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Frederick Douglass in the British Isles (1845–1847): A Reassessment of Approach, Achievement, and Legacy[1]

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ABSTRACT

Frederick Douglass's first tour of the British Isles (1845–1847) proved a pivotal episode in the life of the legendary campaigner and the broader fight against slavery. Douglass made over three-hundred speaking appearances during his nineteen-month stay—sparking public debate, generating hundreds of newspaper articles, and reinvigorating an antislavery movement that had largely stalled in Britain since the 1830s. Douglass's campaigning revealed early glimpses of his rhetorical skills and political instincts, including his successful navigation of the "white slavery" controversy and an impressive publicity blitz on the nation's newspapers. However, Douglass's time in Britain was not an unmitigated success. This paper examines the limitations of his work—including the failure to successfully pressurize the Free Church of Scotland into returning donations linked to slavery, and the strategic decisions that limited Douglass's ability to deliver tangible results. In so doing, the paper attempts a more nuanced and dispassionate assessment of Douglass's tour—evaluating his visit as a political campaign (not an oratory showcase) with successes *and* failures that shaped the most influential Black American of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Frederick Douglass; Abolitionism; Public Relations; Activism; Victorian Newspapers

> How are we to get rid of this system? This is the question which mostly concerns the people of this country. There are different ways by which you may operate against slavery. First let me state how it is upheld: it is upheld by public opinion. How is public opinion maintained? Mainly by the press and by the pulpit . . .[2]
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> **Frederick Douglass (London, 22 May 1846)**

Frederick Douglass's first tour of the British Isles (1845–1847) was a pivotal episode in the life of the legendary campaigner and the broader fight against slavery.[3] Douglass made over

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[2] Newspaper articles about Douglass's speeches were not attributed to individual reporters (as per the convention of the period) and should be considered anonymous, unless otherwise stated. Certain reports were published in multiple publications. For reason of space, not every publication is listed in the footnotes. However, the full list is available at the cited reference. "American Slavery, American Religion, and The Free Church of Scotland: An Address Delivered in London, England, On 22 May 1846," *London Morning Advertiser*, 23 May 1846, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 1: *Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, Vol. 1: *1841-46* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), 269.

[3] Douglass visited Ireland, Scotland, England and (briefly) Wales during his tour. For ease, this paper refers to "Britain" and the "British Isles" interchangeably—noting the separate distinction for Ireland, where applicable. For chronology see Hannah-Rose Murray and John R. McKivigan, *Frederick Douglass in Britain and Ireland, 1845–1895* (Edinburgh, Scot.: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), xxv–xxxiii.

three-hundred speaking appearances during his nineteen-month stay—sparking public debate, generating hundreds of newspaper articles, and reinvigorating an antislavery movement that had largely stalled in Britain since the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833.[4] Douglass was "only seven years from slavery" when he fled the United States for Britain in 1845—still relatively inexperienced as a campaigner and finding his feet in the white-dominated abolitionist scene.[5] Douglass left England two years later as a free man, having established his reputation as an exceptional orator and highly-skilled political campaigner.[6] This paper examines a truly transformative period in Douglass's life—exploring how he harnessed his growing fame to pursue short and longer term Anglo-American abolitionist goals. In so doing, the paper explores the legacy of Douglass's first visit to Britain and his influence on popular attitudes towards slavery—arguing that the true impact would only become evident during the American Civil War a decade-and-a-half later.

The paper also challenges the idealized notion (propagated by many of Douglass's contemporaries and historians alike) that the "young lion" achieved a resounding triumph in Britain and Ireland—exploring the limitations of his approach, the challenges he faced, and the failure to deliver tangible short-term results.[7] In so doing, the paper attempts a more nuanced and dispassionate assessment of Douglass's visit—evaluating his work as a political campaign (not an oratory showcase) with successes *and* failures.

"A Heart-stirring Appeal on Behalf of the Oppressed"[8]

The central message of every speech that Douglass delivered in Britain was clear: the system of slavery in America is "upheld by public opinion" and therefore the "public" has the power to bring the system down.[9] Reflecting on this argument four decades later, Douglass wrote that "we regarded [slavery] as a creature of public opinion."[10] This thesis was reflected in the

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[4] For example, Willard Gatewood describes Douglass's tour as "an attempt to rekindle the dormant anti-slavery spirit" in Britain. Willard B. Gatewood Jr., "Frederick Douglass and the Building of a 'Wall of Anti-Slavery Fire,' 1845–1846. An Essay Review," *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (January 1981), 340–344. See also Richard J. M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 17; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 317.

[5] Although Douglass had been delivering speeches for several years, he later described his relative naivety and inexperience when he arrived in Britain—claiming (perhaps overly-modestly) "I may not always have been so guarded in my expressions, as I otherwise should have been. I was ten years younger then than now, and only seven years from slavery." Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 376–77.

[6] Blassingame, "Introduction to Series One," in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1, xxi; Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 102–103.

[7] "Young lion" is a description from David Blight's recent biography, which portrays the visit in glowing terms. Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 139.

[8] "Frederick Douglass in Leicester: The Anti-Slavery Meeting in the New Hall," *Leicester Mercury*, 6 March 1847, 2, in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 172.

[9] "American Slavery, American Religion, and The Free Church of Scotland: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 22 May 1846," *London Morning Advertiser*, 23 May 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:269.

[10] Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times* (1881) in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series Two*: Autobiographical Writings,* Vol. 3, ed. John R. McKivigan *et al* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012), 232; Tom F. Wright, *Lecturing the Atlantic: Speech, Print, and an Anglo-American Commons 1830–1870* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 59; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 13–18.

strategic approach adopted by Douglass and his allies, who sought to mobilize the British public against slavery through an extensive program of lectures and conventions—each one amplified by coverage in newspapers and supportive publications. Faith in the revolutionary power of print had long been a tenet of the abolitionist movement. Douglass understood that he must seize and sustain the attention of the British press if his "moral suasion" was to resonate with a wider public—communicating beyond the abolitionist echo chamber to awaken the "anti-slavery spirit" which had "lain dormant and inactive" since West Indian emancipation.[11]

Douglass's strategy was to insert himself into the heart of the debate—neglecting stale abolitionist messaging in favor of his own dramatic experiences of "the peculiar institution." He offered audiences something fresh and memorable—conveying the urgency of his cause in ways more likely to inspire and appall the Victorian public. Douglass also sharpened his promotional instincts in Britain, developing an increasingly sophisticated understanding of how to navigate (and occasionally instigate) controversial "circumstances" in order to generate attention for the cause.[12] This paper focuses on two such controversies: the debate on so-called "white slavery" in Britain and Ireland, and the pressure campaign launched against the Free Church of Scotland. Both highly charged episodes reveal glimpses of the skills that would eventually see Douglass become the most influential Black American of the nineteenth century.

A Stepping Stone to Greatness?

Even at this early stage in his career, Douglass's audiences seemed to appreciate that they were witnessing something quite extraordinary. Contemporaries showered praise on Douglass for capturing the public imagination and rejuvenating interest in slavery. One auditor described "the indescribably beautiful, sublime, pathetic and powerful" impact of Douglass's words, while even a veteran abolitionist like George Thompson complimented Douglass for inspiring "tens of thousands" in England who had "never felt upon this question before."[13] Newspapers, meanwhile, reported scenes of Douglass holding audiences spellbound, with large crowds cheering, crying, and laughing along with his virtuoso performances. Black abolitionists (including the formerly enslaved) toured Britain before, but the public's response to Douglass seemed exceptional.

[11] "Frederick Douglass: England Should Lead the Cause of Emancipation," 23 December 1846, in Hannah Rose Murray, "Douglass in England," *Frederick Douglass in Britain,* http://frederickdouglassinbritain.com/journey/FDEngland. Wright describes "moral suasion" as "a theory of propaganda and persuasion," based (as Frank Kirkland has defined it) on "the presupposition that the language of morality directly influences conduct." . . . It was the governing philosophy of the Garrisonian wing of the abolitionist movement, which believed that moral appeals had far greater power than political action. Wright, *Lecturing the Atlantic,* 53.

[12] Douglass later cited four specific "circumstances [that] greatly assisted me in getting the question of America slavery before the British public"—each one a controversial episode. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 380; Terry Baxter, *Frederick Douglass's Curious Audiences: Ethos in the Age of the Consumable Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3.

[13] Thompson quoted in "Farewell to the British People: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 30 March 1847," *London Morning Advertiser*, 31 March 1847, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers:* Series 1: *Speeches, Debates and Interviews,* Vol. 2: *1847–54*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), 19. Mary Brady, who attended a lecture in 1847, wrote: "Oh what a speech Frederick made! It was indescribably beautiful, sublime, pathetic and powerful. Often the enthusiasm of the audience knew no bounds." Letter published in Boston *Liberator*, 20 February 1847, in Blassingame, "Introduction," *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1: liv.

Historians have largely echoed these rave reviews in their accounts of Douglass's tour—broadly founding their conclusions on the extensive collection of positive newspaper coverage generated by his appearances.[14] John Blassingame declares that Douglass "took the British Isles by storm," while David Blight presents the tour as a personal and professional triumph.[15] Hannah-Rose Murray and John McKivigan—two historians that have undertaken the most detailed analysis of Douglass's visits to Britain—conclude that his overall impact was "extraordinary" and "incalculably significant."[16]

However, one must be wary of hindsight when evaluating Douglass's early work. The knowledge of what Douglass would later *achieve*—and the icon that he would *become*—can exert a hagiographic pull in which it is tempting to view his time in Britain as a mere stepping-stone on a linear path to greatness. While Douglass's oratorical genius is evident, the question of what he actually *achieved* in Britain remains relatively underexplored—despite Douglass himself having "despaired of his effectiveness" during his lengthy visit.[17] To better answer the question of impact, one must first examine *why* Douglass came to Britain and what he wanted to achieve.

"The Curtain Which Conceals Their Crimes Is Being Lifted Abroad"[18]

The most pressing rationale for Douglass's visit was self-preservation. The publication of his *Narrative* had revealed Douglass's true identity and it was now too risky for him to remain in the United States. Nevertheless, Douglass had ambitious plans for his time in Britain—including seeking a "new stock of information," "opportunities for self-improvement," and the chance to engage new audiences, including potential customers for his *Narrative*.[19] Douglass's core mission was to preach the gospel of abolitionism on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society—increasing external pressure on the United States for "her adhesion to a system so abhorrent to Christianity and to her republican institutions."[20] Following the path of pioneering Black campaigners (such as Nathaniel Paul, Moses Roper, and Charles Lenox Remond), Douglass came

[14] Newspapers are the source on which historians are almost entirely reliant for learning the content of Douglass's speeches and how his audiences responded. Historians have also used a more limited selection of correspondence from Douglass, his associates, and lecture attendees. Whilst the newspaper reports provide invaluable insights, it is important to acknowledge their limitations. Newspapers published heavily edited versions of Douglass's speeches, each one shaped by the quality and editorial agenda of the publication and its scribe. Despite the lengthy accounts provided (typically presented as *verbatim,*) Douglass's words were, as Murray & McKivigan put it, "viewed, edited and shaped through a white correspondent's pen." Blassingame notes that there were safeguards to encourage accurate representations of Douglass's speeches, and he regards British newspaper reporting as more accurate than American publications in this period. However, newspapers do not provide a transcript of what Douglass said and much was omitted. Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* x; Blassingame, "Introduction," *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:lxxi-lxxvi.

[15] Blassingame, "Introduction," *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:liii; Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, chapters 9–10.

[16] Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 4, 85. Murray credits Richard Blackett for catalyzing "meaningful scholarly attention" on Douglass's work in Britain. Hannah-Rose Murray, "The British Isles," in *Frederick Douglass in Context*, ed. Michaël Roy (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 22.

[17] Baxter, *Frederick Douglass's Curious* Audiences, 90.

[18] "American Slavery: Report of a Public Meeting Held at Finsbury Chapel," in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 45.

[19] Douglass outlined his objectives for the tour in the Preface to the 2nd Irish edition of his autobiography. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Dublin: Webb and Chapman, 1846), iii-iv, cxxxii, quoted in Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 154.

[20] Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 154.

to Britain to declaim slavery's horrors to the foreign audience deemed most valuable (from a financial and "moral" perspective) to American abolitionists.[21]

This broader strategic context informed the objectives and format of Douglass's tour, which Richard Blackett positions within the internationalist strand of American bolitionism—one in which the formerly enslaved were an integral part of the "well-oiled and pretty efficient propaganda machine" built to raise funds and motivate supporters.[22] Douglass described the strategy as building a "cordon of antislavery feeling" that stretched from "Canada on the North, Mexico in the West, and England, Scotland and Ireland on the East, so that wherever a slaveholder went, he might hear nothing but denunciation of slavery, that he might be looked down upon as a man-stealing, cradle-robbing, and woman-stripping monster . . ."[23] This was a powerful image. However, by the 1840s, the antislavery movement in Britain was stalling and in need of fresh impetus—not only to resource its operations and rejuvenate the networks, but also to demonstrate ongoing commitment to a mission that many Britons believed had already been accomplished.[24]

This creeping sense of inertia contrasted with the growing confidence emanating from the proslavery lobby across the Atlantic. Belligerent "King Cotton" rhetoric in Congress was accompanied by communications targeted at the British public, including a series of provocative open letters written by slaveholder-politician James Henry Hammond.[25] Proslavery authors argued that Anglo-American abolitionists were spreading "falsehoods" about the "peculiar system," which was actually a more humane alternative to the harsh free-market capitalism of the northern states and Western Europe.[26] The sense that something closer to a *debate* was emerging on the merits of slavery is conveyed by Douglass's recollection of his 1845 transatlantic voyage, writing

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[21] Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* ix; Wright, *Lecturing the Atlantic*, 52; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 10.

[22] Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* ix-x, 8, 13.

[23] Report of speech published in the *Glasgow Argus*, syndicated in Boston *Liberator*, 15 May 1846, in Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 6.

[24] For example, Catherine Clarkson wrote in August 1846 that "Mr Douglass is making a great impression in this country . . . We have no pro-slavery party here, but too many seem to think that having paid 22,000,000 to redeem our own slaves England has nothing more to do." Blassingame, "Introduction," *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:lvi; Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 8.

[25] The extent to which authors like Hammond believed they could genuinely influence public opinion in Britain or the northern states (as opposed to producing these works for their own political and social advancement) is debatable. For a skeptical view see David Donald, "The Proslavery Argument Reconsidered," *Journal of Southern History* 37, no.1 (February 1971), 5–6. Donald concludes: "It is . . . fairly certain that no hope of reaching or convincing the North drove the pens of the proslavery writers of the 1840s and 1850s." Nevertheless, Douglass referenced these proslavery appeals as a rationale for sharing his *true* experiences. James Henry Hammond, *Letter of His Excellency Governor Hammond to the Free Church of Glasgow, on the Subject of Slavery* (Columbia, S.C.: A.H. Pemberton, 1844); James Henry Hammond, *Gov. Hammond's Letters on Southern Slavery: Addressed to Thomas Clarkson, the English Abolitionist* (Charleston, S.C.: Walker & Burke, 1845); For details on Hammond and his place within Southern intellectualism see Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge. La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) and Drew Gilpin Faust, *Sacred Circle: The Dilemma of the Intellectual in the Old South, 1840–1860* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

[26] For example, Hammond wrote that British abolitionists "weep over the horrors of the Middle Passage, which have ceased, so far as we are concerned; and over pictures of chains and lashes here, which have no existence but in the imagination." Douglass rebutted this claim with physical demonstrations of these apparatus and vivid descriptions of their use. Hammond, *Letter to the Free Church of Glasgow,* 5. See also George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals All! or Slaves Without Masters* (1857), a proslavery text that emphasized cruel treatment of the working class in nineteenth century England. George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! or Slaves Without Masters*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 175; Donald, "The Proslavery Argument Reconsidered," 5.

that "we had antislavery singing and proslavery grumbling, and at the same time that Governor Hammond's Letters were being read, my *Narrative* was being circulated."[27] This experience informed a central theme of Douglass's rhetoric in Britain: exposing the "great lie" told by those who sought to "turn away sympathy from the slave to the slaveholder, and to excite opposition against the abolitionists."[28]

"Tearing Off the Mask from the Abominable System of Slavery"[29]

The means by which Douglass revealed the true nature of slavery to the British public were not particularly novel. Starting in Ireland, Douglass embarked on a regional lecture tour that was coordinated through a network of antislavery societies.[30] Every appearance was publicized in advance through notices in local newspapers (as well as posters and flyers), while the event itself was accompanied by public and private receptions for Douglass with local dignitaries. Douglass would then speak at length (typically around two hours) to an audience that included reporters from local newspapers.[31] The resulting press coverage amplified the content of the speech to a wider audience and prompted invitations from new locations—creating a momentum that enabled Douglass to spread his message across the British Isles for nearly two years.

This approach had been tried and trusted by abolitionists for decades. However, what *did* seem different about Douglass's approach was the way in which he instinctively understood how to maximize press attention. Whether through weaving earlier coverage into his speeches (which established newspapers as part of the narrative) or building direct relationships with editors, Douglass understood how to exploit the reach and influence of the Victorian press to amplify his voice beyond the lecture hall.[32] His tour stimulated hundreds of newspaper articles—nearly all of which reviewed Douglass's performances favorably.[33] However, whilst the volume and geographical spread of the coverage was impressive, there are two important caveats that historians have largely overlooked.

Firstly, most publications prepared to report on abolitionist activities were those with an editorial agenda already supportive of their cause. Indeed, the majority of Douglass's audiences (in person and in print) were likely to have harbored antislavery sentiments. Douglass was often therefore preaching to the converted; an important task for galvanizing supporters in Britain, but

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[27] Letter from Frederick Douglass to William L Garrison, 1 September 1845, Boston *Liberator,* 26 September 1845, quoted in Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 141–142.

[28] "American Slavery is America's Disgrace: An Address Delivered in Sheffield, England, on 25 March 1847," *Sheffield Times*, 27 March 1847, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 2:8; "Farewell to the British People: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 30 March 1847," *London Morning Advertiser*, 31 March 1847, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 2:19.

[29] "Emancipation is an Individual, a National, and an International Responsibility: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 18 May 1846," *London Patriot*, 26 May 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:249.

[30] Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 18–20.

[31] Blassingame, "Introduction," *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1: xxi.

[32] Douglass regularly corresponded with editors and proprietors to thank them for positive reviews or to (diplomatically) address coverage he considered inaccurate. For example, one letter to the Editor of the *Protestant Journal* began "My attention has just been called to attack upon myself in your paper of the 18th July, which seems deserving a word of reply . . ." Frederick Douglass to James Wilson, 23 July 1846, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers.* Series 3: *Correspondence,* Vol. 1: *1842–1852,* ed. John R. McKivigan (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2009), 145; Hannah-Rose Murray, *Advocates of Freedom: African American Transatlantic Abolitionism in the British Isles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 83.

[33] Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 20.

one unlikely to trigger the earthquake in "public opinion" required to "get rid of this system."[34] By contrast, editors who disagreed with abolitionists generally ignored their campaigns.[35] This media landscape made it challenging for activists like Douglass to generate coverage in less sympathetic publications, which tended to write about slavery only at times of heightened tension. This tipping point was reached only sporadically during Douglass's tour (despite his best efforts to stir up controversy), most notably when the "Send Back the Money" campaign sparked a media counter-offensive from Free Church supporters that featured racists slurs and allegations of blasphemy.[36]

Secondly, Douglass's appearances were not once covered by *The Times* of London, the most important newspaper in Britain, if not the world.[37] The first mention of Douglass in *The Times* came after he had left England—reporting not a speech, but an incident (masterfully "exploited" by Douglass for maximum publicity) in which he experienced racist discrimination on his return voyage to America.[38] Fixating on one publication may seem mean-spirited, but such was the influence of *The Times* (not least on the hundreds of regional and foreign newspapers which syndicated its content) that Douglass's inability to amplify his message through its pages clearly limited the impact of his campaign.[39]

The apparent indifference of *The Times* to Douglass is partly explained by the publication's conservative agenda, but also reflected a broader decline in British interest towards the "slavery question" after 1833. In the decade that followed West Indian emancipation, *The Times* only reported slavery-related stories deemed highly significant (such as diplomatic disputes and international conventions)—rarely appearances by individual campaigners.[40] Indeed, by the 1840s,

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[34] "American Slavery, American Religion, and The Free Church of Scotland: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 22 May 1846," *London Morning Advertiser*, 23 May 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:269.

[35] Baxter, *Frederick Douglass's Curious Audiences*, 39.

[36] For example, the *Scottish Guardian*, 5 May 1846, 1, in Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 95; Murray, *Advocates of Freedom*, 111–15; Letter from Frederick Douglass to Francis Jackson, 29 January 1846, in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 40

[37] By the early 1850s, *The Times* had a circulation of c.40,000 daily readers—four times bigger than the combined sales of its chief competitors (the *Morning Chronicle, Morning Herald,* and *Morning Post*). According to Hankinson, the paper's "network of contacts and correspondents worked so well that 'it became axiomatic that important news would be known to [the Editor] before it reached the government.'" Alan Hankinson, *Man of Wars, William Howard Russell of The Times* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 47; See also Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 147.

[38] The first mention of Douglass in *The Times* came on 14 April 1847. The newspaper published a letter written by Douglass in which he described an incident onboard the steamship *Cambria* during his return voyage to the United States. Douglass discovered that his berth had been allocated to another (white) passenger, while he was also excluded from entering the saloon of the ship. Murray & McKivigan note that Douglass sought to "exploit" the incident for promotional purposes, working with abolitionist William Logan to distribute his letter to fifty newspapers across the British Isles—as well as influential antislavery supporters—in order to generate awareness. Logan reported back to Douglass that the news had been reported in "every influential paper in Britain." Articles appeared in over one-hundred newspapers. In response to Douglass's letter, *The Times* declared that the incident was "wholly repugnant to our English notions of justice and humanity." See Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 82–83.

[39] Douglass referenced *The Times* throughout his career in ways that suggest he placed great importance on its influence and insights. He also used the publication as an important source of intelligence on British and international affairs. For example, "The Present Condition of Slavery: An Address Delivered in Bradford, England, on 6 January 1860," *Bradford Observer*, 12 January 1860, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers:* Series 1*: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews.* Vol. 3: *1855–63*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), 301, 304–05; Starr, *The Creation of the Media,* 147.

[40] For example, in 1840 *The Times* reported on the "General Convention" in London organized by the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The article reported that the event was "crowded with delegates from every district of

The Times seemed more interested in dramatic incidents involving abolitionists (especially when they were physically attacked) than the content of their arguments. Douglass belatedly recognized these sensational inclinations and later had several letters published in which he used his own travails (including a "brutal assault" suffered in New York City) as a means to smuggle antislavery messaging into its pages.[41]

"Speech! Speech!"[42]

This blending of personal experience with powerful antislavery rhetoric was typical of Douglass's approach to public engagement. Using clear and direct language, he painted a vivid picture of slavery for his audiences.[43] Indeed, Douglass seemed to calibrate his argument to elicit maximum outrage from the Victorian public, describing rape, violence against children, corrupted Christianity, and the desecration of marriage as everyday occurrences in the American South.[44] Douglass asked his auditors to visualize the shocking scenes taking place "within fourteen days sail of the shores of Britain"—emphasizing the urgency of the situation, but also uplifting his audience with the reassurance that "the curtain which conceals their crimes is being lifted abroad . . . Slavery is one of those monsters of darkness to whom the light of truth is death."[45]

Douglass skillfully balanced accounts of violence and cruelty with moments of humor and memorable soundbites.[46] For example, addressing the delicate question of so-called "white slavery" in Britain, Douglass remarked that "Englishmen were said to be very industrious . . . yet, in all his experience, during 19 months' residence in this country, he had never seen a man in the market place seeking for work without wages. (Laughter.)... But the slave had to work without wages. In the absence of *cash*, there must be the *lash*. (Renewed laughter.)"[47]

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the United Kingdom," as well as visitors from overseas, including "a great many ladies" from the northern states. "General Anti-Slavery Convention," *The Times*, 13 June 1840, 7.

[41] Frederick Douglass, "To the Editor of *The Times*," *The Times*, 2 July 1847, 8; Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 204–205.

[42] Frederick Douglass, *North Star*, 23 November 1849, in Ronald K. Burke, *Frederick Douglass: Crusading Orator for Human Rights* (New York: Garland Pub., 1996), 6.

[43] Blassingame acknowledges that Douglass's approach was not to everyone's taste, describing contemporary critics of Douglass's speaking style as "legion." Blassingame, "Introduction," *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:xxii, xxxvii; Burke, *Frederick Douglass,* 11, 121.

[44] Blackett writes that "one . . . suspects that the theme of sexual exploitation of female slaves was used to win the support of British women, who played a pivotal role in 19th century British philanthropy." Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 29–30; Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 150; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 4, 39. For Victorian attitudes towards female innocence and violence against women see Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Women in the Colonial Text* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

[45] "Slavery in America: Frederick Douglass in Wakefield, Bradford," *Bradford and Wakefield Observer* and *Halifax, Huddersfield, and Keighley Reporter*, 21 January 1847, in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 169; "American Slavery: Report of a Public Meeting Held at Finsbury Chapel," in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 45.

[46] "'Lectures on American Slavery,' Dundee, Scotland," *Dundee, Perth and Cupar Advertiser*, 30 January 1846, 3, in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 147.

[47] "American Slavery is America's Disgrace: An Address Delivered in Sheffield, England, on 25 March 1847," *Sheffield Times*, 27 March 1847, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 2:8.

This reference to "industrious" Englishmen reflects another central theme of Douglass's speeches: an approach that Alan Rice terms "strategic Anglophilia."[48] Douglass was not the first Black campaigner to present an idealized vision of his British hosts—a deliberate approach to flatter and cajole audiences into feeling a "moral and physical responsibility to do something about American slavery."[49] Terry Baxter argues that the deferential tone and "promise of uplift" was necessary for Black abolitionists to penetrate the "therapy-seeking minds of white popular audiences" in Britain while maintaining their sense of "goodwill."[50] Douglass deployed "strategic Anglophilia" throughout his visit, making favorable comparisons with the United States that artfully stoked British patriotic pride and bolstered his audiences' sense of superiority.[51]

This charm offensive was built on Douglass's central argument that the British public held the power to end slavery in the United States; proclaiming that "the moral influence of England . . . was necessary for abolitionising the United States, and that once enlisted in favor of the slave, slavery could no longer exist."[52] Presenting Britons as the true defenders of freedom, Douglass concluded (usually to a rousing reception) that "liberty under a monarchy is better than despotism under a democracy. (Cheers.)"[53] Douglass's flattery was designed to create the optimal conditions for "moral suasion" to resonate with his audiences—emphasizing a positive role for every Briton in ending slavery, whilst carefully avoiding sensitive subjects (such as British colonialism) that risked distracting from his core message.[54]

"The White Slave Lay There Dying"[55]

Not every controversial topic could be so easily avoided. Douglass encountered a political landmine almost as soon as he arrived in Ireland, with several newspapers reporting that he was asked if he believed "slavery existed in Ireland."[56] This question required Douglass to walk a

[48] Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), 160–190; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 51.
[49] Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic, 160–190;* Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 51.
[50] Baxter, *Frederick Douglass's Curious Audiences,* 115.
[51] Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 51.
[52] "Mr Fred Douglas's (*sic*) Lecture on American Slavery, Carlisle," *Carlisle Journal*, 22 August 1846, 4, in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 161.
[53] For example, in his "Farewell to the British People" of March 1847, Douglass reportedly proclaimed: "From the slave plantations of America the slave could run, under the guidance of the North-star, to that same land, and in the mane of the British lion he might find himself secure from the talons and beak of the American eagle." "Farewell to the British People: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 30 March 1847," *London Morning Advertiser*, 31 March 1847, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, *2:*19.
[54] Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 113; Murray, *Advocates of Freedom*, 94–95.
[55] The line comes from a late eighteenth century British ballad about a child worked to death in a factory. "Their tender hearts were sighing as negro wrongs were told; But the white slave lay there dying who earned their father's gold." Unknown author, quoted in Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2005), 352.
[56] "Slavery and America's Bastard Republicanism: An Address Delivered in Limerick, Ireland, on 10 November 1845," *Limerick Reporter*, 11 November 1845, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:77–78. By the 1840s, the portrayal of Irish as "white slaves" of the British had become a familiar trope of Irish nationalism. During Douglass's visit, one nationalist newspaper (the *Tipperary Free Press*) declared: "When we are ourselves free, let us then engage in any struggle to erase the sin of slavery from every land. But, until then, our own liberation is that for which we should take counsel and work steadily." See also Patricia Ferreira, "All But 'A Black Skin and Wooly Hair': Frederick Douglass's Witness of the Irish Famine," *American Studies International* 37, no.2 (1999), 70–72.

rhetorical tightrope: demonstrating sympathy and solidarity with Ireland's poor, whilst simultaneously rejecting any equivalency between their status and that of the enslaved. To complicate matters, Douglass arrived during the Great Irish Famine and he witnessed firsthand the starvation and abject poverty across the land.[57] Furthermore, Douglass understood that many Irish nationalists viewed abolitionism as a distraction from their independence movement, and an unnecessary provocation of potential supporters in the United States.[58] By the mid-nineteenth century, comparisons between exploited "free" laborers and the enslaved had become a common feature of working-class rhetoric in Britain and Ireland.[59] Indeed, "white slavery" was a concept gleefully seized upon by the proslavery lobby too, with polemicists like Hammond arguing that the "paternalism" of slavery compared favorably with the "squalid misery, loathsome disease, and actual starvation, of multitudes of the unhappy laborers—not of Ireland only, but of England…."[60]

Irish poverty was a particularly perilous topic for Douglass because he privately believed that alcohol was the root cause of the "human misery, ignorance, degradation, filth and wretchedness" he encountered—a view unlikely to win him supporters in the midst of a catastrophic famine most blamed on the English.[61] However, Douglass's response to "the objection that slavery existed in Ireland" demonstrated both empathy and finely-tuned political instincts. According to the *Limerick Reporter*:

> His answer was, that if slavery existed here, it ought to be put down, and the generous in the land ought to rise and scatter its fragments to the winds (loud cheers).—But there was nothing like American slavery on the soil on which he now stood. Negro-slavery consisted not in taking away any of the rights of man, but in annihilating them all—not in taking away a man's property, but in making property of him, and in destroying his identity . . .[62]

Douglass carefully made the distinction about *property* not poverty: explaining that slavery did not depend on the relative level of oppression or suffering, but on its pure legal domination. The enslaved were "considered as property, used as property, treated as property, thought of as property—and as nothing but property so far as the government of the country was concerned."[63] To be enslaved was to be entirely subject to the whims of another. Douglass emphasized the distinction by explaining how this domination debased Christian values and family life (two central pillars of Irish identity), stating that "the slave must not even choose his wife, must marry and unmarry at the will of his tyrant, for the slaveholder had no compunction in separating man and

[57] Ferreira, "Frederick Douglass's Witness of the Irish Famine," 70–72.
[58] "A people in serfdom cannot afford to make new enemies . . ."*The Waterford (Ire.) Freeman*, 10 September 1845, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:77.
[59] Hochschild, *Bury the Chains,* 352; Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 23.
[60] Hammond, *Letter to the Free Church of Glasgow,* 5.
[61] On 1 August 1846, Douglass wrote a private letter to Eliza Nicholson in which he attributed the "human misery, ignorance, degradation, filth and wretchedness" of the Irish poor to intemperance. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 22.
[62] "Slavery and America's Bastard Republicanism: An Address Delivered in Limerick, Ireland, on 10 November 1845," *Limerick Reporter*, 11 November 1845, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:76.
[63] "American Slavery is America's Disgrace: An Address Delivered in Sheffield, England, on 25 March 1847," *Sheffield Times*, 27 March 1847, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 2:8,

wife, and thus putting asunder what GOD had joined together."[64] Douglass asked his audience "could the most inferior person in this country be so treated by the highest? If any man exists in Ireland who would so treat another, may the combined execrations of humanity fall upon him, and may he be excluded from the pale of human sympathy!"[65]

Douglass stuck to this point of principle whenever he discussed "white slavery" on the British mainland too. Indeed, according to Blight, it was the insistence by Chartist leaders that there *was* equivalency between America's enslaved and the oppressed workers of England that led Douglass to "pull back" from the movement—despite his eagerness to mobilize Chartist supporters behind the antislavery cause.[66] Notwithstanding those tensions, one indication of Douglass's broader success in navigating sensitivities around "white slavery" was his gradual evolution from a reactive position (addressing the topic only when asked) to a proactive approach, in which he incorporated the "property" differentiation into his stump speech.

"Send Back the Money!"[67]

Douglass had a flair for *generating* controversy too, when the occasion required. He arrived in Scotland in January 1846 and found a country in the midst of a major denominational "Disruption."[68] The Free Church of Scotland, which had split from the Church of Scotland in 1843, had recently bolstered its fledgling operations with a major fundraising drive, including sending a delegation to the United States. This outreach included a mission (led by Rev. George Lewis) which secured approximately $9,000 in donations from Presbyterian churches in the South, including many with congregations and clergy directly involved in slavery.[69] Growing criticism of this move (from inside and outside the Free Church) "culminated in a full-scale onslaught" by mid-1846, when Douglass joined allies (including George Thompson, William Lloyd Garrison, Henry C. Wright, and James N. Buffum) in campaigning for the Free Church to "SEND BACK THE MONEY!"[70] Douglass sensed an opportunity to harness the controversy to advance the abolitionist cause, writing to Garrison:

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[64] "Slavery and America's Bastard Republicanism: An Address Delivered in Limerick, Ireland, on 10 November 1845," *Limerick Reporter*, 11 November 1845, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:78; Burke, *Frederick Douglass*, 34; Blight, *Frederick Douglass,* 150, 173–174.

[65] Slavery and America's Bastard Republicanism: An Address Delivered in Limerick, Ireland, on 10 November 1845," *Limerick Reporter*, 11 November 1845, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:78.

[66] Douglass broadly sympathized with the goals of the Chartists and other radical groups in Britain. However, on a more pragmatic level, he recognized that fully embracing a radical agenda risked distracting from his core antislavery mission and antagonizing other elements of British society—not least the ruling elite. Blight, *Frederick Douglass,* 174.

[67] "American Slavery, American Religion, and The Free Church of Scotland: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 22 May 1846," *London Morning Advertiser*, 23 May 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:299.

[68] The website of the Free Church of Scotland makes no reference to slavery or abolitionist campaigns. Anon., "History, Roots & Heritage," The Free Church of Scotland, https://freechurch.org/history/; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 35.

[69] George Shepperson, "Thomas Chalmers, The Free Church of Scotland, and the South," *Journal of Southern History* 17, no. 4 (November 1951), 518-519; Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 156; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 36–37; McKivigan, *The Frederick Douglass Papers.* Series 3: *Correspondence,* 1:152.

[70] The decision to accept these donations sparked the creation of the Free Church Anti-Slavery Society, a small dissident organization founded by members of the Free Church of Scotland. McKivigan, *The Frederick Douglass Papers.* Series 3: *Correspondence,* 1:194; Shepperson, "Thomas Chalmers," 518–20.

> Scotland is a blaze of anti-slavery agitation—the Free Church and Slavery are the all-engrossing topics . . . The Free Church is in a terrible stew. Its leaders thought to get the slaveholders' money and bring it home, and escape censure. They had no idea that they would be followed and exposed. Its members are leaving it, like rats escaping from a sinking ship. There is a strong determination to have the slave money sent back, and the Union broken up. In this feeling all religious denominations participate. Let slavery be hemmed in on every side by the moral and religious sentiments of mankind, and its death is certain.[71]

Douglass's reaction reflected another central (but controversial) pillar of his ideology: namely, that "the churches of America were responsible for the existence of slavery. (Hear. Hear)" because of their corruption, complicity with slaveholders, and justifications for slavery on scriptural and religious grounds.[72]

Douglass and his allies embarked upon a full-scale pressure campaign against the Free Church—incorporating public gatherings, pamphlets, supportive newspapers, petitions, sermons, posters, songs, poems, and even a giant "SEND BACK THE MONEY!" display carved into the side of Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh.[73] Foreshadowing a staple of modern political campaigning, Douglass amplified the "SEND BACK THE MONEY!" slogan at every opportunity—from demanding that every hall and lectern be adorned with the words, to repeating the phrase in the rousing crescendo of each speech.[74] According to one hyperbolic report, the cumulative effect drove "the conscientious Scotch people into a perfect *furore*. 'SEND BACK THE MONEY!' was indignantly cried out, from Greenock to Edinburgh, and from Edinburgh to Aberdeen."[75]

These were some of the most highly-charged appearances of Douglass's tour, during which he portrayed Free Church leaders like Thomas Chalmers as morally and spiritually bankrupt for accepting "blood-stained money."[76] Describing his own enslavement, Douglass emphasized the Free Church's complicity with violence and mocked Chalmers' lame insistence that "a distinction ought to be made between slavery and slaveholders!"[77] Douglass ridiculed the many flaws in the Free Church defense, even imagining a scene in which he was re-sold by his former enslaver "to get a little money to aid the cause of religious freedom in Scotland. (Laughter.)"[78]

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[71] Letter from Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, 16 April 1846, on Hannah Rose Murray, "Douglass in England," Frederick Douglass in Britain, http://fredericdouglassinbritain.com/journey/FDEngland/.

[72] "An Account of American Slavery: An Address Delivered in Glasgow, Scotland, on 15 January 1846," *Glasgow Argus*, 22 January 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:131; R. Blakeslee Gilpin, "The Other Side of the World: Battling the Exceptional South," *Early American Literature* 52, no. 2 (2017), 447.

[73] Burke, *Frederick Douglass,* 46; Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 160.

[74] Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 8; Burke, *Frederick Douglass*, 46.

[75] "Slavery in America," *Nottingham Review*, 12 March 1847, in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 8; Burke, *Frederick Douglass*, 46. See also "American Slavery, American Religion, and The Free Church of Scotland: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 22 May 1846," *London Morning Advertiser*, 23 May 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:299. "I want to have all the children writing about the streets 'Send back the money.' I want to have all the people saying 'Send back the money;' and in order to rivet these words in the minds of the audience, I propose that they give three cheers, not hurrahs, but say 'Send back the money.' (The vast assembly spontaneously complied with Mr Douglass' request. The effect produced was indescribable.)"

[76] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 383–86.

[77] "The Relation of the Free Church to the Slave Church: An address delivered in Paisley, Scotland, on 20 March 1846," *Renfrewshire Advertiser*, 28 March 1846 in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:192.

[78] "Charges and Defense of the Free Church: An Address delivered in Dundee, Scotland, on March 10, 1846," Anti-Slavery Soirée: Report of the Speeches Delivered at a Soirée in Honor of Messrs. Douglass, Wright, and Buffum . . ." (Dundee, Scot, 1846), in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:179–80.

However, these performances and all the public pressure did *not* convince the Free Church to "send back the money." On the contrary, Blackett argues that the campaign may have had a detrimental effect—backing Free Church leaders into a corner and giving them little choice but to resist "mob" demands.[79] Douglass would later attempt to spin the campaign as a success, arguing that while the money had not been returned, their efforts had "furnished an occasion for making the people of Scotland thoroughly acquainted with the character of slavery, and for arraying against the system the moral and religious sentiment of that country."[80] The campaign certainly did capture public attention and generate debate about slavery beyond the abolitionist echo chamber. However, Douglass ultimately failed to achieve his core objective—a result made more notable because this was the only time in which he pursued such an explicit short-term goal during his tour.

Missing (In)Action?

The specificity of the target and range of tactics employed also marked out the "SEND BACK THE MONEY!" campaign as atypical in the broader context of Douglass's tour, which was otherwise characterized by a lack of clear objectives beyond the ultimate goal of abolition. Accounts of Douglass's speeches capture the soaring oratory and vivid descriptions, but what is lacking (at least in the newspaper coverage) is clear direction from Douglass about how his audiences should *act* against slavery. One possibility is that editors omitted more mundane sections of the speeches (in which Douglass may have encouraged membership of societies, solicited donations, and promoted petitions) from their condensed reports. However, it is notable that no such references exist in the extensive coverage, whilst the absence of any obvious "call to action" in the newspaper reportage would have dulled the impact of Douglass's campaign on those who did not attend his events. [81]

Douglass's surviving correspondence from this period reveals a greater interest in the logistical side of the movement than suggested by the records of his speeches. For example, Douglass was actively engaged in the process of printing and distributing his *Narrative* to generate much-needed finances for the tour, and for the American Anti-Slavery Society more broadly.[82] Douglass had also been "earnestly and successfully laboring" on behalf of the newly-formed (and short-lived) Anti-Slavery League—a Garrisonian organization launched to rival the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.[83] Yet, the formation of the Anti-Slavery League was, itself, indicative of the internal divisions rife within the Anglo-American abolitionist movement, whose

[79] Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 91–94. The scenario of a public pressure campaign (driven by the newspaper press) targeting a church institution over its financial affairs would later be satirized in Trollope's *The Warden* (1855). Anthony Trollope, *The Warden and The Two Heroines of Plumplington*, ed. Nicholas Shrimpton (Oxford, Eng.: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[80] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom,* 370–399; Murray, *Advocates of Freedom*, 138.

[81] The absence of a clear "call to action" in newspaper coverage is important, considering this was the medium by which Douglass hoped to engage an audience beyond the auditorium.

[82] Douglass worked with Irish abolitionist Richard D. Webb to manage this process during the tour. Douglass was furious to learn that British abolitionists were debating whether he should be trusted to manage the funds raised during the tour. For example, a letter from Maria Weston Chapman to Webb suggested that Irish abolitionists should "watch over" Douglass. Letter from Frederick Douglass to Richard D. Webb, 26 April 1846, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers.* Series 3: *Correspondence,* 1:116; McKivigan, *The Frederick Douglass Papers.* Series Three: *Correspondence,*1:101–02.

[83] Letter from Frederick Douglass to William L Garrison, 2 January 1847, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*. Series 3: *Correspondence,* 1:190, 193.

leaders often seemed more preoccupied with pursuing their own agendas than broadening their support base. Indeed, Douglass was criticized during his time in Britain for speaking at events organized by non-Garrisonian groups—suggesting that not every abolitionist was motivated by reaching as broad an audience as possible.

Douglass's campaign—limited as it was by the ideological and strategic constraints of Garrisonianism—also suffered from a relative lack of creativity when it came to encouraging public behavior change. Abolitionist efforts in the 1840s were far less ambitious than the multi-faceted campaigns masterminded by Thomas Clarkson and his Quaker allies several decades earlier, which had employed a wide range of tactics (from product boycotts to selling branded merchandise) to mobilize a movement that (eventually) delivered specific *political* results.[84] By contrast, the vagueness and tactical stagnation of the 1840s reflected a comparative malaise by the time Douglass arrived in Britain.[85]

For example, Douglass did not promote or endorse boycotts during his tour—despite the historic effectiveness of this tactic in driving public awareness and motivating action in Britain.[86] By the 1840s, there were other behavior change initiatives available to campaigners like Douglass. For example, the "free produce" movement—championed in the 1820s by Quakers and Black abolitionists (such as Lydia White and William Whipper)—sought to persuade the public to reject slave-made goods in favor of "free labor" produce.[87] According to Lawrence Glickman, the initiative had been initially supported by abolitionists like Garrison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Grimké sisters until internal divisions stalled progress.[88]

Garrison's rejection of consumer-focused activism in the 1830s (on practical and moral grounds) had what Julie Holcomb describes as "a long afterlife" in the abolitionist movement—the effect of which can be seen in the neglect of such tactics by Douglass.[89] Nevertheless, belief in

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[84] Hochschild states that the abolitionist movement "added a new dimension to British political life . . . At a time when only a small fraction of the population could vote, citizens took upon themselves the power to act when Parliament had not." Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, 6–7, 195.

[85] In a deeply symbolic moment, the aged Thomas Clarkson (who was just weeks from death) met with Douglass and Garrison on 9 August 1846. Little details are known about the meeting. Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, 354.

[86] For example, in the late eighteenth century more than 300,000 people had boycotted West Indian slave-grown sugar. Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, 7. Holcomb summarizes the rationale thus: "boycotters believed that if slavery were rendered unprofitable, slaveholders would be forced to free their slaves." Julie L. Holcomb, *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy* (London: Cornell University Press, 2016), 9; Lawrence B. Glickman, ""Buy for the Sake of the Slave": Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (December 2004), 889.

[87] Glickman, "Buy for the Sake of the Slave," 889–890.

[88] Douglass is referenced as an early supporter of "free produce" but without supporting evidence. Glickman, "Buy for the Sake of the Slave," 893.

[89] Holcomb details the divisions within the British and American abolitionist campaigns regarding boycotts and free produce. She notes that Garrison started to withdraw his support for boycotts by the mid-1830s, believing the approach was flawed as an economic measure because slaveholders were motivated "not [by] the love of gain, but the possession of absolute power, unlimited sovereignty." Garrison also criticized the tactic from a moral perspective, claiming that boycotts gave supporters a "pretext to do nothing more for the slave because they do so much" in their efforts to locate free-labor goods. By 1847, Garrison concluded that slave-labor products were "so mixed up with the commerce, manufactures and agriculture of the world—so modified or augmented in value by the industry of other nations,—so indissolubly connected with the credit and currency of the country" that seeking to abstain from them was "preposterous and unjust." Boston *Liberator*, 5 March 1847; *Liberator*, 18 June 1836; *Liberator,* 1 March 1850, quoted in Holcomb, *Moral Commerce*, 1–2, 9. Ironically, the unfeasibility of boycotts was also emphasized by John MacNaughton, a Free Church minister, in April 1846. MacNaughton denounced the phrase "Send Back the Money" for its impractical and hypocritical implications; stating that if the money was to be returned, then "we must not buy [American] cotton, nor wear it, we must not use their rice nor purchase their

the effectiveness of such tactics had not disappeared entirely. Indeed, "free produce" and consumer boycotts *were* being promoted by other Black activists during the 1840s and 1850s, including Henry Highland Garnet, who spent three years campaigning in England, Scotland, Ireland, and Germany.[90] Douglass was initially critical of Garnet's efforts in Britain.[91] However, by 1848 Douglass was reprinting a pamphlet in his own newspaper that connected the resilience (and even resurgence) of American slavery to increased British imports of slave-grown cotton.[92] The evolution in Douglass's views on consumer action was evident when he returned to Britain in 1859 and criticized his audiences for their complicity with the "peculiar system"—linking British consumption of slave-produced goods with the torture of enslaved people in America.[93]

Follow the Money

Another question of complicity concerned the British-based individuals and institutions that were bankrolling Southern enslavers—none of which were targeted by Douglass during his campaign. Firms like Baring Brothers, Rothschilds, and George Peabody and Co. sat astride the credit chain for large-scale slaveholdings and plantation-owning elites.[94] British creditors were immersed in the Atlantic economy, accruing what Jay Sexton describes as "unprecedented power" and diplomatic influence over "American affairs" by the mid-nineteenth century.[95] Slavery was central to the rise of the City of London as a global economic powerhouse, and it

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tobacco, [for] the stamp of slavery is on them all." "The Free Church and American Slavery – Slanders Against the Free Church Met and Answered in a Speech, John MacNaughton, Paisley, April 1846," on Hannah Rose Murray, "Scotland," Frederick Douglass in Britain, http://fredrickdouglassinbritain.com/journey/scotland; Murray*,* *Advocates of Freedom*, xx. Scholarly works on abolitionist boycotts and slavery-free produce reflect the almost non-existent role of Douglass in that story. Two recent works on the subject do not include an entry for Douglass (probably the world's most famous abolitionist) in either index, and feature only brief references in the text. Holcomb. *Moral Commerce*; Bronwen Everill, *Not Made by Slaves: Ethical Capitalism in the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020).

[90] Holcomb emphasizes the importance of slave-labor boycotts for Black and female abolitionists. She writes that "for Black abolitionists, the boycott was a practical antislavery tactic, one that was critical to racial uplift because it reinforced black abolitionists' efforts to establish an economic foundation for the free black community." Holcomb, *Moral Commerce,* 6–7.

[91] Holcomb attributes Douglass's attitude to Garrisonian concerns that Garnet's tour would "erode support for other, more efficient abolitionist tactics," as well as the fact that Garnet had apparently never supported free produce in America. Holcomb concludes that "despite the criticism, Garnet's tour was a success, leading to the establishment of twenty-six free-produce societies by the end of January 1851." Holcomb, *Moral Commerce,* 181.

[92] The pamphlet was "Revolution of the Spindles" by Henry and Anna Richardson. *North Star*, 23 June 1848, quoted in Holcomb, Moral *Commerce*, 191.

[93] For example, "Mr Douglass on American Slavery," Supplement to the *Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*, 21 January 1860, 10, cited in Murray and McKivigan, *Frederick Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 99, 194.

[94] Sven Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War," *American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (December 2004), 1425; Jay Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy: Finance and American Foreign Relations in the Civil War Era 1837–1873* (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon, 2005), 12.

[95] Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy,* 12. Ironically, the private diary of James H. Hammond (a Southern slaveholder) accused the Northern politician Daniel Webster (then Secretary of State) of being "in the pay of the great English Bankers, the Barings, the head of which House, Lord Ashburton, resulting in a treaty of extradition in 1842 for certain high crimes." "Diary of James H. Hammond," 21 March 1842, in James Henry Hammond, *Secret and Sacred: The Diaries of James Henry Hammond, a Southern Slaveholder,* ed. Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 88–89.

was even rumored that Sir Francis Baring had made his initial fortune as a sixteen-year-old slave dealer.[96]

From these unsavory beginnings, Barings had developed "unsurpassed authority" in matters of American finance to become a leading merchant house in the cotton trade.[97] Family grandees like Alexander Baring (later First Baron Ashburton) were renowned for their wealth and power, which had been wielded on behalf of the proslavery "Interest" within Britain's political and financial elite before 1833.[98] Ashburton (a partner in Barings until 1830) made numerous proslavery speeches in Parliament—including advocating for the right to own enslaved people in 1828, and opposing immediate abolition in 1832.[99] By the time Douglass arrived in Britain, Ashburton was a well-known public figure, noted for his wealth, influence (he was a member of the Privy Council), and instrumental role in the Anglo-American treaty (known as the Webster-Ashburton Treaty) of 1842.[100]

Considering the deep connections between British firms like Barings and slave-based enterprises (before and after 1833), why did Douglass not direct his fire at these businesses and their leaders? Ashburton surely made a more compelling villain than the Rev. Chalmers, a man who pioneered models of poor relief in his Glasgow parish.[101] Yet, while Douglass vilified the Free Church for accepting tainted donations *from* enslavers, there is no evidence that he considered attacking the British elites who were funneling credit *the other way*.

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[96] S.I. Martin, *Britain's Slave Trade* (London: Channel 4 Books, 1999), 58; Nicholas Draper, "Helping to Make Britain Great: The Commercial Legacies of Slave-ownership in Britain," in *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, eds. Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, et. al. (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 102, 109.

[97] Sexton relays the following anecdote: "Ask about anything" concerning American securities, one American traveler in Britain remarked in the 1850s, "and the reply is, 'What does Mr. Thomas Baring say or think?'" Sexton, *Debtor Diplomacy*, 21.

[98] Martin, *Britain's Slave Trade*, 58; For a detailed account of the proslavery lobby in Britain and the West Indies see Michael Taylor, *The Interest: How the British Establishment Resisted the Abolition of Slavery* (London: Bodley Head, 2020).

[99] Ashburton's proslavery posturing chimed with Barings' investment strategy, which almost broke the firm in the 1820s after it gambled "one third of [its] total capital on credit to Wolfert Katz, the largest slave-owner in Berbice"—a catastrophic decision only mitigated by the large compensation received by the Barings for the loss of their slaves after the Act of Emancipation. Anon., "Alexander Baring, 1st Baron Ashburton: 1774–1848*,"* The National Gallery,; Draper, "Helping to make Britain Great," 85, 102; For Barings' involvement in the slavery-economy post-1833 see Inés Roldán de Montaud, "Baring Brothers and the Cuban Plantation Economy, 1814–1870," in *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy: Circuits of Trade, Money and Knowledge, 1650–1914,* eds. Adrian Leonard and D. Pretel (Basingstoke, Eng.; Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[100] Draper, "Helping to Make Britain Great," 86; "Webster-Ashburton Treaty, 1842," United States State Department, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/webster-treaty; "Alexander Baring," UCL Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/-1411131717.

[101] Shepperson, "Thomas Chalmers," 517. Douglass even favorably referenced Ashburton during a "Send Back the Money" speech in 1846; contrasting Ashburton's recent rejection of U.S. demands for the return of fugitives from slavery who had been on the *Creole* (a ship which had escaped to British territory) with the Free Church of Scotland accepting "blood stained money" from Southern churches. "Send Back the Blood Stained Money: An Address Delivered in Paisley, Scotland, on 25 April 1846," *Renfrewshire Advertiser*, 2 May 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:102, 240, 246. Interestingly, Douglass's only published work of fiction—an 1853 novella titled *The Heroic Slave, a Thrilling Narrative of the Adventures of Madison Washington, in Pursuit of Liberty*—was based on the *Creole* affair. Douglass also referenced the episode in numerous speeches in the second half of the 1840s. Arthur T. Downey, *The Creole Affair: The Slave Rebellion That Led the U.S. and Great Britain to the Brink of War* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 152.

One possibility is that Douglass and his allies lacked sufficient understanding of commerce and capital-flow to unpick these complex and deliberately opaque connections.[102] However, from at least the 1770s onwards there *had* been public debates in Britain about the financing of slavery—a discourse initially sparked by Quaker leaders who emphasized the "moralization of wealth" and publicly disassociated themselves from those who used capital to facilitate the oppression of others.[103] By the 1820s, evangelical abolitionist Zachary Macaulay was promoting his blend of free labor capitalism-humanitarianism to the British public—reflecting a growing awareness that "the global economy was deeply entangled with the slave trade and enslaved labor."[104] This conclusion encouraged more Britons to balance commercial interests with moral and spiritual concerns—guided by their faith (and the theories of Adam Smith) towards what Bronwen Everill calls "new, ethical capitalism."[105]

In the 1840s, Douglass was developing his own understanding of political economy by reading the likes of Smith, J.S. Mill, and John Locke.[106] Douglass was soon referencing Smith ("among the distinguished of those who early struggled in this glorious cause") and he even joined a Free Trade Club in 1846—all actions that suggest Douglass was far from naïve about the commercial realities of the Atlantic World.[107] Indeed, these realities were being explicitly stated by another American abolitionist, Elihu Burritt, who was touring Britain at the same time as Douglass. Burritt described American slavery as an "international evil [that] feeds itself at the

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[102] Draper, "Helping to make Britain Great," 102, 109; Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, Keith McClelland, "Introduction," in *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain*, Catherine Hall et al. (eds.) (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1. Such connections are still being overlooked today. For example, Downey's recent book on the *Creole* Affair fails to mention that Lord Ashburton (a key player in the drama) was himself a former enslaver whose wealth, power, and influence owned much to slavery. Downey, *The Creole Affair.*

[103] Such principled public positions were not always reflected in the commercial operations of their firms. Margaret Ackrill & Leslie Hannah, *Barclays: The Business of Banking, 1690–1996* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 28. Holcomb argues that the genealogy of Quaker boycotts of slave labor can be traced all the way back to the seventeenth century. Holcomb. *Moral Commerce,* 3.

[104] Everill, *Not Made by Slaves*, 3.

[105] Everill writes that "Abolitionists like the evangelical Zachary Macaulay or the American Quaker George W. Taylor saw the market as the solution to both the supply side and the demand side of the slavery problem, because in the economic theories of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, calm (*doux*) commerce was the best way to counteract the greed and "passions" of excess accumulation and consumption—in the private as well as the national interest." In describing the resulting "ethical capitalism," Everill counters the thesis (which she attributes to Christopher Brown and Kevin Grant) that this was a campaign against capitalism; arguing instead that figures like Macaulay were seeking "to reform capitalism," while removing "specific, morally loathsome practices." Everill, *Not Made by Slaves*, 4, 11, 12. 175.

[106] Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty* (London: New York University Press, 2012), 52–53, 59.

[107] "Pioneers in a Holy Cause: An Address Delivered in Canandaigua, New York, on August 2, 1847," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 19 August 1847, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 2:77–79. During the Civil War, Douglass frequently reminded his audiences about Smith's economic arguments against slavery. In 1864, he declared: "The old doctrine that the slavery of the black, is essential to the freedom of the white race, can maintain itself only in the presence of slavery, where interest and prejudice are the controlling powers, but it stands condemned equally by reason and experience. The statesmanship of today condemns and repudiates it as a shallow pretext for oppression. It belongs with the commercial fallacies exposed long ago by Adam Smith . . ." "A Friendly Word to Maryland: An Address Delivered in Baltimore, Maryland, on November 17, 1864," Boston *Liberator*, 23 December 1864, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers:* Series 1: *Speeches, Debates, and Interviews.* Vol. 4: *1864–1880,* ed. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 48; Letter from Frederick Douglass to William L Garrison, 23 May 1846, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers.* Series 3: *Correspondence,* 1:133–134.

markets of nations and communities that have abolished or repudiated the inhuman institution."[108] If other campaigners *were* speaking out, why did Douglass stay silent?

One possibility is that Douglass decided it would be too provocative (or too complicated) to highlight the financial connections between British commerce and plantation slavery to his audiences. He may also have felt that any efforts to pressurize or influence British creditors were doomed to fail. Transatlantic connections between politics, trade, and finance ran deep (exemplified by a figure like Daniel Webster, who served as U.S. Secretary of State and Legal Counsel for the Barings) and the risk of antagonizing these power-brokers was high—especially for those who believed that slavery could still be abolished through peaceful means.[109] Likewise, any boycott of slave-produced goods (such as cotton) would also damage manufacturers in Britain and the northern states—including businesses owned by wealthy abolitionists.

Ultimately, the simplest explanation for why Douglass neglected (or rejected) a pressure campaign against "immoral capital"—to adapt the term used by Christopher Brown—is found in his insistence that the best way to attack slavery was by influencing "public opinion."[110] Douglass focused on slavery's debasement of church, marriage, chastity, and childhood precisely because this was the most effective way to generate outrage in Victorian Britain ––*not* describing complex credit chains, nor accusing prominent Britons of profiting from the "peculiar institution."

However, doubts remain as to whether a man as fiercely intelligent as Douglass (and as experienced in Southern matters) truly believed his own claim that the British public had the power to end American slavery. West Indian emancipation showed that sufficient public pressure could influence government policy, but that was *British* territory and *British* "property"—not millions of enslaved people in another sovereign state. Douglass surely suspected that the South would never voluntarily concede the "cornerstone" of its economic, political, and social existence—let alone in response to British moral concerns.[111] Indeed, the reason for Douglass's eventual return to Britain in 1859 was because of his involvement in John Brown's plot to overthrow slavery by *violent* means—an episode that reflected the failure of traditional abolitionist methods to curb the growing political and economic power of the slaveholding South.[112]

Impact and Legacy

Douglass's second tour of Britain (1859–1860) provides clear insights as to how we should best evaluate the impact of his first visit. Douglass despaired at the rising racist countercurrents he now observed in Britain—stoked by works like Thomas Carlyle's infamous (but influential) "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question," which was published just two years after

[108] Elihu Burritt to George W. Taylor, 29 September 1846, cited in Holcomb, *Moral Commerce*, 10, 180; "Elihu Burritt 1810–1879," Central Connecticut State University, Elihu Burritt Library, https://library.ccsu.edu/help/spcoll/burritt/biography.php.
[109] Downey, *The Creole Affair,* 37.
[110] "American Slavery, American Religion, and The Free Church Of Scotland: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 22 May 1846," *London Morning Advertiser*, 23 May 1846, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:269; "Mr. Fred Douglas's (*sic*) Lecture on American Slavery, Carlisle," *Carlisle Journal*, 22 August 1846, 4, in Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 158; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 457.
[111] Blakeslee, "Battling the Exceptional South," 447.
[112] Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 95–98.

Douglass left.[113] Douglass remarked in 1860 that "he saw the evidence on the right hand and on the left, of the possible deterioration of British sentiment on that subject [slavery]. He read it in the London *Times*; he read it, too, in our streets. A change had taken place since he was here—fourteen years ago—in that respect."[114]

This bleak assessment suggests that Douglass himself believed his first tour had made little lasting impact. Certainly, no discernable changes in British policy towards the United States resulted from his efforts, nor is there evidence of any significant shift in public opinion towards a more interventionist approach to slavery.[115] Even the Free Church of Scotland held on to its "blood-stained money."[116] In this context, one could be tempted to dismiss Douglass's nineteen-month campaign as little more than an impressive display of oratory and stamina.[117]

However, as Blackett reminds us, "it is not easy to evaluate the success of [Black American abolitionists in Britain]; it is never easy to gauge the intangible effects of the international appeals of oppressed groups."[118] As an enslaved Black man (at this point largely following Garrison's ideological and strategic direction) Douglass's individual capacity to deliver meaningful change or tangible results was extremely limited—despite his prodigious talents. Indeed, it is on a *personal* level that this tour proved such a transformative episode. In Britain, Douglass met the supporters who purchased his freedom, and his international reputation grew with every speech and every copy of his *Narrative* sold. As Douglass remarked in his farewell address: "I came a slave; I go back a free man. I came here a thing—I go back a human being. I came here despised and maligned—I go back with reputation and celebrity."[119]

Such was the extent of Douglass's transatlantic fame that by 1850 even *The Times* felt it unnecessary to explain who he was in their reports.[120] Beyond personal acclaim, Douglass found a greater sense of independence and autonomy during his time abroad; beginning his transition away from the paternalistic direction of white Garrisonians[121] This shift would eventually culminate in Douglass's bitter split with Garrison, but was more immediately evident when he

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[113] Carlyle's work was first published anonymously in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country of London* in December 1849. The article was reprinted as a pamphlet four years later under the title "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question." Robert E. Bonner, "Slavery, Confederate Diplomacy, and the Racialist Mission of Henry Hotze," *Civil War History* 51, no. 3 (September 2005), 298; Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 154–55.

[114] "British Racial Attitudes and Slavery: An Address Delivered in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, England, on February 23, 1860," *Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Northern Daily Express*, 24 February 1860, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 3:335.

[115] For example, Blackett emphasizes that racism in British Canada actually increased from the 1840s to 1850s. The British Government also ignored abolitionist calls to clarify the Extradition Clause of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty (1841), meaning that the U.S. could theoretically demand the return of fugitive slaves from Canada. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall,* 154.

[116] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 383–86.

[117] Confusingly, Douglass titled a chapter in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) "21 months in Great Britain." However, records show that he was only in the British Isles for 19 months. Douglass himself referenced "19 months of close study of the character of the British people" in a later letter to *The Times*. Frederick Douglass, "To the Editor of *The Times*," *The Times*, 2 July 1847, 8; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 189.

[118] Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 196.

[119] "Farewell to the British People: An Address Delivered in London, England, on 30 March 1847," *London Morning Advertiser*, 31 March 1847, in *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 2:19; Baxter, *Frederick Douglass's Curious Audiences,* 3.

[120] For example, "America," *The Times*, 19 October 1850, 5.

[121] Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic*, 174–175; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland,* 11–12; Murray, *Advocates of Freedom*, 42.

returned to America and launched his own newspaper, the *North Star*. In so doing, Douglass established the means to better engage the public and shape the debate on his own terms.[122]

Finally, Douglass's tour jolted the British antislavery movement out of its post-1833 stupor—engaging new supporters and revitalizing old ones from across the social, economic, and geographical spectrum.[123] The significance of this achievement would only become evident during the American Civil War, fifteen years later. Blackett claims that "no other international event . . . had such a profound effect on the economic and political life of Britain as did the war in America."[124] The conflict had a devastating short-term impact on the British economy, as the "Cotton Famine" (initially caused by Southern brinkmanship, then by Union blockades) triggered mass unemployment and riots in several British towns and cities.[125] The Confederacy exerted considerable pressure on the British Government to recognize its claim to statehood and intervene in the conflict on its behalf—appealing directly to the British people for their support.[126] The question of slavery—and the true character of the South's "peculiar institution"—would be central to the eventual failure of these efforts.[127]

Various considerations weighed on the *political* decision by the British government to remain neutral during the Civil War.[128] However, slavery was undoubtedly the most important

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[122] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 389; Ford Risley, *Abolition and the Press: The Moral Struggle Against Slavery* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2008), 30–40; Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 10.

[123] Blassingame, "Introduction," *Douglass Papers:* Series 1, 1:lvi–lvii.

[124] Richard J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 6–7, 25–26.

[125] Cotton imports from the United States had fallen by 96% by early 1862. Approximately 500,000 Britons were negatively affected by the economic fallout of the Civil War. Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire," 1410–17; Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 106.

[126] These efforts included the covert creation of southern supporter groups and even a weekly newspaper (*The Index*)—edited by Confederate propagandist Henry Hotze. *The Index* was tasked with steering British public opinion (especially the views of Britain's political and social elite) towards a pro-Confederate position—emphasizing shared characteristics between the South and Britain, from manufacturing supply chains to the aristocratic model and mutual suspicion of Northern expansionism. *The Index* downplayed Southern slavery as far as was possible. Bonner, "Slavery, Confederate Diplomacy, and the Racialist Mission of Henry Hotze."

[127] Michael de Nie's analysis of British newspaper reporting of the Civil War states that "deeply felt antipathy for slavery" was shown by the great majority of the population and its newspapers. This sentiment not only fueled aversion to the Confederacy, but also mistrust of the Union leaders who had initially insisted they were fighting to restore the Union—*not* to free enslaved people. Michael de Nie, "The London Press and the American Civil War," in *Anglo-American Media Interactions, 1850–2000*, eds. Joel H. Wiener and Mark Hampton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 129, 137.

[128] British neutrality cannot be attributed to one single factor, nor was public opinion uniformly supportive of the North. However, the public and media discourse in Britain about the American Civil War featured slavery as one of (if not *the*) major points of interest. Slavery was also crucial to the ways in which Britons viewed the Confederacy and remained its defining characteristic—despite the efforts of Southern propagandists to shift attention elsewhere. For a detailed account of British deliberations (in particular, the debate over diplomatic recognition) see Howard Jones's *Blue & Gray Diplomacy* (2010). Jones concludes that "slavery was *not* the defining factor in Britain's November 1862 decision against intervention." However, his study makes clear that slavery featured heavily in political and public debate about the conflict—rendering British military or diplomatic support for the Confederacy a highly controversial policy option, and one that millions of Britons would have considered a betrayal of the nation's antislavery ideals. Howard Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy: A History of Union and Confederate Foreign Relations* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 283. For a more cynical assessment see Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy: Foreign Relations of the Confederate States of America* (2nd ed.) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 545. For a concise overview of the historiography on British public opinion see Lonnie A. Burnett (ed.), *Henry Hotze, Confederate Propagandist—Selected Writings on Revolution,*

factor in shaping *public* perceptions about the Confederacy. Antislavery societies mobilized against the Confederate propaganda push and abolitionists travelled the land promoting the Union cause.[129] Although Douglass had returned to America by the outbreak of war, nobody had done more to pre-condition the British people to reject the overtures of the fledgling slave-state. The force of Douglass's influence was felt on both sides of the Atlantic. In 1862, Douglass released his "Slave's Appeal to Great Britain"—an impassioned call (amplified through a media campaign that generated extensive newspapers syndication) for the nation to remain true to her proud abolitionist heritage—guided by the "inspiration of an enlightened Christianity."[130] Douglass privately worried about whether the British government would resist the Confederacy; however, his faith in the British people was ultimately vindicated.[131]

The extraordinary contribution of Frederick Douglass to rejuvenating (perhaps even resuscitating) the British antislavery movement in the 1840s proved crucial in ensuring that "repugnance to our institutions" remained "a part of the [British] national conscience," as one Confederate propagandist bemoaned.[132] This "repugnance"—brilliantly stoked by Douglass—helped ensure that the world's first "modern proslavery and antidemocratic state" did not receive the British support it needed to survive.[133] This final victory was the true legacy of Douglass's time in Britain.

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[129] Blackett estimates that approximately forty African Americans were involved in promoting the Union cause in Britain—despite various misgivings about the Lincoln administration's approach. Richard J. M. Blackett, "Pressure from Without: African Americans, British Public Opinion, and Civil War Diplomacy," in *The Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim,* ed. Robert E. May (Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 2013), 85–86.

[130] *London Daily News*, 26 November 1862, 5, in Murray, *Advocates of Freedom*, 238.

[131] Murray & McKivigan, *Douglass in Britain and Ireland*, 107.

[132] Bonner, "Slavery, Confederate Diplomacy," 296–97.

[133] Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1; Jones, *Blue & Gray Diplomacy*, 6.

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