that misrecognitions of slave interiority by both Madison and Whites in charge reveal an ongoing sense of epistemic and social uncertainty in the novella. I conclude by showing that if we take seriously the sense of unknowing that I identify in Douglass's novella, then we can realize the limitations of trying to explain slaves' action through the rubric of agential freedom—particularly as it relates to uncovering the personal, moral, and psychological commitments of Madison's wife that sustained Madison's ability to ponder, plan, and escape.

Invisible Institution' in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[8] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[9] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), 13.

I

When Madison proclaims, "My resolution is fixed. I shall be free," he intends to strategically resist slavery in order to escape.[10] Madison's conviction shows readers that despite how damaged he is from the floggings and psychological terrorism of his masters, he will use whatever is available to garner his freedom. Madison epitomizes slave agency and his major moment of conviction calls attention to slaves' less-celebrated, but equally important, everyday acts of resistance. Scholars' emphasis on what slaves do to seize whatever power they can and/or confront their masters began to take root in the 1970s, after Stanley Elkins argued that slaves had no other desire than to further their masters' interest.[11] While there is no doubt that much has changed in slavery scholarship since the 1970s, the conceptual focus on various faces of slave resistance and White coercion remains largely unchanged. Walter Johnson posits that slavery scholarship still maintains too many "durable abstractions," such as agency, resistance, damage, power, and social death.[12] In this section, I will highlight the overlooked through a line of oppositions between heroic slaves and submissive ones, as well as between freedom seekers and those content with bondage across generations of scholars. I will also point out recent scholars who transcend those oppositions.

The opposite of Douglass's hero Madison is the Sambo figure. Stanley Elkins made the slave Sambo crucial to understanding slave personality. According to Elkins, Sambo—who embodies laziness, dependency, and complicity with masters' interests—typifies slave personality.[13] Elkins's book argues that Sambo was the product of slavery's closed system, a system that damaged people to a degree matched only by the horrific abuses of the Holocaust of World War II. Thus slaves, with a few exceptions, were "docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, humble but chronically given to lying and stealing."[14] "Utter dependence" solely defined the slaves' relationship to the masters.[15] Elkins called his Sambo description of slave personality a thesis defined by damage. When Elkins updated his book through several editions, he included essays that responded to his critics and trends in scholarship that conflicted with his work. In the essay "The Two Arguments on Slavery," Elkins divides slavery scholarship essentially into two camps: scholars that conceptualize slavery through "brutality and damage" on the one hand and those that approach slavery looking for evidence of resistance and Black culture on the other hand.[16] The division Elkins describes remains vital to rethinking slavery discourse in the present.

Elkins, rightly or in error, found novelist and essayist Ralph Waldo Ellison to be an inspiration for slavery scholarship that emphasized Black culture and resistance instead of damage and brutality. Ellison argued that studies of Black experience, which relied upon the explanatory power of sociology and social theory, often missed the "great deal of heroism" in Blacks'

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[10] Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 6.
[11] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordon Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1972; New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); John Blassingame, *Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 82.
[12] Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013), 8–9.
[13] Elkins, *Slavery*, 82.
[14] Elkins, *Slavery*, 82.
[15] Elkins, *Slavery*, 82.
[16] Elkins, *Slavery*, 267–268.

struggles.[17] Ellison insists that slaves played a crucial role in American culture, and slave-being was both a product of "brutalization" and "that culture"; the "culture" Blacks produced falls by the wayside in Elkin's *Slavery*. Thus Ellison, while not advocating for African survivalist or Black revolutionary ethos, pushes the idea that Blacks were co-creators of an expressive culture that allowed them to survive and endure in conditions where Whites in power physically brutalized, politically excluded, and socially demonized them. Ellison establishes an implicit connection between the rhetoric of heroism and Black social production in everyday life. But must heroism be implied or stated explicitly to make slaves' lives worthy of study? How does this expectation shape what types of slave actions, meaning making, and survival tactics are the focus of scholarly attention?

More importantly, Elkins claimed that his disagreement with Ellison encouraged a generation of counter-Sambo (counter-Elkins, rather) texts—books on slavery that featured resistance and Black culture. Blassingame's *Slave Community*, Peter Wood's *Black Majority,* and Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*[18] all had a lasting impact on American slavery studies. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, however, stands out as garnering the most attention. Genovese demonstrates with painstaking detail his subtitle: that the chattel South is a "world" that "the slaves made." Genovese depicts slaves as makers and producers of music, culture, architecture, and religious rituals that shaped slaves' understanding of and negotiation with the slaveholders' regime. Like Ellison, Genovese suggests that Black culture-making under slavery was heroic. Yet despite Genovese's tremendous respect for slave culture, he laments that, whatever slaves' heroics, the slaves ultimately acquiesced. Genovese crystallizes the challenge across the board between resistance and damage: did slave culture actually threaten slave masters or did it ultimately make them better adapted to their lives as slaves and "reinforce the regime"?[19] While he offers a great deal more evidence and archives than Elkins, Genovese seems very interested in similar questions to Elkins's. Thus, while Genovese saw his work as refuting Elkins's and expanding and deepening the study of slavery, *Roll Jordon Roll* made the poles of disagreement about the relationship between slave resistance and masters' power concrete.

Orlando Patterson composed a review of Genovese's *tour de force* in the *New Republic*, in which he focuses on the Genovese's failure to answer one pressing question: why weren't slaves more heroic? Patterson wants to know the "reasons for slaves' acquiescence."[20] While "expressive components" of slave culture were impressive in music, Patterson concludes, slaves' resistance efforts were inconsequential, a "total betrayal of . . . the *heroic ideals* of their African ancestors."[21]

The results of Patterson's analysis of Genovese foregrounds his magisterial book, *Slavery and Social Death*.[22] "Social death" means that slaves fully succumb to the absolute power of their masters; the effect of this expressed power means that, in addition to being subject to White masters' physical abuse as well as legal and social exclusion, slaves have no ancestral or family

[17] Ralph Ellison, "A Very Stern Discipline," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John Callahan (New York: Vintage, 1995), 736.
[18] Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: Norton, 1975); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976).
[19] Genovese, *Roll Jordon Roll*, 617.
[20] Orlando Patterson, "The Peculiar Institution Again: Roll, Jordan Roll," *The New Republic*, November 1974.
[21] Patterson, "The Peculiar Institution Again."
[22] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).

connections except through their masters. This ongoing dehumanization forms a totalizing ideological matrix that smothers the slaves' social lives, making the slaves socially dead.[23] Patterson's book, despite its vocal detractors, maintains an explicit and implicit presence in Black cultural study. In *Scenes of Subjection,* for example, Saidiya Hartman advances that many of slaves' efforts for freedom further reinforced the designs and mechanisms of slavery's regime. Hartman's reading of slavery's gendered violence and legal and social exclusions, especially with regard to Black women, reveals how discourses of freedom, liberation, and humanism contain the tentacles of further restraint.[24] Hartman repeatedly emphasizes that the absolute power masters had over their slaves yielded no agential life for slaves, but only advanced forms of coercion.

More recently, Vincent Brown has taken up the oppositions discussed in this essay to unsettle the growing scholarly commitment to Patterson's social death. After the publication of his book on the funeral rituals of Jamaican slaves, *The Reaper's Garden*, Brown embraced the challenge of evaluating the work of scholars who deployed social death as a prism through which to evaluate slavery.[25] In "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," Brown juxtaposes his own approach to slavery in Jamaica with works like Stephanie Smallwood's *Saltwater Slavery*, Ian Baucom's *Spectres of the Atlantic*, and Hartman's *Scenes* and *Lose Your Mother*.[26] Brown's major accomplishment in the essay, however, is his assertion that studying slavery sheds light on how "conflicts over the most elemental aspects of social life informed" major events of political history. The question I ask of Brown is, why the end game of "political history"? While Brown points us to the import of common acts that other scholars overlook, he still reinforces the relevance of slave choices and actions to influence politics and political history. The subtext of Brown's emphasis is that slaves' choices, practices, and culture, even ones that have eluded scholars, can be significant to the larger events scholars already deem monumental. Brown suggests that, while slave actions may not be heroic, their importance is of heroic proportion and of consequence to politics and political thinking. Can slave culture, thought, and practices capture values and significance outside of agential politics, or is there only a political history of slave social life? Brown demonstrates in *The Reaper's Garden* that one can deemphasize the language of agency and resistance and emphasize "social being," but is this really still just a subtle way of demonstrating slaves' impact on their masters and their world-making culture without explicitly drawing on the contested phrases of past slavery debates? Brown still seems trapped in the very oppositions he wants to escape. He advances his profound thesis on "political life" against other slavery arguments that rely too heavily on social death, damage, and idioms of power.

What if we take political issues like slavery and emancipation that call scholars' attention and use them to mine slavery for other significances and rubrics? Christopher Hager's book *Word by Word* does just this. Hager takes the topic of slave education and focuses less on illegality of White society, deprivation of literacy, and transgressions of White authority. Instead Hager zeroes in more on the literal, physical, and psychological difficulty of acquiring literacy, as well as the

[23] Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*.
[24] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 48.
[25] Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008).
[26] Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Politics Life in the Study of Slavery," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (December 2009); Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); Ian Baucom, *Spectres of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005); Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

victories and failures of slaves trying to communicate effectively across networks. White authority obviously shapes slaves' conditions, but that is not Hager's focus, and readers get a sense of the depth and variety of slaves' points of view about writing as a form of everyday life.[27] Hager's emphasis does not transcend the political juggernaut of antislavery activism and print culture, but the event of slaves' literacy struggle recasts historical consciousness, interiority, and the written word in "many and unpredictable directions" that need not be legitimated as confrontations with White authorities.[28]

What is more, I take this sense of unpredictability to apply not only to what slaves do but also to how scholars interpret and frame slaves' actions and thoughts. To this point, in addition to Hager's important work, Johnson's analysis of the *Creole* ship revolt upon which Douglass had based *The Heroic Slave* also liberates itself from past slavery dogma. Johnson claims the "black revolt is represented as political organization practiced along a razor's edge of mistrust, betrayal, and mortal vulnerability"; for Johnson, these themes exceed the frames of what most scholars rely on to approach slavery.[29] When Johnson examines the revolt aboard the *Creole*, he reveals the differences in social and political interest among the slaves on board. Johnson steadies his eye on the "mistrust, betrayal, and mortal vulnerability" that define the social forces aboard the ship. He believes slaves' interpersonal dynamics and choices are crucial factors. Johnson's reading of the *Creole* invites questions about how and why the revolt was planned, how each individual slave's interests were quelled in favor of collective interests, and how enslaved Africans told their own individual stories, including what they were thinking as well as how and why they were thinking it.

Just as Johnson uses Douglass's novella to go around the archive, I think we can use it to reimagine what we find of interest in the archive of slavery. We know that clear political interests dominate *The Heroic Slave*, but can we use our keen eye for political interests, agency, and power as a way to access social, psychological, and spiritual enigmas of Black subjects in social conflict? Turning back to Ellison can be useful here. He insists that scholars and writers consider the chaotic, vibrant, and "imperious mind" within all subjects, which he considers to be a "mysterious configuration of forces."[30] Incorporating the psychological and social fact of unwieldiness is a crucial part of history and of thinking historically about the minds and worlds of slaves; doing so unmoors frames and opens up space to imagine, create, and debate.

II

Scholars may be interested in the damaging effects of power or how slaves seize agency, but often the answers do not give insight into the mystery of what slaves do, what they value, or how they think individually and collectively. Early in *The Heroic Slave*, Madison asks, what "is life to me?" This question has no certain answers beyond his compelling desire to seek freedom, but is the desire for freedom all there is in Madison's predicament? Madison has a wife and children. While he loves his wife, he feels driven toward freedom and ultimately leaves her. What are the values and social attachments that make him want to go back for her but that do not directly correspond to how Whites impact their daily lives? The novella narrates a predictable story of

[27] Hager, *Word by Word*, 136–37.
[28] Hager, *Word by Word*, 218.
[29] Walter Johnson, "White Lies: Human Property and Domestic Slavery aboard the Ship *Creole*," in *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* 5:2, 237–263.
[30] Ellison, "The Little Man at Chehaw Station," in *The Collected Writings*, 509.

heroic triumph, but what I think is equally important is how the story discloses a subtext of slaves' unpredictability and enigmatic thinking that exceeds Madison's thirst for freedom.

The Heroic Slave casts slavery as dark, destructive, and irreparable. Slavery's horrors encourage Madison's escape. For instance, Madison's masters flog him for staying at the mill too long. This disciplining stands as a punishment and warning, a way to police and dominate Madison's behavior and that of other slaves, yet the flogging is actually a motivating factor in Madison's escape. After he escapes, he risks being recaptured because he wants to free his wife and children. He cannot get his wife and kids out of his mind.[31] While one could reduce this to an attachment to slavery itself or an ideology of love, such a reduction diminishes and oversimplifies human thought and the interpersonal connection that Douglass conveys. What actually inspires Madison's moves is unclear, but that shouldn't stop readers from asking what the probable factors are for his actions. There is epistemic and psychological certainty about what masters and slaves will do in a given situation, but how can anyone from a critical distance be so certain about such uncertain situations as escape attempts and revolts? I submit that no one can actually know and that *personal unpredictability* is embedded in the textual moments where it appears Whites claim the most control. There is no way to obscure, blot out, or eradicate a slave's unpredictability—the brutal fact is that however much one whips, sexually assaults, overworks, or rewards, one can never know what is going on in someone else's head.

There can be no greater example of this than in the retelling of the circumstances of the insurrection led by Madison. After Madison escapes from slavery initially, he is recaptured and ends up aboard the *Creole* where he leads an insurrection. Madison's revolt has already happened in the novella when Douglass introduces the reader to some sailors at a coffee house in Richmond who are discussing it. One sailor, Jack Williams, argues the insurrection could have been prevented or safely contained. Williams is confident that every Negro slave is a coward on the inside simply because the slave is Black. With six resolute White men, Williams says, he could have the Blacks in chains in ten minutes.[32] The boastful and confident Williams turns to the practice that was supposed to subdue Madison when he stayed at the mill too long—"flogging"—but flogging may not be enough, and Williams goes on to explain that he would use other means of violence to "quell a nigger insurrection." But this is where Williams tries to have it both ways. He claims that slaves are cowards and that cowardice is their nature, but if slaves are fundamentally cowards, where does the experiential knowledge come from on how to "quell insurrections"? If all one needed was to crack a whip, there would be no such thing as "rebellious darkies," and the thought of rebellion would not even occur to a Sambo coward solely interested in furthering his master's interests. Williams's misrecognition of what motivates slaves begs the question.

Douglass does want to claim that slaves, if given the opportunity, can be heroic, but my point is to show that what a slave is thinking about cannot be certain, and that even though the character may be thinking about rebelling, he could be unwilling to actualize the rebellion for reasons other than cowardice or the master's absolute dominion. The culture of domination has built into itself that slaves are capable of insurrections for a variety of unknown reasons. The conditions of possibility have instability baked into the cake, even while the sailor Williams insists that White supremacy always maintains the upper hand through knowledge and violence, chalking the revolt up to White incompetence. Johnson's study of the *Creole*, however, unveils that slaves

[31] Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 37.
[32] Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 42.

aboard the ship with different personal and political interests (which the novella withholds) temporarily aligned with one another and decided to rebel.[33]

Douglass emphasizes the ongoing sense of instability and contingency with which I identify. The most eloquent moment in the book occurs when Douglass attributes Madison and his fellow slaves' courage to the sea. Douglass writes about the sea's spiritual encouragement: "lonely billows of the Atlantic . . . every breeze speaks of courage and liberty." The sailor Williams is skeptical, claiming that, whether at sea or on land, the slave is a coward. What the sea communicates is the notion that something—a change of conditions perhaps, together with inspiration (via Madison)—can change the lot of slaves. Douglass's text revolves around the emphasis on the possibilities of radical and unexpected change. The sea exemplifies this effect and reality. Agents, actors, and new information mean that a compressed state that defines Negro character is unreliable and that self-risk, and what slaves take risks for, might be prompted by the desire for freedom or for something else they find valuable.

Does this change how we see Madison's wife or the other slaves who, unlike Madison, are not interested in revolting or escaping? While Douglass implies that the sea is crucial in conveying the ethos of freedom, the unpredictability in human subjects—that the sea makes manifest—points us back to when Madison tries to avoid slaves from his plantation. He believes if they discover him, they will betray him. While the "negroes [on the *Creole*] fairly worshipped him,"[34] his fellow plantation slaves were less poised and flat-out uninterested in freedom. They certainly didn't worship him. What did the slaves think about Madison? What did they think about their fellow slaves or the idea of escape? Douglass does not go to great lengths to explain the difference between the ship slaves and the slaves on the plantation; he only says the ship slaves worshipped Madison and that the others would betray him. But why aren't these slaves on the ship the same as the ones Madison encounters on his own plantation?

Douglass writes: "peeping through the rents of the quarters, I saw my fellow slaves seated by a warm fire, merrily passing away the time, as though their hearts knew no sorrow. Although I envied their seeming contentment, all the wretched as I was, I despised the cowardly acquiescence in their own degradation which it implied . . . I dared not enter the quarter—, for where there is seeming contentment with slavery, there is certain treachery to freedom."[35] Masters and/or slaves have deceived themselves into "contentment with slavery." But why don't the slaves aboard the *Creole* turn Madison in? Is it the sea or some new conditions that shape slaves' proclivity to act? Madison may be wrong about the degree to which slaves have acquiesced; he may also be wrong about his own predisposition to change their minds. Madison and the sailor Williams misdiagnose slaves' interiority, or at least fail to admit that they do not know why or how long slaves will cowardly acquiesce. If Madison believed his fellow slaves were all cowards, then he would have never attempted a revolt, and if the White sailors did believe slaves were all capable of rebellion, then they would not have been blindsided.

III

Unpredictability circulates throughout the text of Douglass's *Heroic Slave.* The novella shows that even slavery's fiercest scenes of domination contain the wildest contingencies, which need to be further explored as part of slavery's archive. One of the most overlooked mysteries in

[33] Johnson, "White Lies."
[34] Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 47.
[35] Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 17.

The Heroic Slave is why Madison chose to leave his wife and children in the first place.[36] When Madison tries to rescue his wife, she is shot dead. Her horrific death is significant, but there are important moments in the novella before her death. When Madison says, "I shall be free," he commits himself to the likelihood that he will never see his wife again. Are we to believe him when he says their "parting was like flesh from bones"? He chooses for five years to leave his wife and live in a cave near his master's plantation, but it isn't a heroic burst of courage that drives him into arms of freedom; it is a great fire.[37] Otherwise, Madison stays in hiding. He says, "I had partly become content with my mode of life." Madison's love for his wife is paradoxical. It sustains him from "utter despair," yet this sustenance encourages his ambition to be free; it is because of this forceful attachment that he does not want to leave her.

During the five years of bringing him provisions, how did Madison's wife procure his food and keep his whereabouts secret from malicious parties? Along with caring for their children, I wonder what values and practices sustained her connection to Madison. The context of the relationship is the potential for escape and the refusal of it; the five years is a stalemate in historical progress, yet rife with possibilities in historical thinking. Madison and his wife's survival during this interim period is not heroic, yet the circumstances of it make for an interesting vehicle into the social life that is estranged from the monuments of political history. This social life is full of moral probing, ethical choices, and agonizing feelings of despair and hope that might be legitimate on their own historical grounds. *The Heroic Slave* cues us to turn our attention away from our own political impulses—to look for agency, resistance, or the elasticity of power. Douglass provides us with an opportunity to explore new rubrics and reaffirm that slavery contains both the discernable and ungraspable aspects of everyday life.

[36] See Andrews, "Novelization," and Edlie Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
[37] Douglass, *Heroic Slave*, 17.

New North Star, 2019; 1:18–33

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.

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"Douglass, Frederick": Frederick Douglass's Forgotten Autobiography

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The fact that Frederick Douglass wrote three separate autobiographies over the course of his long public career is a remarkable achievement often celebrated by scholars. Never before noted in scholarship or reproduced for close examination was a short autobiographical sketch that Douglass prepared for the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography.* A letter from one of the encyclopedia's editors, George R. Prowell, recounts that it had taken a visit to Cedar Hill to fulfill a commitment by Douglass to write a fifteen-hundred-word entry on his life. In a letter to Douglass, Prowell stated that the new encyclopedia sought "to have the sketches of notable living men come from official sources and be recognized as accurate." Busy serving as U.S. minister plenipotentiary to Haiti under the end of July 1891, Douglass had delayed preparing the entry. Prowell had to warn Douglass, on 4 September 1891, that his sketch was needed by the first of the following month, when the editor would visit Washington to pick up the copy. Written in the third person, Douglass's autobiography almost exactly met the requested word length. The entry was planned to appear in late 1891 in the inaugural edition of the *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* alongside sketches of many antebellum reformers and abolitionists. Publication of the encyclopedia by the New York City–based firm headed by James Terry White was suspended, however, and the volume with Douglass's entry was not released until 1895. It was reprinted in later editions with the notable addition of a new concluding sentence reporting Douglass's death in Washington, D.C., on 22 February 1895. The *National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* with Douglass's autobiographical entry continued to add new volumes until the 1980s.[1]

DOUGLASS, Frederick, orator and U. S. minister to Hayti, was born a slave to Capt. Aaron Anthony, chief agent of the estate of Col. Edward Lloyd, in Talbot county, Md. His father was of white and his mother of brown complexion. The exact date of his birth is unknown, but from a remark in his hearing by the daughter of Capt. Anthony, he thinks it was in February, 1817. Separated from his mother in infancy he was placed with his grandmother to be reared with other slave children, till five or six years old, when he was removed from her log-cabin near Hillsborough, to the home of Capt. Anthony on the Lloyd estate in the county of his birth. Here he remained until he was eight years old, seeing a great deal during his stay of the hardships and cruelties incident to the condition of slavery. Much of the harsh treatment, it seems, was due to the bad temper of the colored woman who had charge of him. Lucretia Auld, the daughter of his master, the wife of Capt. Thomas Auld, to whom he afterward by inheritance belonged, was very kind to him and often defended him from the brutality of the woman. By her he was transferred from the home of her father to Baltimore, to take care of Thomas, the son of Hugh Auld, brother to her husband. The change was greatly to his advantage, inasmuch as it was a change from hunger to plenty, from brutality to refinement, and from misery to comfort. His new mistress, Sophia Auld, was kind to him and taught him the alphabet and to spell, though without the knowledge of her husband, who, when it became known to him, promptly forebade it. He told her that a knowledge of letters would ruin a slave and make him discontented. Young as Douglass was, he

[1] George R. Prowell to Douglass, 4 September 1891, General Correspondence File, reel 6, frames 234–35, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

already had dreams of being free some day, and the prohibition imposed upon his teacher only stimulated his resolution to learn to read, in every way open to him. Thereafter his reading lessons were taken from little school-boys in the street and out-of-the-way places where he could not be interfered with or observed. In fact the street became his school and the pavements and fences in the neighborhood his copy-books and blackboards. When eleven years old he was put to work in his master's shipyard to beat and spin oakum, to keep fires under the pitch boiler and turn the grindstone on which the carpenters sharpened their tools. There he practiced writing by imitating letters on different parts of the ships in process of building. His progress in his studies was so great as to be a surprise to himself as well as to others about him, for in that day there seemed to be a doubt of the ability of one of African descent to learn, even under favorable conditions. But this progress soon received a formidable check. In 1833 he was taken from his easy home in Baltimore, and placed on the farm of Edward Covey, where he was subjected for a time to hard labor, and often to brutal chastisement, so that, as he expresses it, his young human ambition was nearly destroyed, his desire to read and study deserted him, food and rest became his only wants, and he felt darkness closing over his mind and heart. This broken condition did not continue long. Roused to desperation by cruel treatment, he refused to submit to chastisement, and successfully resisted the attempt of Covey to flog him. This daring resistance on his part, committed in a moment of intense feeling and without calculating consequences, finally became a settled disposition and purpose. Success made him fearless and he determined to repeat his conduct should another attempt be made upon him. No further attempt was made, and he often said afterward, "He is whipped oftenest who is whipped easiest." In 1836, after his experience at Covey's, he planned an escape from slavery for himself and three others, but the plot was discovered before it could be carried out, and he was arrested and put in prison and exposed for sale to the slave-traders. For some reason his master refused to sell him, and sent him again to his brother Hugh in Baltimore, to work in the shipyard, where he learned to caulk vessels, working at the trade two years and six months. From here he escaped from slavery on Sept. 2, 1838, was married to Anna Murray, a free woman, and went to New Bedford, Mass. Not being allowed, on account of his color, to work at his trade, he went to work as a common laborer and stevedore in fitting out whaling ships for sea. During his stay in New Bedford he often spoke in public meetings where questions affecting the colored race were being discussed. His speeches attracted the attention of the abolitionists of that city, and in August, 1841, he was persuaded to devote his time and talents to the cause of his people. He was employed successively by the Massachusetts anti-slavery society, the Rhode Island anti-slavery society, and the American anti-slavery society, and in 1843 he was sent, with several other speakers, by the New England anti-slavery convention to hold one hundred anti-slavery conventions, beginning in the state of New Hampshire and ending in the state of Indiana. At one of these, in the last-named state, he was set upon by a mob and badly beaten, having his right hand broken in a fight. In 1844 he wrote a narrative of his life, in which, to remove doubts of his having been a slave, he told his master's name and residence, thereby exposing himself to the danger of being returned to slavery. To avoid this he went abroad, traveling and lecturing on slavery, in England, Ireland and Scotland until 1847, when, having been ransomed by Mrs. and Miss Richardson, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, at the price of £150 sterling, and being no longer in danger of recapture, he returned to the United States to continue his work for the emancipation of his people. In December, 1847, he began to edit and publish a weekly paper in Rochester, N. Y., called the "North Star," which was afterward published as "Frederick Douglass's Paper." He continued its publication during sixteen years, lecturing in the meantime all over the northern states, until the emancipation proclamation of President Lincoln made further agitation unnecessary. In 1859 he

was indicted for being concerned in the John Brown raid, and for a time again took refuge in England, but soon returned to use his pen and voice as before against slavery. On the outbreak of the civil war in 1861, he advocated arming the slaves and making the war directly against slavery, and had several interviews with President Lincoln on the subject. He assisted in raising the 54th and 55th colored regiments in Massachusetts, in which two of his sons, Lewis and Charles, were non-commissioned officers. At the close of the war he was in much demand as a lyceum lecturer, and in this vocation traveled extensively. At the close of the war he was a prominent advocate for instant and complete enfranchisement of the freedmen of the South, had a notable debate with President Johnson on the subject, and during two years edited and published a paper in Washington called the "New National Era." In 1871 he was sent by President Grant with the commissioners B. F. Wade, Dr. Samuel J. Howe, and Andrew D. White, to St. Domingo, to inquire into the condition of that country and the disposition of its people as to annexation to the United States. The same year he was appointed a member of the upper house of the territorial government of the District of Columbia. In 1872 he was one of the electors-at-large in the state of New York, being selected by the electoral college of that state to take the vote of New York to Washington, and in 1877 he was appointed by President Hayes U. S. marshal of the District of Columbia. His appointment to this office created a sensation throughout the country, he being the first of his color to whom that high office had been assigned. On the 4th of August, 1882, his first wife, the mother of his five children died, and on the 24th of January, 1884, he was married to Helen Pitts, of New York state. In 1881 he was appointed by President Garfield to be recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia. In 1889 he was given by President Harrison the mission to Hayti as minister resident and consul-general, and *Chargé d'Affaires* to Santo Domingo. He resigned in 1891. At different times during the fifty years of his public life he was elected president of national conventions of colored citizens, notably at Cleveland in 1848, Syracuse in 1866, and at Louisville, Ky., in 1883. In politics, until 1856, he was a member of the liberty party. Since then he has steadily supported the republican party, often taking the stump for its candidates. Few men have spoken oftener, or more effectively, or to a larger number of the American people, than Frederick Douglass.

Source: "Douglass, Frederick," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York, 1891), 2:309–10.