NEW NORTH STAR

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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 IUI and hosted on that project's website. Instructions for submitting articles to the *New North Star* can be found on the journal's website.

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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]
>
> **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

[1] I thank Elizabeth S. Blackmar for her guidance and encouragement throughout this project. Thanks also to the reviewers, editors, and staff for their attention and efforts during revision and publication.

[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

[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.

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[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

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[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://frederickdouglassinbritain.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://frederickdouglassinbritain.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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Revisiting Frederick Douglass and the Nineteenth Century Religious Imagination

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In 2012, the Frederick Douglass Papers began a series of interdisciplinary symposia on the life and times of the iconic African American statesman Frederick Douglass at its home campus at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. On its sixth biannual symposium, the theme "Race, Religion, and Politics in the Age of Frederick Douglass" and a date in October 2020 was selected. Like the rest of the world, plans that year were disrupted by the unprecedented effects of the Covid-19 Corona Virus pandemic. The symposium was rescheduled to be held in October 2021 but suffered the same fate. Finally, the Douglass Papers shifted the event's format to an online symposium and its papers were delivered on 16–17 February 2022. The following collection now being published in the 2023 issue of the *New North Star* are revised versions of four scholarly papers from that symposium, all examining aspects of Douglass's religious views. While Douglass's life and writings were marked by his relationship to American Christianity and a variety of Christian institutions, this collection will look at the depth and breadth of Douglass's religious influences and how these sources were critical to his political and social vision.

The first paper "'That Strange, Mysterious, Indescribable': The Powers of Soul in Frederick Douglass's Political Philosophy," is adapted from the 2022 symposium's keynote address by Nick Bromell, professor emeritus in the Department of English at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Bromell works at the intersection of literary and cultural studies and philosophy. In his most recent book, *The Powers of Dignity: The Black Political Philosophy of Frederick Douglass* (Duke University Press, 2021), Bromell begins to unpack what Douglass might have meant when he claimed that "from this little bit of experience, slave experience, I have elaborated quite a lengthy chapter of political philosophy applicable to the American people."

Like all the authors in this symposium, Bromell emphasizes the critical and formative role personal experiences as a slave played in Douglass's religious as well as political development. Bromell also demonstrates how Douglass's autobiographical texts function as political philosophy, which is radical for Black writings to be elevated as a universal text to understand the shape and contours of human experience. As he contemplated social and political issues over the course of his life, Douglass's religious views, like those of other African American statesmen of the twentieth century, did not remain static. Bromell notes that in his post-Civil War addresses, Douglass did not thank God directly but instead the "faithful men and women, who have devoted the great energies of their *souls* to the welfare of mankind. It is only through such men and women that I can get any glimpse of God anywhere." For Bromell, such statements are evidence of an important "shift from theological and transcendent to more secular and immanent language [that] reflects the trajectory of Douglass's own development as a thinker." (36) He sees these early contemplative spiritual experiences as pivotal to creating Douglass's understanding of how much the established racist social order violated fundamental understandings of humanity or "soul" that would guide his future activism.

The remaining three essays in this collection were originally presented in a session entitled "Frederick Douglass and American Religion." Danjuma Gibson, Professor of Pastoral

Theology, Care, and Counseling at Calvin Theological Seminary and a licensed psychotherapist, delivered **"**Frederick Douglass: Fostering Psycho-Spiritual Resources for Resilience, Resistance, and Healing in the Age of Terror." Gibson previously explored Douglass's life in his 2018 book *Frederick Douglass, a Psychobiography: Rethinking Subjectivity in the Western Experiment of Democracy* (Palgrave Macmillan).

Gibson's essay explores the unique nature of "psycho-social" Blackness. He argues that slavery had substantive impacts on the African American psyche that psychological theories based on the European experience cannot explain. Gibson connects his observations of Douglass's inner struggles to contemporary problems facing African Americans today. He maintains that it is psychologically unhealthy for African Americans to be in a permanent state of rebellion against racism. One important technique Gibson finds that Douglass adopted to cope with this problem was "the act of articulating one's life-story, and then reconstructing that story as often as needed [as] a potent counter-hegemonic strategy." (47) Like Bromell, Gibson contends that Douglass believed that the capacity to imagine and to be creative was a sacred act, which makes us human and was most endangered by slavery.

A second scholar at the Douglass symposium to combine training in psychotherapy and religious studies was Heather L. Kaufman, a licensed therapist as well as a research associate with the IUI Institute of American Thought. Kaufman's paper, "Numinous Encounters in Frederick Douglass's Autobiographies," also draws on her long affiliation with the Frederick Douglass Papers that has produced several coauthored books, the most recent of which was *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass: A Critical Edition* (Yale University Press, 2018).

Kaufman's essay displays strong evidence that Douglass attributed key developments in his early life to divine intervention or providence. Kaufman analyzes some of the same experiences described in Douglass's autobiographies that Gibson examines but through the lens that Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Jung labeled as a "numinous experience." She shows Douglass repeatedly interpreting key incidents in his youth as the inspiration for deep spiritual or religious emotion (or practice).

The principal argument of Kaufman's essay is that Douglass's life exemplifies Jung's central principle of individuation. Kaufman argues that "Incidents in Douglass's life as a slave in which he experienced moments of profound, mystical insight are evidence of the divine at work in his life and these encounters have a numinous quality." (56) Kaufman acknowledges that while Jung was tone-deaf regarding American racism, his theories can be helpful in explaining the psychodynamics of Douglass's religious exploration. Her essay also draws repeated attention to early "moments of profound, mystical insight" that convinced Douglass that he was "destined by a higher power for freedom." (56) In re-counting his life, Douglass emphasized key almost-mystical moments when he experienced the inner knowing, or "individuation," that were central to his becoming a free man, intellectually as well as physically. She concludes that these numinous encounters "had profound psychological influences that propelled Douglass forward on his journey to becoming a free man." (56)

The final article, "'I Bow to No Priest Either of Faith or Unfaith': Frederick Douglass's Afro-Agnosticism," is by Maurice Wallace, an associate professor of English at Rutgers University, who specializes in African American literature and literary theory. Wallace also is a scholar of visual culture and featured Frederick Douglass prominently in his 2012 book *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Duke University Press).

Wallace's essay views Douglass's religious life from a new and quite different perspective. As the other authors do, Wallace uses Douglass's autobiographies as key sources for his religious and theological orientation but does not always reach similar conclusions. For example, when examining the young Douglass's conflict with "slave-breaker" Edward Covey, Wallace focuses upon one evening the young, enslaved man spent in the Maryland woods which he describes as Douglass's "Gethsemane experience," brooding over how a divine power could permit the injustices that the enslaved endured. The incident, set in the "deep woods," draws intriguing parallels to maroon culture and allows Wallace to speak to the heterodox nature of Black spirituality compared to more orthodox white Christianity.

Wallace conjectures: "If Douglass did not testify to his irreligion as a young man, it is perhaps because he would have no language or leadership to express or understand it in a systematic way for many more years. Eventually, he'd entertain both." (67) Wallace's essay reveals how exposure to new intellectual trends like the philosophical writings of Ludwig Feuerbach and friendship with American atheist Robert Ingersoll caused Douglass to question traditional leanings in religious belief. In many ways, the older Douglass presents himself as a heterodox Christian, especially if normative Christianity was the robust nationalist, racist, and imperialist Christianity of contemporary white Americans.

Wallace finds that despite possibly harboring heterodox religious views, Douglass maintained highly visible public connections to traditional African American religious institutions. The traditional African American institutions of Douglass's time were mostly likely Black Protestant churches or what has colloquially been referred to as the Black Church. His connection to the Black Church was not only a result of his childhood upbringing and proximity to Black Protestant spaces, but it more likely represented the outsized role that the mainstream Black Church played in the public and political sphere of the nineteenth century. Wallace notes that "Douglass kept faith and religious assembly far apart and thus saw no contradiction between his paratheistic musings and his ongoing engagements in and with Black American ecclesiality." (74) As Gibson emphasizes the therapeutic values Douglass found in such connections, Wallace finds Douglass drawing cultural reassurance due to participation in such Black religious gatherings.

Wallace's novel interpretation is supported by a wide base of evidence from Douglass's speeches, writings, and correspondence. His extensive documentation places Wallace's new interpretation against existing scholarship and assists readers in rethinking the connection between Douglas and Afro-agnosticism in their own mind. This essay's conclusions both complement and contrast with those of the other essays in the symposium and should stimulate further study into Douglass's intellectual life which the author desires.

The question of what it means to be human and how that might connect to religious experience resonates through all these essays. They all describe a highly introspective Douglass, at various stages of his life, pondering his personal experiences in the light of the evolving religious climate of the nineteenth century but also as a member of a race at first resisting and then triumphantly emerging from slavery. As these scholars all demonstrate, Douglass's sense of personal identity and his later activism was heavily informed by the religious belief of his times. While shaped by his times, the sources that Douglass engaged were far more expansive than originally considered. His eclectic and often contradictory sources not only informed Douglass's personal musings, but they were also a part of a larger public discourse throughout the nineteenth century on Afro political and religious models of belonging. Therefore, it is not surprising that the assembled scholars have introduced novel ways of interpretating Douglass's canon and

challenged us to reimagine Douglass's critical contributions to American political philosophy and the western religious imagination.

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"That Strange, Mysterious, Indescribable"
The Powers of Soul in Frederick Douglass's Political Philosophy

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When Thomas Jefferson and the other signers of the Declaration of Independence declared that "All men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights," they left two questions unanswered, indeed unthought: what exactly *is* a "man," and what is it about "men" that their creator would have seen fit to endow them with certain inalienable rights? In other words, what exactly are human beings, and what specific qualities or attributes do they have such that they, alone in all of creation, merit certain rights? The signers of the Declaration failed to raise or answer these questions because, I would suggest, no one had ever questioned their humanness, that is, their status as human beings; and while their right as human beings to hold certain rights was a relatively new idea, they did not feel obliged to articulate exactly *why* human beings have this right. It was enough, for the moment, to claim that they were "endowed" with it.

This was not the case for Frederick Douglass when he began to assert that the enslaved also merited these rights; nor was it the case when he asserted that free Blacks living in the North were endowed with such rights. Indeed, he had to argue against the widespread view, so famously expressed in 1857 by Chief Justice Roger Taney, that Blacks had no rights which whites were bound to respect. That view was based on two assumptions many white Americans held about Blacks: that they were not fully human in the ways that whites were human, and that they therefore lacked the specific kinds of human worth that merit acknowledgment and protection by the protocol of human rights embodied by the Declaration. In order to advance thoroughgoing arguments on behalf of Black rights, therefore, Douglass believed that he had to address and refute both of these assumptions. And to do that, he had to answer the two questions left unanswered by the Declaration: what is a human being, and what is it about human beingness—what is its value or worth—such that one can assert that humans have a distinctive worth that should be recognized and protected by rights? As Douglass put the matter in an 1848 speech: "Sir, we have in this country, no adequate idea of humanity yet; the nation does not feel that these [blacks] are men; it cannot see through the dark skin and curly hair of the black man, anything like humanity, or that has claims to human rights."[1]

In seeking to answer these questions and thereby to provide Americans with "an adequate idea of humanity," Douglass availed himself of all the resources at his disposal: his conversations with colleagues in the abolitionist movement, his fellowship in the AME church, his voracious reading, especially in political philosophy, and his own experience of life as a Black man. Significantly, however, he claimed in 1867 that it was this last resource, his

[1] Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass,* 5 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1950–1975), 5:79. All further references to this source will be abbreviated as *LW*. To a considerable degree, Douglass's conviction that his times required a more adequate idea of the human anticipates Sylvia Wynter's belief that "the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves." ed with the dignity and interdependence of the human species than with its "cognitive and behavioral autonomy." Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, after Man—an Argument" *CR: The New Centennial Review,* 3: 3 (Fall 2003), 260.

experience of life as a Black human being, that most crucially shaped the political philosophy he developed in order to make his political activism more effective: "From this little bit of experience, slave experience," he declared, "I have elaborated quite a lengthy chapter of political philosophy applicable to the American people."[2] Douglass believed, then, that his political activism was underwritten by a political philosophy that drew upon, but also made radical supplements to, the political philosophy enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and widely taken to epitomize the main principles of U.S. liberal democracy then and to this day. That supplement derived from his own Black experience.

In what follows, I will first provide a brief summary of Douglass's answers to these two questions and suggest that they form the core of his own political philosophy. I will then develop at some length a surprising but crucially important aspect of his answers: his conviction that aesthetic sensibility provides a crucial component of the human worth, or dignity, that makes humans merit human rights. Seeking to express, or name, what this human sensibility is and does, he frequently turned to what I will be calling "soul" language—language that depicts the crucial worth of human beings as residing in part in our capacity to respond with awe and joy to the beauties of the natural world and the infinite majesty of creation. As we shall soon see, he was not the only or the first Black American of his time to experience a linkage between aesthetic experience and human rights, but he was the first to develop this insight into a core component of a Black political philosophy that aimed to correct the deficiencies of white Americans' understanding of the principles of their democracy. [3]

Providing U.S. Political Philosophy with "An Adequate Conception of Humanity"

What knowledge did Douglass feel he had acquired from his personal experience of enslavement (and later from his experience of anti-Black racism) that could address and remedy the above-mentioned omissions of U.S. political philosophy in his time? To answer briefly: he had learned that to be human is to possess certain "faculties" or "powers," and that our possession and exercise of those powers is what gives us human worth, in our own eyes and in the eyes of others.[4] "Man's right to liberty," he declared in "God's Law Outlawed" (1851), "is written upon all the *powers and faculties* of man."[5] Three years later, he repeated himself almost verbatim in a January 1854 speech: "the great truth of man's right to liberty is written on all the

[2] John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, eds., *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, 5 vols., (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979–92), 4:160. All further references to this source will be abbreviated as *Douglass Papers*. Douglass's political philosophy is the subject of two excellent book-length studies, both of which argue that it is a form of natural rights liberalism. See Peter C. Myers, *Frederick Douglass: Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism* (Lawrence, Kans.: University of Kansas Press, 2008), and Nick Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). I am also indebted to two superb intellectual histories of Douglass: Waldo E. Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), and David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1989). Robert-Gooding-Williams argues, by contrast, that Douglass's political thought is best understood as an expression of republican political philosophy. Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[3] Much of what follows is a condensation of the arguments I advance in *The Powers of Dignity: The Black Political Philosophy of Frederick Douglass* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021).

[4] Peter Myers was the first to notice Douglass's use of this phrase, but he does not allow it to trouble his argument that Douglass was fundamentally a natural-rights liberal whose major political value was freedom. In his analysis of the phrase, he argues that the two words ("powers" and "faculties") mean significantly different things to Douglass. Myers, *Frederick Douglass*, 53–57.

[5] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 2:261 [emphases added].

powers and faculties of the human soul."[6] Six months later, in his important lecture "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered," he again referred to human faculties and powers. "To know whether [a] negro is a man," he begins, "it must first be known what constitutes a man." And what constitutes a man, he argues, are certain faculties and powers: "Man is distinguished from all other animals, by the possession of certain definite *faculties and powers,* as well as by physical organization and proportions."[7] In an 1866 editorial on women's suffrage, he expands on these ideas: "If woman is admitted to be a moral and intellectual being, possessing a sense of good and evil, and a power of choice between them, her case is already half gained. Our natural powers are the foundation of our natural rights; and it is a consciousness of powers which suggests the exercise of rights. Man can only exercise the powers he possesses, and he can only conceive of rights in the presence of powers."[8]

In other words, Douglass believed that if we become "conscious" of our "natural powers" through the exercise of them, we prepare ourselves as well for the "exercise of rights." Conversely, if we are denied opportunities to exercise our rights, and show them to ourselves and others, our consciousness of them dims and our lowered self-esteem discourages us from claiming our rights. He brings all these threads together in another speech on woman's suffrage rights:

> But whatever may be thought as to the consequences of allowing women to vote, it is plain that women themselves are divested of a large measure of their natural dignity by their exclusion from such participation in Government. . . . To deny woman her vote is to abridge her natural and social power, and to deprive her of a certain measure of respect. . . . Woman herself loses in her own estimation [of herself] by her enforced exclusion from the elective franchise just as slaves doubted their own fitness for freedom, from the fact of being looked down upon as fit only for slaves.[9]

How did Douglass come to perceive these linkages among human nature, human powers, consciousness of powers, dignity, and rights? On the one hand, while enslaved he had felt the force of the slavery system bearing down upon him in ways that seemed designed specifically to prevent him and other enslaved persons from becoming conscious of and exercising the powers that affirmed and produced their human worth, or dignity. He had also felt within himself, and observed in the behavior of other enslaved persons, a fierce determination to cling to those powers and to maintain some awareness of them even while the slavery system—and later Northern racism—strenuously sought to prevent their exercise and demonstration of those powers. "Dark as is the lot of the slave, yet he knows he is not a beast, but as truly a man as his master. Nothing can make the slave think that he is a beast; he feels the instinct of manhood within him at all times."[10] This "instinct of manhood," I would suggest, is the enslaved person's not quite fully conscious sense of his own humanity and his worth. A more complete and confident sense of self-worth would be produced by his "putting forth" his natural faculties and

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[6] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 2:454–55.
[7] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 2:501, 502.
[8] Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, 5 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1950–75) 4:232–33. All further references to this source will be abbreviated as *LW*.
[9] *LW,* 4:236, 237.
[10] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 2:327.

powers, but the slaveholder has denied and appropriated these. The enslaved person, "as a mental, moral, and responsible being," was "blotted out from existence . . . and ranked with the beasts of the fields [because] all his powers were in the hands of another."[11]

Certain distinctively human powers, then, are what constitute humanness itself. Awareness, exercise, and recognition of those powers (by oneself and others) is what constitutes the human dignity that makes human beings deserving of certain rights.[12] As the passages I have quoted suggest, Douglass frequently asserted that two of the powers that most plainly constitute our humanness are our "mental" or "intellectual" power (the capacity to reason), and our "moral" power (our ability to distinguish between right and wrong and to be "responsible" for our actions). But Douglass also frequently suggested—and in one lecture explicitly stated—that humanness is constituted by another power also. This is our capacity to respond aesthetically to the world we are in, to perceive and appreciate beauty, to imagine and to create, to transform spaces into places, and to behold the infinitude of the universe, to sense its vastness and to stand in awe of it. As Douglass recalls in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, his own experience of this uniquely human power of responding aesthetically and spiritually to the world entered into his boyhood's self-conception and helped form his conviction that he was a being with a dignity that deserved recognition and freedom and political rights. In later texts such as "Pictures and Progress" and "It Moves," he elaborated further on this insight, and in so doing he introduced the "soul" language that I aim to call our attention to in this essay. I will try to show the ways this human capacity for aesthetic and spiritual response and creativity entered (as Douglass recalled in *My Bondage and My Freedom*) into his self-conception and helped form his conviction that he was a being of dignity who deserved recognition and protection from universal human rights.

Aesthetic Responsiveness and Soul Language

Douglass was not the only or the first Black American to express the view that human rights are based on a sense of human dignity that derives in part from aesthetic and spiritual experience. In 1849, Douglass stood in his *North Star* office in Rochester and read a remarkable letter he had just received from Martin Delany, briefly his co-editor of the newspaper and for some time one of its occasional correspondents. Describing a recent journey he took through the Allegheny Mountains, Delany writes:

> The soul may here expand in the magnitude of nature, and soar to the extent of human susceptibility. Indeed, it is only in the mountains that I can fully appreciate my existence *as a man* in America, my own native land. It is then and there my soul is lifted up, my bosom caused to swell with emotion, and I am lost in wonder at the *dignity of my own nature*. I see in the works of nature around me, the wisdom and goodness of God. I contemplate them, and conscious that he has *endowed me with faculties* to comprehend them, I perceive the likeness I bear to

[11] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 2:9.

[12] Dignity has generally been overlooked as a key word in Douglass's political philosophy. One notable exception is Nick Buccola, "'The Essential Dignity of Man as Man': Frederick Douglass on Human Dignity," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2015), 228–58. See also Robert Gooding-Williams, "The Du Bois–Washington Debate and the Idea of Dignity," in *To Shape a New World: Essays on the Political Philosophy of Martin Luther King, Jr*., eds., Tommie Shelby and Brandon M. Terry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press: 2018), 19–34.

> him. What a being is Man! . . . created in the impress image of his Maker; and how debased is God, and outraged his divinity in the person of the oppressed colored people of America![13]

According to Delany, then, a definite logic linked his perceptions of the natural world, his belief in his own human dignity, and his determination to resist any oppression that denies his possession of such dignity. He begins by observing that only when he is in a beautiful natural setting like the mountains—away from the scorn heaped upon him by whites—can he truly feel like "a man." This powerful feeling of his human personhood comes into being as he "contemplates the works of nature," causing him to "become conscious" that he is "endowed . . . with faculties to comprehend them and in turn this consciousness of his aesthetic "faculties" of appreciation causes him to "be lost in wonder at the dignity of [his] own nature." There is something unquestionably worthy—or in "the image of god"—in this distinctively human ability to respond so fully to the "works of nature." Filled now with this sense of his own "dignity," he cannot but believe that God must be outraged that such a being as he now knows himself to be routinely denied his rightful dignity "in America" merely because of the color of his skin. When Delany writes that God is "debased" by racism, he means that whites' anti-Black racism has degraded God by denying the divinity, or human worth, that resides in all humankind. Both he and God are thus indignant that his humanity and dignity as a Black man are so thoroughly denied by the white racist order. And he implies that this outrage, accompanied by his belief in the justice of his outrage, will energize and drive his determination to resist such oppression.

With its words like "soul," "expand," "magnitude," "soar," "wonder," and "dignity," Delany's letter to Douglass draws heavily on Romantic ideas and tropes circulating at the time in U.S. culture, but it makes quite distinctive use of these when it puts them to work to assert Black dignity and overturn white racism. As I hope to show, it is not at all surprising that Douglass decided to publish this letter in the *North Star*, for it expressed a view that he maintained and elaborated somewhat more philosophically than Delany throughout his long career.

It is in *My Bondage*, that Douglass first describes some of the varied ways he exercised and became conscious of having this particular human power. He recalls, for example, some moments of dreamy reflectiveness he enjoyed as a small boy and suggests that these eventually made possible his political awakening and resolve to resist oppression. He writes that "in a little valley, not far from grandmammy's cabin, stood Mr. Lee's mill. . . . It was a water mill; and I shall never be able to tell *the many things thought and felt*, while I sat on the bank and watched that mill, and the turning of its ponderous wheel." He writes further that, "the sloop and mill were wondrous things, full of thoughts and ideas. A child cannot well look at such objects without *thinking*."[14]

One of the things young Frederick Bailey (for that was his actual name at the time) found himself thinking about was the painful fact of his enslavement:

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[13] Quoted in Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 47 [emphasis added].

[14] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994), 161 [emphases added]. All further page references will appear in the text.

> As I grew older and more thoughtful, I was more and more filled with a sense of my wretchedness. . . . There are thoughtful days in the lives of children—at least there were in mine—when they grapple with all the great, primary subjects of knowledge, and reach, in a moment, conclusions which no subsequent experience can shake. I was just as well aware of the unjust, unnatural and murderous character of slavery, when nine years old, as I am now. Without any appeal to books, to laws, or to authorities of any kind, it was enough to accept God as a father, to regard slavery as a crime. (209)

We should note the juxtaposition here of the "great, primary subjects of knowledge" and the conviction that "slavery [was] a crime." These relate to each other in two ways. His thinking about these "subjects" leads him to think about his enslavement, and, just as importantly, his *awareness* of his ability to think about "the great, primary subjects of knowledge" instantly reveals to him that it is criminal to hold a being, who is capable of such grappling, in a condition of enslavement. The logic here is exactly the logic we saw earlier—and spelled out more explicitly—in Delany's letter.

We find essentially this logic at work in the pages in *My Bondage* in which Douglass recounts his discovery of the true nature of the slavery system. The young Fred Bailey asked the enslaved persons most recently brought from Africa *why* they have been enslaved, and they replied that there was no theological nor moral justification for their condition: rather, they had been kidnapped by robbers. Douglass writes:

> I could not have been more than seven or eight years old, when I began to make this subject [of my criminal enslavement] my study. It was with me in the woods and fields; along the shores of the river, and wherever my boyish wanderings led me; and though I was, at that time, quite ignorant of the existence of free states, I distinctly remember being, even then, most strongly impressed with the idea of being a free man some day. This cheering assurance was an inborn dream of my human nature—a constant menace to slavery—and one which all the powers of slavery were unable to silence or extinguish. (179)

Why does Fred Bailey choose to pursue his study of his condition in the "woods and fields?" And why do his ramblings there produce his conviction that he "will be a free man one day"—that is, his determination to resist and escape slavery? It is not so much because the natural world makes his own nature with its "inborn dream" of freedom visible and palpable to him, as because his ability to respond to the natural world reveals to him his own capacity or power of response, just as the Allegheny mountains would later do for Delany. Recall Delany's words: "I contemplate them, and [become] conscious that he has *endowed me with faculties* to comprehend them." Delany was a grown man at that time, so this transition from experience to consciousness happens easily. Not quite so for Douglass, who was still a boy. His responsiveness to the words and fields and streams did produce the strong feeling that his enslavement was a crime, but it did not quite rise to a consciousness of "the dignity of [his] own nature" as Delany puts it. For a fuller and more explicit account of this process, we must turn to a later work, Douglass's 1861 lecture "Pictures and Progress."

"The Divinest of all human faculties"

Read today almost exclusively for his views about photography[15], this lecture is also one of Douglass's more explicitly philosophical works, one that explains why one's ability to respond aesthetically to the natural world—that is, to behold and experience the wondrousness of the world—prompts the kind of self-consciousness that leads to a determination to resist oppression. His explanation begins with this account of "the divine meditations" of a "boy of ten":

> On the hillside in the valley under the grateful shades of solitary oaks and elms the boy of ten, all forgetful, of time or place, calls to books, or to boyish sports, looks up with silence and awe to the blue overhanging firmament and views with dreamy wonder, its ever shifting drapery, tracing in the Clouds, and in their ever changing forms and colors, the outlines of towns and cities, great ships and hostile armies of men [and] of horses, solemn Temples, and the Great Spirit of all; Break in if you please upon the prayers of monks or nuns, but I pray you, do not disturb the divine meditations of that little Child. He is unfolding to himself the Divinest of all human faculties, for such is the picture making faculty of man.[16]

Haven't we already met this child in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, where he was the boy who gazed at the sloop and windmill and found them and himself "full of thoughts," the boy who walked along the river and grappled "with all the great, primary objects of human knowledge?" In any case, Douglass goes on to explain how this child's dreamy reflections give rise to what he calls the "divinest of human faculties," which he now calls a "power":

> It [the picture-making power] lies, directly in the path of what I conceive to be a key to the great mystery of life and progress. The process by which man is able to invert his own subjective consciousness, into the objective form, considered in all its range, is in truth the highest attribute of man[']s nature. All that is really peculiar to humanity—in contradistinction from all other animals[—]proceeds from this one faculty *or power*. The world has no sight more pleasant and hopeful, either for the child or for the race, than one of these little ones [that is, children] in rapt contemplation. . . . The process is one of *self-revelation*, a comparison of the pure forms of beauty and excellence without, with those which are within.[17]

This complex passage must be examined step-by-step. First, Douglass takes the "picture-making power" of dreamy meditation —which is, I would suggest, an *aesthetic* faculty or power—to be the one power that most decisively distinguishes humans from nonhuman animals and thus most assuredly constitutes our humanity. The reason for this, he posits, is that this

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[15] See, for example: Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012); John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, eds., *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liverwright Publishing Corp., 2015); Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African Americans* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012).

[16] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 3:460.

[17] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 3:461.

power is the primary means through which we become self-conscious: responding aesthetically to the world is "the process by which man is able to invert his own subjective consciousness, into the objective form." Then he goes one step further and attributes to this faculty our dawning *consciousness* not just of ourselves as *persons* but as persons of some *worth*. He writes that when a child is in "rapt contemplation," what's happening inside him or her is a " process . . . of *self-revelation*, a comparison of the pure forms of beauty and excellence without, with those which are within." In other words, children dimly realize that their ability to see and respond to beauty and excellence in the world (and in art) testifies to their own beauty and excellence. Only because they have something within them ("soul" will become Douglass's word for it) that *corresponds* to nature's beauty and magnificence can they *respond* to it aesthetically. Thus, we are back to the letter from Delany, who wrote: "I contemplate [the works of nature], and conscious that [God] has *endowed me with faculties* to comprehend them, I perceive the likeness I bear to him." The only difference is that Douglass's language here is more plainly philosophical. Douglass leaves out the "God" language and sees human aesthetic experience as the primary producer of both human self-consciousness and human consciousness of human worth (or dignity).[18]

This shift from theological and transcendent to more secular and immanent language reflects the trajectory of Douglass's own development as a thinker. In 1855, Douglass took this capacity for wondrous reflection and imaginative response to be the essence of humanness itself, and when he described it he blended soul language with more conventional language about "God:" Humanness is a state of being "endowed with those mysterious powers by which man soars above the things of time and sense, and grasps with undying tenacity, the elevating and sublimely glorious idea of God."[19] By the early 1860s, if not earlier, he was expressing the same belief but without any "God" being present. For example, in an 1863 address, he declared that there is "in man, deep down, and it may be very deep down, in his *soul* or in the truth itself, an elective power, or an attractive force, call it by what name you will, which makes truth in all her simple beauty and excellence, ever preferred to the grim and ghastly powers of error."[20] Likewise, in his remarks in 1870 at the final meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, he said: "I want to express my love to God and gratitude to God, by thanking those faithful men and women, who have devoted the great energies of their *souls* to the welfare of mankind. It is only through such men and women that I can get any glimpse of God anywhere."[21] And in his great 1883 lecture "It Moves," he affirmed: "What is true of external nature [its obedience to the physical laws of the universe] is also true of that strange, mysterious, and indescribable, which earnestly endeavors in some degree to measure and grasp the deepest thought and to get at the soul of things; to make our subjective consciousness, objective, in thought, form and speech."[22]

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[18] As Simon Gikandi notes, the very project of the European Enlightenment aimed to exclude the enslaved from human status by denying their capacity for moral reflection and aesthetic response: "the act of enslavement was predicated on the exclusion of the slave from the moral and aesthetic realm." No doubt because he wished to contest this exclusion, Douglass's account of his childhood suggests that even an enslaved man, one who is *not* "civilized and illuminated by knowledge," can nonetheless make such discoveries in the "objects and occurrences around him" and "recognize" himself to be an "intelligible and accountable subject"—that is, a human being who possesses certain powers and from those powers derives a sense of his self-worth. Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 238.

[19] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 2:255.

[20] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 3:553 [emphases added].

[21] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 4:264 [emphases added].

[22] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 5:143.

In all of these instances, Douglass is suggesting that our power to "grasp the deepest thought and to get at the soul of things" helps constitute our human worth, and thus crucially underwrites our claim to political rights (when we are aware of having this power) while also firing our determination to gain those rights.

"That mysterious, invisible, impalpable something"

In one of his last speeches, "The Lessons of the Hour" (1894), Douglass goes a step further and makes this claim for not just individual citizens of a democracy but the nation or polity they compose. Midway through the speech, he refers to "the soul of the nation," and he returns to this idea at the end his lecture also:

> In conclusion, let me say one word more of the soul of the nation and of the importance of keeping it sensitive and responsive to the claims of truth, justice, liberty, and progress. In speaking of the soul of the nation I deal in no cant phraseology. I speak of that mysterious, invisible, impalpable something which underlies the life alike of individuals and of nations, and determines their character and destiny.[23]

How do we respond today to Douglass's soul language and to the political philosophy—a radical supplement to the Declaration's liberal natural rights philosophy—it helped him elaborate? Do we take it to be "cant," just a metaphor, or mere lip-service to a discredited though still potent worldview? If so, how did we respond to the late John Lewis's own soul language as it appears in his valedictory essay published the day after his death in the *New York Times*? Lewis devotes most of the essay to paying tribute to the young people who launched the Black Lives Matter and Me Too movements, and he sums up by affirming that, "ordinary people with ordinary vision can redeem the soul of our nation by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble."[24]

In my view, we lose a great deal if we are unable to take Lewis's and Douglass's soul language on its own terms and instead put words like "soul" in scare quotes to distance ourselves from them. Broadly, we overlook a long history of Black Americans' use of soul language in their efforts to rethink and restate the principles on which U.S. democracy is based. More particularly, we overlook Douglass's effort to supplement the familiar, traditional principles of freedom and equality with a more thoughtful account of what men and women *are* (i.e., a more adequate "conception of humanity") such that they possess a human "dignity" that deserves those rights.

Perhaps the most subtle loss incurred from thinking of soul language as mere rhetoric is that we can overlook what a number of Black poets and writers have written about Black subjectivity and resistance. Dating back at least to antebellum period, all Black activists and intellectuals have had to struggle against a racial order that seeks to categorize and simplify Black subjectivity both by rendering it as group phenomenon (to be a Black individual is in itself to share a group's quality or experience of Blackness), and by asserting that such Blackness lacks the qualities that characterize white humanity. Some of them have responded with soul language because, with its unembarrassed embrace of the ineffable and unknowable, it sets itself against

[23] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 5:191 [emphases added].

[24] John Lewis, "Together You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation." Nytimes.com.

simplifications of both kinds. The late Jeffrey Ferguson was thinking along these lines when he wrote in his 2008 essay, "Race and the Rhetoric of Resistance," that, "a theme like resistance, which focuses more on the struggle against outside forces than on inner experiences, cannot give the best account of how both the oppressed and oppressor exceed the frameworks that we use to explain them."[25] Ferguson's call to rethink resistance and to look at the role of "inner experience" in Black life has now been taken up by many scholars and artists, and I will close with the words of one of them, poet and critic Kevin E. Quashie. Like Douglass before him, he is unafraid to use words like "ineffable" or "mysterious" or "impalpable," and like Douglass he suggests that "quiet" has always been both a supplement to and a form of "resistance" in Black culture:

> Quiet . . . is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life—one's desires, ambitions, hungers, vulnerabilities, fears. The inner life is not apolitical or without social value, but neither is it determined entirely by publicness. In fact, the interior—dynamic and ravishing—is a stay against the dominance of the social world: it has its own sovereignty. It is hard to see, even harder to describe, but no less potent in its ineffability. Quiet.[26]

The ten-year-old Fred Bailey who "look[ed] up with silence and awe to the blue overhanging firmament and view[ed] with dreamy wonder, its ever-shifting drapery . . . in the Clouds" was being very quiet. So was the eight-year-old Fred who walked "in the woods and fields and along the shores of the river" on the Lloyd plantation. So was enslaved boy for whom "the sloop and mill were wondrous things, full of thoughts and ideas." Yet out of that quietness would emerge the incomparably energetic Black political activist, philosopher, and writer we know today as Frederick Douglass. This, I believe, was one of the crucial insights gained from his experience of enslavement that the older Douglass sought to convey in the "chapter of political philosophy" he "elaborated" and thought "applicable to the American people."

[25] Jeffrey Ferguson, "Race and the Rhetoric of Resistance," *Raritan* 28, no. 1 (Summer 2008), 6–7.
[26] Kevin E. Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 6.

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Frederick Douglass: Fostering Psycho-Spiritual Resources for Resilience, Resistance, and Healing in the Age of Terror

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> I have sometimes thought that the American people are too great to be small, too just and magnanimous to oppress the weak, too brave to yield up the right to the strong . . . He is a wiser man than I am, who can tell how low the moral sentiment of this republic may yet fall. When the moral sense of a nation begins to decline and the wheel of progress to roll backward, there is no telling how low the one will fall or where the other may stop . . . The Supreme Court has surrendered, State sovereignty is resorted. It has destroyed the civil rights Bill, and converted the Republican party into a party of money rather than a party of morals . . . The cause lost in the war, is the cause regained in peace, and the cause gained in war, is the cause lost in peace.[1]

This passage is a portion of a speech given by Frederick Douglass on 9 January 1894, at the Metropolitan AME Church in Washington, D.C. It was a little over a year before his death on 20 February 1895. Taken by itself, the reader could easily think that these words were uttered by someone in the present-day sociopolitical context. The current context includes, (1) coming to terms with the aftermath of a global Covid-19 pandemic where Black and Brown people suffered disproportionately in terms of infection and death due to the intersection of structural racism and inequity,[2] (2) navigating a racial reckoning and backlash the country has arguably not witnessed since the Civil Rights era, presumably in response to the first Black family to occupy the White House and, (3) the social and political fallout of the January 6th insurrection at the Capitol—a brazen act of violence overrun with themes of White supremacy and far-right extremism. Add to this a recent spate of Supreme Court decisions within the last decade that has undermined voter rights, women's rights, and the rights of marginalized individuals to equity and inclusion in higher education, and one could easily make the case that we are in an environment in the public sphere that strongly mirrors what Douglass experienced in the final decades of the 19th century.

For Frederick Douglass, the context that enveloped his *Lessons of the Hour* lecture involved a seismic social, cultural, and political shift from the Reconstruction era to what Southern Whites dubbed the Redemption era. Douglass was faced with the prospect of seeing a significant amount of social progress (in no small part attributable to his life's work) reversed because of the efforts of the southern states (coupled with the fraternizing and appeasing tendencies of the northern states) to reinstitute a racial caste system underwritten by White supremacy and terror. In 1883 Douglass witnessed the Supreme Court strike down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, along with the premature removal of federal troops from southern states, which all but guaranteed the return of the terror of the slavocracy and racial apartheid for Black people. In so many ways then, where Douglass found himself in 1894 is where so many find themselves today in the wake of America's first Black presidency: an undeniable backlash to ethnic minority progress. There is something

[1] Douglass, *The Lessons of the Hour*, 23–24.
[2] See Karaye and Horney, "The Impact of Social Vulnerability of COVID-19 in the U.S." in American Journal of Preventative Medicine.

hauntingly consistent and repetitious about the life-cycle stages of a nation experimenting with democracy: (1) the cries and protests of the oppressed and those forced to exist at the margins, (2) resistance and revolution, (3) sociopolitical progress and, (4) violent backlash to restore the normality of domination and oppression. These life-cycle stages can last for several generations, and then send the society into catatonic shock, as those who are conscientious or more given to deep introspection wrestle with the reality that instead of the imagined linear trajectory of so-called progress, we are instead compelled to begin again as it relates to the stages of the democratic experiment. Democracy is not static. Democracy is dynamic. Democracy is a practice. In a short essay written just a few days before his death, the esteemed congressman John Lewis, recollecting on a moment in his younger years when he heard a speech on the radio by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., wrote:

> He [King] said we are all complicit when we tolerate injustice. He said it is not enough to say it will get better by and by. He said each of us has a moral obligation to stand up, speak up and speak out. When you see something that is not right, you must say something. You must do something. Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part to help build what we called the Beloved Community, a nation and world society at peace with itself. Ordinary people with extraordinary vision can redeem the soul of America by getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble.[3]

For our purposes here, we are compelled to ask how we might sustain hope in the democratic experiment while existing in the context of extremity? To respond to this question, this essay looks to the life of Frederick Douglass to reflect on psychospiritual practices that aided him in navigating the contours of resilience, resistance, and healing in an age of social and political terror.

"The Interpretive Power of Psychohistory and Psychobiography"

The Pedagogy of Psychohistory and Psychobiography

James Baldwin asserts, "History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We are our history. If we pretend otherwise, we literally are criminals."[4] I suggest the criminality that Baldwin speaks to is one of depraved indifference and reckless endangerment in how we engage with history. It is when we waste the opportunity to learn from the human errors and atrocities of the past so that we might be better situated to act as moral agents in the present and in the future. But as a trained theologian and psychotherapist, I understand that it is psychologically and emotionally easier to assume the position of the bystander, to act in our personal best interest, and to become indifferent in times of social unrest and political mayhem. Victoria Barnett makes this point in her scholarship on the Holocaust, asserting that "the genocide of the European Jews would have been impossible without the active participation of bystanders to carry it out."[5] Perhaps one of the most difficult lessons to communicate to students who learn in the isolated silos of higher education is that life and history are far more complex, ambiguous, and intersectional. For Barnett, "the Holocaust did not occur in a vacuum."[6] Indifference and

[3] Lewis, *Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation*.
[4] Baldwin, *I Am Not Your Negro*, 107.
[5] Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust*, 11.
[6] Barnett, *Bystanders*, 11.

apathy—the hallmark traits of the bystander, aided and abetted in the Holocaust. Barnett offers up a persuasive example of how James Baldwin expresses the criminality of devaluing history when she says of the Holocaust, "the genocide was preceded by years of intensifying anti-Jewish persecution, which much of Europe's non-Jewish population either witnessed or participated in."[7] That is say, at some point, there was a failure to learn from history. Indeed, disavowing history is more psychologically palatable.

Herein is the value of psychohistory and psychobiography: instead of delimiting the academic analysis on historical events, and then compartmentalizing them as unrepeatable or inconsequential human actions of the past, *psychohistory and psychobiography compels us to consider the psychological and emotional state of the individual and collective self that gave rise to the historical event in question.*[8] In his critical work on the reciprocal benefits of history and psychoanalytic theory, Thomas Kohut forcefully concludes that "an appreciation of the power of history on the psyche . . . [and] an appreciation of the power of the psyche on history, a sensitivity to the profound influence of psychological factors in the creation of defining historical events such as the Holocaust, will enhance the ability of . . . [us] to understand and improve the world in which we live."[9] The point to understand here is that history does not repeat itself by mere happenstance (as is commonly suggested). It is the similarity of the *individual and group psychology and spirituality*, across the horizon of time, that makes it seem as if history is repeating itself. Psychohistory, often in an uncomfortable way, has the potential to reconnect us with the past to show that while human innovation may progress, the human actor does not progress much, if at all. When we contemplate the emotions, psychological motivations, and the interior world of humans, we greatly shorten the gap between how we understand our historical selves, and who we are today. Psychohistory and psychobiography teach us that when we contemplate the idea of social progress, it is less about what can be attained, and more about the requisite individual and group faculties to sustain social achievement in the historical moment. That which is accomplished in history means little if we give no thought to the social maintenance of it. Psychohistory and psychobiography reveal to us that we are very similar to the historical actor—for better or worse—more often than we are willing to admit.

Learning From Frederick Douglass

In this essay, I turn to several psychospiritual practices in the life of Frederick Douglass, self-care resources that he employed to aid him in enduring the context of terror and oppression in which he lived. Building on previous work where I conducted a psychodynamic analysis of the life of Douglass that included the qualitative examination and coding of his autobiographies, I suggest that we can learn psychospiritual practices from him—practices that foster resources for resilience, resistance, and healing in our current age of social and political unrest and racial terror.

Some of the more notable psychobiography projects in the twentieth century include Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* (i.e., the reformer Martin Luther), Abraham Lincoln, Sigmund Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, Edgar Allan Poe, and many several of the U.S. presidents. Over the past one-hundred years, there has been significant progress within

[7] Barnett, *Bystanders*, 11.

[8] For more on the interpretive efficacy of psychobiography on history or historical figures, see William Runyan's *Life Histories and Psychobiography*, or Dan McAdams' *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* where he delineates the impact of history on contemporary identify formation in America. In both instances the authors make the case that the intersection of history, narrative, and psychology bridges the hermeneutical gap between historical events or the historical actor, and contemporary events and actors.

[9] Kohut, "Psychoanalysis as Psychohistory or Why Psychotherapists Cannot Afford to Ignore Culture," 235–36.

the genre.[10] The genre of psychobiography adds significant interpretive value to how we understand the historical subject and context.[11] Such understanding is crucial if history is to move us towards moral agency and a more just world. According to Runyan, "psychological processes are important for understanding the flow of historical events and processes at six different levels . . . [that include] persons, groups, organizations, institutions, nations . . . [and] international or intersocietal relationships."[12] Itzkowitz and Volkan address the question of the efficacy of psychodynamic inquiry into the categories of history and biography and conclude that "psychobiographies add depth to our understanding of their subjects . . . [while] conventional historians do not care about the internal motivations of their subjects and how these develop."[13] The authors go on to emphasize the importance of understanding the motivations of the historical subject. Otherwise, the reader of history runs the risk of undermining the potential of the pedagogical moment by unconsciously superimposing their own psychological and emotional state on the historical actor or context. For Itzkowitz and Volkan, psychobiography "takes us away from thinking of political leaders or states simply as 'rational actors,' . . . [as] the rational actor model only works when crises, negotiations, or ambitions are reasonable."[14]

While the vast majority of psychobiographies reflect a methodology whereby the stories of the target subject are read through the lens of psychological theory in furtherance of a more robust historical interpretation, my project with Frederick Douglass differs in a significant way. Instead of interpreting the life of Douglass through the lens of contemporary psychological theory, I set out to re-interpret or augment psychological theory through the lens of Frederick Douglass. That is to say—in this project I embark on a journey to discover how the first-person autobiographic narratives of Frederick Douglass that allow us to *see into and experience* his life expand how we understand a *theory of mind*. Instead of prioritizing the interpretive power of psychology, I grant hermeneutical privilege to the narratives of Douglass. In my project, I am clear about the value of this approach, as it reflects:

> a much-needed remedial exercise in anthropological value creation, giving voice to the expression of black subjectivity beyond a singular (but still crucial) modality of resistance to oppression. It is a movement toward reimagining black subjectivity through a methodology that prioritizes black lived experience, heritage, culture, and religious expression and that postulates how black subjectivity illumines what it means to be human and self-aware. Furthermore, it augments how we understand psychological and spiritual growth and development, pathology and brokenness, healing and human flourishing, and a theory of change. Like resilience studies of other human atrocities, the reality of black experience in the slavocracy calls for a psychoanalytic examination of firsthand testimony and personal narrative that chronicles antebellum and postbellum black life and religious experience.[15]

[10] Runyan, "Progress in Psychobiography."
[11] See Anderson, "Recent Psychoanalytic Theorists and Their Relevance to Psychobiography" and Runyan, "Psychobiography and the Psychology of Science."
[12] Runyan, "From the Study of Lives and Psychohistory to Historicizing Psychology: A Conceptual Journey," 127.
[13] Itzkowitz and Volkan, "Psychobiography: Terminable and Interminable," 19.
[14] Itzkowitz and Volkan, "Psychobiography," 20.
[15] Gibson, *Frederick Douglass, A Psychobiography*: *Rethinking Subjectivity in the Western Experiment of Democracy*, 13.

The importance of reading psychodynamic theory through the lens of the autobiographic first-person accounts of enslaved people cannot be understated. This approach suggests that how we understand psychology and spirituality needs revision and augmentation. Psychoanalytic discourse does not account for the formation of human subjectivity and agency in the context of extremity. The point of departure in articulating the etiology of the human subject generally reflects the sociocultural context of the western European subject whose humanity is a forgone conclusion. The literature tends to assume the presence of caregivers or parents as a condition precedent to subjectivity. However, the slavocracy undermines each of these assumptions. How do we understand the formation of human subjectivity when the subject is born into a world of terror, violence, and dehumanization. Moreover, the violence of the slavocracy didn't allow for families to stay together, or for children to know their parents. In the slavocracy, many of the ideas of human development representing a universal linear process is turned on its head. Ultimately, there is danger in uncritically reading contemporary psychodynamic theory into the life of Frederick Douglass. The reckless interpreter of history risks minimizing or romanticizing the horrors of the slavocracy, or even idealizing a violent and radically evil period of American history, just so the subject can neatly fit into a psychospiritual theory.

Perhaps the methodological warning being made here—to read psychological literature through the eyes of Frederick Douglass, as opposed to the more common approach of reading the life of Frederick Douglass exclusively through the lens of psychology—reflects the distinction between what one Auschwitz survivor understands as common memory and deep memory. In his work on capturing survivor testimony from the Holocaust, Lawrence Langer recounts the terminology of common memory and deep memory as expressed by Charlotte Delbo, a survivor of Auschwitz. For Delbo, common memory reflects a group or collective interpretation of a historical (and in her case tragic) event. Common memory is the broadly agreed upon way of how the historical event is interpreted. Common memory is a byproduct of the professionalization of history. In many cases, common memory is constructed to favor emotional resolution when recollecting human atrocity. Individuals and groups unaffected by the history of such tragedies would rather forget than remember, as remembering has a way of triggering cognitive and moral dissonance. But Delbo contrasts common memory with deep memory, which is how she remembers her entire being and existence in the Auschwitz camp. For her, it was so horrible that it doesn't seem real, yet her body and memory represent unimpeachable witnesses as to the reality of evil that Auschwitz represented. Reflecting on Delbo's account, Langer concludes that:

> Her terms initiate a verbal breakthrough, a vital and refreshing departure from the familiar approach that tries to entice the Auschwitz experience, and others like it, into the *uncongenial sanctuaries of a redeeming salvation* [but alternatively] . . . [w]hat Delbo calls common memory might not find them so uncongenial; her deep memory, however, would consider them inhospitable.[16]

The paradox Langer presents with uncongenial redeeming salvation is compelling, as it reflects the collective attempt to redeem stories that are best left unredeemed. Reading psychodynamic theory through the words and narratives of Frederick Douglass endeavors to engage with his deep memory—memories that are accretive to augment our understanding of a theory of mind, and ultimately, how we understand what it means to be human. The alternative approach of reading Douglass through the lens of psychology (i.e., granting hermeneutical privilege to theory) while

[16] Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, 5. [Italic is my emphasis.]

not inappropriate, is akin to exclusively engaging professional history or our *common memory* of the slavocracy and as such, risks undermining the anthropological value of the project. Freedgood argues persuasively that "memory and history tend to be opposed to one another . . . [as] memory is an activity in which we all participate . . . [but] history is the province of specialists."[17] Consequently, in order to read Frederick Douglass for psychospiritual practices that foster resilience and healing, we are after the deep memories of Douglass. Moreover, hidden within the *deep memory* of Frederick Douglass are psychospiritual practices that can help us cultivate contemporary resources for healing, resilience, and resistance in times of extremity.

Reading Frederick Douglass for Resilience, Resistance, and Healing

Hermeneutic of Affective Attunement

Among the fundamental tasks involved in reading Frederick Douglass for psychospiritual practices is to be psychically immersed into the world of the slavocracy. While this immersion is not ethnography in the proper sense of the term (i.e., living in the midst of the community being studied or researched), it is ethnographic in its approach to the text, as it requires the reader to saturate herself, as much as possible, into the world and existence of Douglass, and to empathically imagine and experience the world through the lens of the human subject existing on the underside of the slavocracy. The alternative approach would be to emotionally compartmentalize, or to appease the temptation to examine Frederick Douglass's experience through the far-removed psychological comforts of a 21st century location. To disengage the traumatological purview when reading the genre of historical narratives written by enslaved human beings is a common coping mechanism for contemporary readers. But this undermines the possibilities for ascertaining strategies of psychospiritual resilience, resistance, and healing.

Through a *hermeneutic of affective attunement*, "the reader must be self-aware and willing to immerse herself through imagination and empathy to experience the terror and horrors that Douglass experienced in order to appreciate fully the psychological tasks that he faced."[18] Indeed, the genre of psychohistory and psychobiography, coupled with a hermeneutic of affective attunement, colludes in a manner to undermine a common interpretation that argues the institution of slavery reflected a rational decision driven in large part by economic motives. The evidence of physical and psychological brutality and unrestrained evil suggests otherwise.[19] Violence against raced bodies was ubiquitous, pervasive, and arbitrary. The slavocracy reflected an age of terror underwritten by individual and collective psychopathology. It is only when we have ascertained the individual and group psychodynamics of this context that we can fully appreciate how Frederick Douglass overcame to become what he understood as a self-made man.[20]

Interiority and the Force of Being

When considering psychospiritual resources to aid in travailing contexts of extremity, a key consideration is to determine (as best one can) how mental and emotional health and wellbeing

[17] Freedgood, "Some Thoughts on Trauma, Autobiography, and the Work of Collective Memory," 652.
[18] Gibson, *Frederick Douglass, A Psychobiography*, 15.
[19] See Fogel and Engerman in *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* for an example of the argument that economics was the primary motivation of slavery.
[20] Douglass, *Self-Made Men*.

is being determined. Who has the power to determine what constitutes a healthy mental, emotional, and spiritual framework? While there are psychodynamic theories that shed light on this question (i.e., conflict-free zone, true-self and false-self, object relations, oedipal, relational psychology, etc.), in a practical sense, and in my experience as a psychotherapist, the question of what constitutes psychospiritual health and wholeness is more culturally and individually determined. In Emanual Lartey's project on intercultural spiritual care, he borrows from anthropological framework of Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry Murray,[21] as he articulates the importance of imagining a dynamic personhood, stating that "every human person is in certain respects: (1) like all others, (2) like some others and, (3) like no other."[22] This framework for parsing out, in part, what it means to be human at the individual, group, societal, and even global level, is vitally important when imagining spiritual and emotional wholeness and wellbeing. Psychodynamic literature commonly makes the mistake of assuming a universal understanding of the contours of the human psyche and soul. But according to Lartey, this tripartite framework, if properly understood, compels us to ask of each person "[w]hat of the universal experience of humanity is to be found here . . . [w]hat is culturally determined about this way of thinking, feeling or behaving [and] . . . [w]hat in this experience can be said to be uniquely attributable to this particular person?"[23] In light of these questions, we are compelled to ask can we understand psychological and spiritual wholeness in the context of the slavocracy where for many—protection (or even a brief reprieve) from physical and emotional violence was near impossible and, freedom for the vast majority of the enslaved was beyond reach? To what extent can this question be answered in the person of Frederick Douglass, who unquestionably evidenced robust subjectivity and agency in his life and in his body of work? Having been born in the slavocracy (which undoubtedly was a context of extremity) are there psychospiritual practices to be found in the life and work of Frederick Douglass that can be emulated and practiced today for persons subjected to a context of extremity? How can we account for the robust subjectivity and agency we find in Frederick Douglass who was born and raised in the terror of the slavocracy?

For Frederick Douglass and his contemporaries who were subjected to enslavement or otherwise oppressed in the slavocracy, mental and emotional wholeness was in large part a matter of interiority. In the absence of being able to secure actual freedom (and even then, interiority was critical to well-being), the strength of a person's interiority was all they had to retreat to. In a previous work I refer to the nature of this interiority as the *force of being*, which is defined as "the interior life force that resists the threat of non-self."[24] Perhaps another way of stating the proposed interiority is that within the interior world of Douglass or any other enslaved and subjugated Black person forced to exist in the slavocracy, the force of being represented the internal desire, and subsequent drive, to experience oneself and one's humanity, as something other than an enslaved or subjugated person within the slavocracy. This understanding of mental and emotional wholeness, while in some ways is psychodynamically complex, is in other ways quite simple. When there is no external fallback position from the slavocracy and racial terror, no retreat from arbitrary violence and the abuse of power, no escape from the brutality, torture, beatings, rapes, and no reprieve from the social, political, and even religious objectification of the slave-power, *the enslaved human being is left with no alternative but to turn inward and strive to experience themselves as something other than a slave.* The terminology of the *force of being* is derived from

[21] Kluckhohn and Murray, *Personality in Nature, Society, and Culture*.
[22] Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 34.
[23] Lartey, *In Living Color*, 36.
[24] Gibson, *Frederick Douglass, A Psychobiography*, 69.

the reflections of Douglass on his epic fight with Covey the negro-breaker. Douglass asserts "a man, without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity [and that] . . . [h]uman nature is so constituted, that it cannot honor a helpless man, although it can pity him; and even this it cannot do long, if the signs of power do not arise."[25]

From a psychospiritual perspective, the robust subjectivity we find in Frederick Douglass represents the amalgamation of experiences or incidents, perhaps thousands, where Douglass fell back on interiority. The idea of the force of being suggests that Douglass took advantage of every opportunity, no matter how mundane, consequential, or inconsequential, to experience himself as something else other than an enslaved person—that is, as a human being. In doing so, over the long run, we see the formation of Frederick Douglass. By way of analogy, when a person is drowning, they will seek every opportunity to experience their humanity by taking in oxygen. Likewise, in the context of extremity, for Frederick Douglass, I suggest that his actions, thoughts, and behaviors, at the most fundamental level, represented this endeavor to fulfill this basic psychological, spiritual, and emotional task: to experience one's humanity, agency, and even the capacity to self-determine, no matter how frail or fragile the experience may be.

The key to the force of being is not the strength of any single self-experience event, but the fusion of self-experiential events over the long-term horizon of the human lifespan. Here, I have identified three self-care strategies—or psychospiritual practices—that Frederick Douglass implemented to foster resilience, resistance, and healing, in the extreme context of the slavocracy: (1) Douglass used sacred spaces of self-contemplation to strengthen his *capacity to imagine*, (2) he actively reconstructed his life-story over the entirety of his lifespan and, (3) he practiced enacting agency over his body.

Psychospiritual Practices

Reconstructing Your Life-Story

Why does a person need to write four autobiographies? In an earlier work I respond to this rhetorical inquiry, suggesting that for Frederick Douglass, the constant attention to reconstructing his life-story reflected his *force of being* in action.[26] It is suggested here that for Douglass, the act of writing the autobiographies reflected a manifestation of interiority, underwritten by his force of being and triggered by a psychological and emotional need to construct counter-narratives that undermined an unchallenged master narrative that catered to (and even normalized) White supremacy and western expansionism, and then justified—socially, politically, and religiously—the existence of the slavocracy. I have referred to this reciprocal dynamic between Douglass posting his narrative over and against a broader master narrative as an intersubjective matrix (or milieu). The psychic and emotional space that existed between Douglass and the others who were beholden to the logic of White supremacy and the slavocracy, represented a space of intersubjectivities where Douglass's social, political, cultural, and religious life-stories that affirmed his personhood intersected with the self-affirming narratives of the proponents of slavery and racial apartheid. More specifically, it is suggested that the intersubjective milieu is:

> The interpsychic space that a group of individuals or community in a specific context (be it geographic, sociopolitical, class, religion, ethnicity, race, etc.) co-

[25] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 246–47.
[26] Gibson, *Frederick Douglass, A Psychobiography*.

> create and inhabit based on individual and collective subjectivity, agency, narratives, histories, cultures, or heritages.[27]

The intersubjective milieu represents confluence of narratives within the collective psychic space in which we all share. It constitutes the intersubjective emotional expanse of life-stories and narratives that exists between individuals, groups, and even nation-states.

Most of the life stories and narratives that make up the intersubjective milieu play less of a role in our conscious lives and operate more potently at the unconscious level. This matrix of stories and narratives become dangerous—even deadly—when there is a clash of narratives. Over the long run, when the emergent (or master) narrative is configured to underwrite hegemonic structures of power like the slavocracy, or to facilitate manifestations of Achille Mbembe's description of necropolitics where the life of *the raced-other* is subjugated to the regime of death, and where:

> the ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die [or where] . . . to kill or let live thus constitutes sovereignty's limits [and] its principal attributes [and where] . . . to be sovereign is to exert one's control over mortality and to define life as the deployment and manifestation of power."[28]

The slavocracy represents the most prominent example of a hegemonic intersubjective matrix, a contagion of necropolitics that decries Black life.

Consequently, when life is at stake (as in the slavocracy) and those who are oppressed have no external support beyond themselves to sustain life, then one's interior force of being, their aptitude for life, their self-experience of their own humanity, becomes the essential psychological and spiritual task. When one is forced to exist in a toxic intersubjective milieu, reconstructing one's life-story becomes a critical psychospiritual practice for resilience, resistance, and healing. Frederick Douglass demonstrated that the act of articulating one's life-story, and then reconstructing that story as often as needed, is a potent counter-hegemonic strategy. It is an act of resistance to the degenerative effects that an oppressive master narrative can have on individual mental health and wholeness, as well as identify formation.

The act of re-storying is a psychospiritual practice that is accretive to fostering resilience and healing when one is compelled to exist in a context of extremity. While most history scholars only recognize three autobiographies written by Frederick Douglass, I am recognizing the revised edition of *Life and Times* published in 1892 that adds the "third part" to *Life and Times* published in 1881. In doing this, I am less concerned with how much of the fourth autobiography is new (when compared to the third autobiography), and more intrigued by Douglass's need to augment his life-story in the wake of the Supreme Court decision of 1883 that struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875—the heartbeat of Reconstruction—as well as the growing movement towards reinstituting racial apartheid throughout the south via mob violence, lynching, and the disfranchisement of Black people. The traumatological impact that these events had on the psychological life of Frederick Douglass (as well as his Black and Brown contemporaries) cannot be overstated.

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[27] Gibson, *Frederick Douglass, A Psychobiography*, 21.
[28] Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 66.

In his interpretation of cultural trauma, Eyerman distinguishes it from trauma induced by a physical injury, or a significant psychological loss or emotional wound. For him, cultural trauma reflects the "dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion."[29] While I believe there are significant limitations to Eyerman's interpretation of trauma in relation to Black life, it is nonetheless useful in how it points to the corrosive nature that *toxic meaning making* about historical events can have on personhood and peoplehood. Moreover, this traumatological impact is more corrosive if it is allowed to metastasize in preconscious or unconscious thought life. In his work on narrative, history, and culture, Freeman uses the terminology of narrative unconscious to describe how the hermeneutics of history and culture influence our psychological lives. According to Freeman, the narrative unconscious emphasizes the formational and pervasive nature (for better or worse) of unattended narratives, or according to him, "distal aspects of psychological life that are in the background . . . [where] our lives [are] bound up with history and culture, the tradition into which we are thrust and which, in its own obscure ways, infiltrates and constitutes being."[30] Roger Frie goes further and makes the connection between the narrative unconscious and individual wholeness and wellbeing. By paying attention to how the interpretation of history and culture influence our emotional lives, Frie believes this enhances the therapeutic space and contributes to healing and change—a position that challenges a commonplace trend in the mental health field that suggests history, or what is commonly referred to in everyday nomenclature as *the past*, has no useful value in therapy, and that the focus should be on *moving on*. But according to Frie, "attending to the narrative unconscious makes it possible for patients . . . to develop an awareness of the constitutive role of culture and history in human life . . . [as] psychoanalysis [and by extension mental and emotional wellbeing] is not just about the multiplicity of emotional experience but concerns our very existence as social, cultural, and historical beings."[31] This is precisely what Douglass was in pursuit of in his lifetime autobiographic project. He knew that what was at stake was not just his own welfare, but the health and sustainability of the entire democratic experiment.

From a psychospiritual perspective, it should be more clear as to why it is suggested that Frederick Douglass penned four autobiographies: it was a manifestation of his will to live—his force of being—in the context of terror and extremity. The importance of narrative and life-story as it relates to identity formation and mental, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being is a key tenant in the field of caregiving. Whether doing it consciously or unconsciously, human beings are inherently makers of meaning. How we understand and order our lives, in part, is determined by the meaning we assign to life occurrences, circumstances, and experiences. This was no less the case for Frederick Douglass. In his work on healthy family systems, Thomas Young captures how the story of a person's life contributes individual and/or collective human flourishing, suggesting that at any given point in time, we all have:

> two concurrent versions of any narrative—a personal or private version and a social or public version—that reciprocally shape each other . . . [and that] all narratives, both personal and social, are the products of conversations and therefore emergent or continually evolving . . . [and that] personal narratives have a strong, if not binding, influence on behavior . . . [and that the] successful revision of one's

[29] Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, 2.
[30] Freeman, "Why Narrative Matters: Philosophy, Method, Theory," 142.
[31] Frie, "On Culture, History, and Memory: Encountering the 'Narrative Unconscious,'" 341.

> personal or private narrative depends on finding a conversant . . . with whom one can reconstruct one's private, personal narrative through a public . . . conversation"[32]

Meaning making is an inherent component of what it means to be human. Whether it is consciously acknowledged or not, we are constantly in the process of assigning meanings and interpretations to life occurrences, as well as how we understand history and culture. The individual and collective memory and interpretation of culture and history has a lasting impact on individual mental and emotional health, especially when the collective memory is damaging to those who have been forced to live and exist on the underside of modernity. Being intentional about narrative reconstruction over the horizon of our lifespan, and being attentive to re-storying our lives because of changes in our external context that are beyond our control, or navigating the inevitable changes in our interior world as we progress through lifecycle stages, all reflect a healthy psychospiritual practice that was useful for Frederick Douglass in his context, and can be useful for us today.

Spaces of Contemplation and Imagination

The following excerpt is a well-known passage from the first autobiography of Frederick Douglass as he watches boats pass by from the shores of the Chesapeake Bay. I quote him at length because of its example of the power of imagination and creativity in contexts of extremity:

> Our house stood within a few rods of the Chesapeake Bay, whose broad bosom was ever white with sails from every quarter of the habitable globe. Those beautiful vessels, robed in purest white, so delightful to the eye of freemen, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition. I have often, in the deep stillness of a summer's Sabbath, stood all alone upon the lofty banks of that noble bay, and traced, with saddened heart and tearful eye, the countless number of sails moving off to the mighty ocean. The sight of these always affected me powerfully. My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships . . . You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free . . . Let me be free! Is there any God? Why am I a slave? I will run away. I will not stand it. Get caught, or get clear, I'll try it. I had as well die with ague as the fever. I have only one life to lose. I had as well be killed running as die standing.[33]

In times of great peril or tragedy, people usually resort to the primary psychological defenses of fight or flight. This is understandable, as survival becomes the preeminent task. However, this becomes problematic when the peril or tragedy does not represent an acute event, but is more chronic and systemic in nature. *In contexts of extremity, the first human faculty that is*

[32] Thomas, "Using Narrative Theory and Self Psychology within a Multigenerational Family Systems Perspective," 144–45.
[33] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, 64–65.

usually compromised is the capacity to imagine and to be creative. When life and circumstance get hard, as human beings, our interactions and tasks take on a transactional nature. The activities or functions that contribute to physical survival are prioritized, and even valorized. Those activities that do not have a direct correlation to physical survival are deemed secondary, inconsequential, and even irrelevant. Over the long run, the sequestering of imagination is problematic, as it is reflective of a maladaptive psychology and spirituality. Imagination is a fundamental ingredient in the cultivation of the human spirit, no matter the context, culture, or social location. In times of great peril, imagination cannot be delimited to the category of conspicuous consumption, as is often the case. Alternatively, what we see in the referenced passage from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is the power of imagination. On the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, the thoughts of Douglass are not initially on deciding to run away from his captors. Instead, he is taken aback by the beauty of the abundance of boats and white sails that populated the bay. He is emotionally taken by the beauty of the wind in the sails of the boats—a wind that caused the boats to move freely. It was this momentary sacred space of contemplation, of becoming a partaker in the sight of beauty, that served as a condition precedent to Douglass finalizing his decision to actually run away. This moment was sacred for Douglass because it allowed him to imagine his personhood, even if only for a brief moment, in a life-giving way that affirmed his humanity and dignity, and that like his captors, he too was created for freedom—not bondage.

While the category of resistance (i.e., activism, protest, intellectual, etc.) is indispensable to the health of the democratic experiment, it is mentally, spiritually, and emotionally unhealthy for it to be the central defining element in relation to individual and group identity formation for the oppressed. To define oneself—*exclusively*—in polar opposition to hegemonic structures of oppression represents a death-dealing internalization of the ideology of the oppressor. Imagination cannot be reduced to mere optionality for human flourishing, it is an absolute mandate for health and wholeness. On the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, Frederick Douglass demonstrated radical interiority by activating his imagination and cathecting with the beauty of what he witnessed in the bay. For a brief moment, he became one with such beauty. And it was this momentary reprieve that led to action. Had it not been for that moment of imagination at the Chesapeake Bay, the world may not have known of Frederick Douglass. In his work on human development and the concept of play, pediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott differentiates mental health and illness, in part, as a distinction between the capacity for imagination and play, as compared to the emotional need for compliance to represent the governing life energy. According to Winnicott:

> *It is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living*. Contrasted with this is a relationship to external reality which is one of compliance, the world and its details being recognized but only as something to be fitted in with or demanding adaptation. Compliance carries with it a sense of futility for the individual and is associated with the idea that nothing matters and that life is not worth living. In a tantalizing way many individuals have experienced just enough of creative living to recognize that for *most of their time they are living uncreatively, as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine. This second way of living in the world is recognized as illness in psychiatric terms. In some way or other our theory includes a belief that living creatively is a healthy state, and that compliance is a sick basis for life*.[34]

[34] Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 65. [Italic is my emphasis.]

For Winnicott, the capacity to play, to imagine, or to be creative, was not only a key feature of sound mental health, but also necessary for an individual to derive a sense of worth out of life. For Douglass, the slavocracy was a life that derived its meaning solely from compliance, being "caught up in the creativity of someone else or of a machine." His imagination on the shores of the Chesapeake reflected his force of being in action, as he sought to define himself beyond the hegemonic logic of slavery.

In an earlier work, I reflect on the individual and collective therapeutic implications of the Harlem Renaissance in the early 20th century, what could perhaps be described as a Winnicottian space of play and creativity in the midst of a Jim Crow social order and brazen racial terror.[35] Alain Locke, considered by many to be the leading intellectual voice that recognized the renaissance of Black art and creativity emerging in Harlem, New York, was a philosopher and professor at Howard University, and a vivacious aesthete. Central to his thought, life was the belief that Black identity and subjectivity must transcend resistance to racial apartheid and the work of securing justice and equity for Black people. Such a position obviously put him at odds with many of his contemporaries like W.E.B. DuBois who believed that the Black arts should be more aligned with expressing the lived experiences of Black people in America and the work of resisting White supremacy. I suggest that both positions are sound, but that perhaps Locke was a person before his time. He knew that Black cultural identity understood fundamentally in relation to resisting racism was tenuous at best, and not sustainable over the long run. Even before Winnicott, Locke understood that culture, aesthetics, and beauty were not merely incidental to a meaningful life, but foundational to it. For Locke, Black identity and agency must be underwritten and crafted on its own terms. In her research on the Harlem Renaissance, Cheryl Wall surmises that the telos of the project, in part, "was to achieve through art the equality that black Americans had been denied in the social, political, and economic realms."[36] And as it pertained to Locke, while he "was no radical [and] . . . [h]is essays do not propose political strategies or economic policies . . . [t]he terrain on which they wage the struggle for equality is cultural."[37] Frederick Douglass showed us that even in the context of terror, culture, creativity, and imagination can still push the human spirit towards capacities for resilience, resistance, and healing.

Practicing Agency Over Your Body

Perhaps one of the most well-known passages in the autobiographies of Frederick Douglass is his fight with Edwin Covey—the plantation hand responsible for "breaking" recalcitrant persons enslaved and victimized on Thomas Auld's plantation. For Douglass, his physical altercation with Covey was less about winning, and more about him not allowing the brutalization of his body to go unchallenged, even if it meant his death. In reflecting on the epic battle, Douglass asserts that it "revived a sense of my own manhood" and that he had a "renewed determination to be a freeman."[38] This last psychospiritual practice emphasizes the importance of having a healthy

[35] Gibson, "Self-Care and the Liberal Arts."
[36] Wall, *The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, 1.
[37] Wall, *The Harlem Renaissance*, 26.
[38] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 246.

relationship with one's body as a way of fostering resistance, resilience, and healing when having to endure contexts of extremity or terror.

In my professional experience as a psychotherapist, more often than not, care seekers delimit their understanding of psychological health and wholeness to their cognitive or affective faculties. The body is often neglected, or outright overlooked. There is a burgeoning amount of quantitative and qualitative research being conducted that demonstrates the connection between body movement, body perception, and psychospiritual healing and recovery.[39] Here I suggest that Douglass's body movement, as manifested in his fight with Covey, was essential to the emergence of a robust interiority. His summation of the incursion emphasizes mental and emotional healing and resilience, and a spiritual renaissance:

> It was a resurrection from the dark and pestiferous tomb of slavery, to the heaven of comparative freedom. I was no longer a servile coward, trembling under the frown of a brother worm of the dust, but, my long-cowed spirit was roused to an attitude of manly independence. I had reached the point, at which I was not afraid to die. This spirit made me a freeman in fact, while I remained a slave in form.[40]

After this battle with Covey, in another passage, Frederick Douglass talks about being liberated from "slaveholding priestcraft."[41] The idea of priestcraft reflects a paradoxical play on a clergyperson (i.e., priest) being involved with, or endorsing actions and circumstances that are akin to witchcraft. With the term priestcraft, Douglass accentuates the practice of church officials using religious resources to justify slaveholding. While Douglass presents this in his autobiography after his battle with Covey, I suggest that he was liberated from "slaveholding priestcraft" just before his fight with Covey, when he presented his battered and bloodied body to Thomas Auld after Covey had initially beaten Douglass (without resistance) because he felt Douglass was not working hard enough. In reflecting on how the priestcraft was broken, Douglass asserts:

> My religious views on the subject of resisting my master, had suffered a serious shock, by the savage persecution to which I had been subjected, and my hands were no longer tied by my religion. *Master Thomas's indifference had severed the last link. I had now to this extent "backslidden" from this point in the slave's religious creed*; and I soon had occasion to make my fallen state known to my Sunday-pious brother, Covey.[42]

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[39] A fuller treatment of research on body, neuroscience, and mental health goes beyond the scope of this essay. But a sampling of such research includes: (1) Sarah Coyne et al., "Beliefs, Practices, or Culture? A Mixed-Method Study of Religion and Body Esteem," (2) Richardson and Lamson, "Understanding Moral Injury: Military-Related Injuries of the Mind, Body, and Soul," (3) Julie Staples et al. in "Mind-Body Skills Groups for Treatment of War-Traumatized Veterans," (4) Kaylee Kruzan et al., "Identity, self-blame, and Body Regard in NSSI (non-suicidal self-injury)," and, (5) Cheng-Cheng Wu et al., "Dance Movement Therapy for Neurodegenerative Diseases." Each of these research articles highlight the importance of the treatment and condition of the body, or body movement, as they relate to neurosis, pathology, or healing and recovery.

[40] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 246.

[41] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 275.

[42] Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 241. Italic is my emphasis.

Douglass's change in his religious views on resisting the slaveholding power did not originate with cognition. The serious shock that his religious views incurred, the evisceration of the hold that priestcraft had on his life, did not come from a resource that Douglass read. In what I refer to as *body-epistemology, Frederick Douglass allowed his broken body to teach him*. His suffering body served as the source of intellection that caused Douglass to "backslide" from the slaveholding religion, and to reorient himself to a lifegiving spirituality that rejected the justification of his bondage.

In contemporary times, the recognition of body, the enactment of body movement, and attention to body-epistemology, can each be activated through religious tradition and practice. In a previous essay on surviving Covid-19 and mental health, I argue for "a radical reclaiming of the multiplicity of worship modalities historically found in black religious heritage [in order] to increase the distribution channels of mental health resources available for black and brown people who are experiencing hopelessness and nihilism" because of structural racism and oppression.[43] Examples of these embodied worship modalities have included dance, singing, yoga, martial arts, theatrical performances, and a host of other activities that emphasize the movement of the body. Here, I argue for augmenting our understanding of the implications of these worship modalities to include their therapeutic value. Black sociologist Cheryl Townsend Gilkes has long recognized Black church tradition as a container for fostering mental and emotional health through its practices. In one place she observes that "for black professionals who worked in overwhelmingly white settings, the cultural comfort of these black churches provided therapeutic relief from the micropolitics of being black in a white and unpredictably hostile world." She goes on to recognize that "for black women, the black church not only continues to function as a therapeutic community, but it also reinforces women's sense of importance by thriving because of women's gifts and support in ways that are observable to the entire community in spite of the institutional sexism."[44] Practicing agency over the body, enacting body movement (in whatever form it may take), and doing work to enhance and improve one's relationship with their body, is indispensable to assisting individuals and communities to heal and resist in times of great distress. We ignore our bodies at our own peril.

Conclusion

This essay turned to the life of Frederick Douglass to discover the psychospiritual practices he used to foster capacities for resistance, resilience, and healing in the context of systemic oppression and peril. It is suggested that when there was little that Douglass could do to change his external circumstances (i.e., escape enslavement), he fell back on a robust interiority that allowed him to experience his humanity, or to experience himself as someone other than an enslaved human being. The psychospiritual practices he engaged included re-authoring or reconstructing his life-story, engaging his ability for creativity and imagination, and practicing agency over his body. Furthermore, the psychospiritual practices outlined here do not reflect contemporary psychodynamic theory uncritically superimposed onto the life of Frederick Douglass. Instead, it reflects an effort to expand our current understandings of a theory of mind, and the methodological approaches to psychobiography and psychohistory, by visualizing contemporary theories of human subjectivity through the lens of Douglass's life-story. It is further suggested that in similar circumstances today, those who find themselves in contexts of extremity

[43] Gibson, "Black Religion, Mental Health, and the Threat of Hopelessness dur the COVID-19 Pandemic," 255.
[44] Gilkes, "Plenty Good Room: Adaptation in a Changing Black Church," 108, 115.

and at the edges of meaning can also engage in similar psychospiritual practices to foster resilience, resistance against systemic oppression, and healing in their own lives.

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Numinous Encounters in Frederick Douglass's Autobiographies

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Scholars of many disciplines have used the three autobiographies of escaped Maryland slave Frederick Douglass as valuable tools to help understand both slavery and the status of African Americans in post-emancipation United States. This essay employs the insights of analytic psychology to assess Douglass's reflections in his autobiographies of pivotal movements on his path to freedom. In particular, "numinous" experiences recounted in these autobiographies will be shown to have had profound psychological influences that propelled Douglass forward on his journey to becoming a free man.

Theologian Rudolf Otto first discussed the idea of the holy or numinous in his classic *The Idea of the Holy* (1923) to describe the "gradual shaping and filling in with ethical meaning . . . of what was a unique original feeling-response" that can be experientially encountered within or without religion (p. 6). Otto proceeds to describe the nature of these encounters with divine wisdom or inner knowing as:

> [A] mental state . . . irreducible to any other; . . . it cannot be strictly defined. There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it. He must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reaches the point at which 'the numinous' in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness. (p. 7)

Incidents in Douglass's life as a slave in which he experienced moments of profound, mystical insight are evidence of the divine at work in his life and these encounters have a numinous quality. It is this awakening that Douglass reports as he begins comprehending the facts of his situation as a slave and developing a faith that he is destined by a higher power for freedom that were psychologically pivotal numinous events. These experiences are critical for his individuation as a free man and the abolitionist he becomes as he works towards his and other enslaved persons empowerment.

Numinous encounters with the divine require a particular understanding of faith that is grounded in ontological being. It is faith that is discovered in a belief that one matters. Theologian Paul Tillich describes the idea of faith in this way: "Faith is the state of being grasped by the power of being-itself. The courage to be is an expression of faith and what 'faith' means must be understood through the courage to be" (1952). The kind of faith that is under discussion here is inextricably linked to numinous encounters because these are interior experiences provoked by external circumstances that demand the acknowledgement that one's humanity matters.

Jungian analyst Leslie Stein (2019) has written extensively about numinous encounters and describes the sudden and overwhelming nature of these experiences as resulting in the consciousness being altered by "a truth that cannot be denied . . . that submerges the individual in the deepest aspects of their psyche: the archetypes of the collective unconscious, wherein a truth is revealed."[1] These incidents can be understood as numinous experiences: sudden, an overwhelming experience of archetypal energies emerging and piercing conscious awareness that

[1] Stein, 73

results in a shift or change to the conscious mind that leads to individuation. Douglass records numinous experiences in his autobiographies as turning points in his decision and journey toward being a free man. He was on a path of self-actualization—a process that culminates with individuation.

Individuation is a term developed in the work of late psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875–1961), founder of analytical psychology, who disagreed with Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) over the centrality of sexuality and instincts that drive psychological development. Jung (1958) believed that archetypes of the collective unconscious contain latent energies that carry the possibility for psychological and spiritual awakenings, which in turn promote emotional healing. Because their power is always a potential point of discovery, they have the capacity for manifesting "astonishing cures or religious conversions" within human consciousness (para. 594). Douglass's enduring belief in freedom and the experiences that were central to this growing awareness possess clear numinous quality. In his autobiographies Douglass recounted and reflected upon ontological arguments, which produced insight into the nature of the internal state of being enslaved for his readers—a process by which he became a self-actualized person who developed an individuated sense of self. The nature of his existence eventually roused him to action toward self-definition in order to relieve the internal conflict produced by the "peculiar institution" as he and other abolitionists often referred to it.

By invoking Jungian thought to examine Douglass's autobiographical accounts as numinous experiences, it is important to recognize and address the implicit bias of Western philosophy that Jungian psychology is informed by, in order to better understand its theoretical orientation toward race and racism in the United States. Jung's limited personal encounters with racism of the early twentieth century led him to formulate a theory of the personality that was essentially color-blind, while simultaneously identifying African Americans with the negative contents of the shadow archetype in the individual person. Jungian analysis has been accused of not incorporating a multicultural approach and thereby acting as if structural racism, inherent to the political and social organization of the United States, was non-existent and irrelevant to therapeutic work. Fanny Brewster in *African Americans and Jungian Psychology* (2017) enumerates this perspective throughout her exposé of the implicit racial bias in analytic psychology. In particular, she points to the timing of Jung's visit to America in the early 1910s and juxtaposes this to the intensifying racism of the Progressive Era to explain Jung's ignorance of the trauma encountered by African Americans, as influencing his cultural biases. Brewster articulates this interpretation succinctly when she states:

> Jung delved into the historical facts and developed his theories oftentimes based on current events or present-day collective needs. The contemporary American life that Jung visited, though he never resided in it, was one of racial bias, active racial bias, and an American consciousness that was still extracting itself not only from slavery, but also from the belief that slavery was and should be an acceptable aspect of American life (p. 16).

Therefore, Jung's theory falls well-short of standards for multicultural competency expected by today's practitioners. Jung's personhood is problematic due to his own internalized racism that in turn caused him to make negative associations of primitiveness with Blackness in his scholarly work. Even though Jung, as a person, was blinded to racism' his framework still holds great utility for theoretical understanding of numinous encounters with the divine. Jung discusses the numinous

in terms of the way that it taps into an inner knowing that is reflective of an indwelling of the divine. When this power is engaged in internal dialogue with the self, then opportunities for mystical experiences expand due to human potential to engage uncertainty and the unknown. Despite this important shortcoming, Jung's theory is intuitive, like all classical learning and theology that is embedded in heteronormative knowledge, because it provides a paradigm from which to understand the inner knowing that Douglass frequently refers to as Providence.

Jung believed that individuation is the culmination of human development that leads to a state of wholeness experienced as a sense of personal integrity and integration resulting from the awareness of the Self at the core of self—an ontological ground of being—that exists as existential security. Individuation was a product of the integration of archetypes emerging from the collective unconscious that are *a priori* to our personal existence. These archetypes emerge from dreams and are represented symbolically across cultures in the arts, literature, and religion. They operate below our awareness and the task of individuation is to resolve underlying conflicts, which these present, in order for the inner truth of oneself to be known. The archetype *Self* in Jungian theory is the ground of human existence and is central to numinous encounters—divine, supernatural forces associated with spirituality and sometimes religion—that emerge from the collective unconscious and become known to the personal self by a working through of the layers of personality consisting of the *persona*, the *shadow*, and the *anima/animus*.

In his classic work *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968) Jung describes *archetypes of transformation* that are "situations, places, and means, that symbolize the kind of transformation in question" (para. 80). Jung argues the quality of the unconscious is for human nature to perceive it as seemingly non-existence and non-directive, but nonetheless containing the potential for healing and wholeness that draws upon a kind of collective culture inherently essential to our humanity and our existence. He says:

> We call the unconscious "nothing," and yet it is a reality *in potential*. The thought we shall think, the deed we shall do, even the fate we shall lament tomorrow, all lie unconscious in our today. The unknown in us which the affect uncovers was always there and sooner or later would have presented itself to consciousness. Hence, we must always reckon with the presence of things not yet discovered. These, as I have said, may be unknown quirks of character. But possibilities of future developments may also come to light, perhaps in just such an outburst of affect which sometimes radically alters the whole situation (para. 498).

Douglass's life exemplifies Jungian individuation. Archetypal energies emerged as spiritual awakenings and insight at pivotal points during Douglass's life, which he recounted in his autobiographies. Numinous encounters with the divine, which Douglass recalls experiencing as an inner knowing, were central to his becoming a free man. These seem to reflect transformative processes that crystalized a subjectivity that oriented his thoughts and personhood toward birthing an experience of self-actualization. Douglass's personal journey to freedom reflected the archetypal *hero*'s journey. His lifelong passion for equality before the law and liberation from tyranny is evidence of a developmental pathway that is representative of a desire for wholeness and Jungian individuation.

These numinous encounters with the divine were transformational in that they describe Douglass's thoughts while still a slave turning toward the idea of escape to the North. These broaden understanding of Douglass's desire to be free, know himself, and be regarded as a

freeman. These ideas found in existentialist thought regarding freedom, choice, meaning, and death date back to nineteenth century theologian Søren Kierkegaard. Similarly, Timothy Golden, George Yancy, Lewis Gordon, and Melvin Hill[2] have explored the existential underpinnings of African American literature, including runaway slave narratives such as Douglass's autobiographies. Golden (2016) points out that "what Kierkegaard discusses in theory, Douglass lives in practice; a practice in which, through his defiant despair, he becomes a self" (p. 17).

Frederick Douglass's autobiographical writing is insightful and articulates an inner examination of life that allows for present day reflection upon the spiritual dimensions of his life. Douglass describes to his reading audience his early childhood innocence of slavery's many forms of violation of its victim's very autonomy, and of the incidents that awoken him to the horrors of that very "peculiar institution." In his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass offers a recollection of his early childhood as surprisingly blissful: "In a word, he [the young Douglass] is, for the most part of the first eight years of his life, a spirited, joyous, uproarious, and happy boy, upon whom troubles fall only like water on a duck's back. And such a boy, so far as I can now remember, was the boy whose life in slavery I am now narrating."[3] Doubts immediately arise about the accuracy of his accounting of his childhood, possibly to wonder if he is exaggerating his recollection to articulate the nature of how his awareness of his state of being a slave was introduced to him.

The profound emotional scaring caused by helplessly witnessing the brutal beating of his Aunt Hester by his owner is graphically described in all three of Douglass's autobiographies. In the *Narrative*, Douglass labeled that event as "the blood-stained gate, the entrance to a hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass. It was a most terrible spectacle. I wish I could commit to paper the feelings with which I beheld it."[4] Douglass similarly describes the confusion and deep sense of loss when, as a seven-year-old child, he felt as though he had been abandoned without any warning by his principal caregiver, his grandmother Betsy Bailey, at the Wye House Plantation where his enslaver Aaron Anthony worked as head overseer-owner. Deeply wounded by this unfathomable loss, Douglass recalled crying himself that night to sleep, a "balm [that] was never more welcome to any wounded soul than it was to mine." Now acutely aware of the vulnerability of his situation, he labeled this incident "my first introduction to the realities of slavery."[5]

Douglass's self-reflecting capacity enabled him to develop an awareness, which permitted him to trust his inner voice and eventually have the fortitude to escape slavery. There are many examples of such noetic moments in which he describes his intuition, or a sense of his own destiny. Many times, he refers to these as Providence. These include his selection as a slave child to be sent to the Baltimore home of his master's brother-in-law, watching the ships sailing North on Chesapeake Bay, his victory in the well-known fight with Covey, the slave breaker, and his first attempt at escape in 1835. All of these numinous experiences contain transformational archetypal energies.

In 1826, the young Douglass, a slave on the Wye House Plantation on the Maryland Eastern Shore, was chosen by his owner's daughter, Lucretia Anthony Auld, to be sent to live in her brother-in-law, Hugh Auld's, household in Baltimore. In his *Narrative,* Douglass instead preferred to credit a higher power that defied human comprehension as responsible for his good fortune in line with numinous thinking. He wrote:

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[2] See references for these authors.
[3] *My Bondage and My Freedom*. *Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 2:26. 26.
[4] *Narrative*. *Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 1:16.
[5] *My Bondage and My Freedom. Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 2:30.

> It is possible, and even quite probable, that but for the mere circumstance of being removed from that plantation to Baltimore, I should have to-day, instead of being here seated by my own table, in the enjoyment of freedom and the happiness of home, writing this *Narrative*, been confined in the galling chains of slavery. Going to live at Baltimore laid the foundation, and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity. I have ever regarded it as the first plain manifestation of that kind Providence which has ever since attended me, and marked my life with so many favors.[6]

Douglass clearly recognizes that his residence in Baltimore was essential to his gradual recognition of the possibility of a life outside the confines of slavery. In 1838, at twenty-years of age, he successfully emancipated himself by escaping to the North and opening the door to his full human potential. He ruminated further on whether his youth's good fortune could be traced to divine intervention:

> I may be deemed superstitious, and even egotistical, in regarding this event as a special interposition of divine Providence in my favor. But I should be false to the earliest sentiments of my soul, if I suppressed the opinion. I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and incur my own abhorrence. From my earliest recollection, I date the entertainment of a deep conviction that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise.[7]

One of the most oft-quoted passages in Douglass's *Narrative,* one that is lyrically expressed so well that he also quoted it verbatim in his later two autobiographies: Douglass recalls sitting brooding along the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, having been sent back to the Eastern Shore from Baltimore to be trained more effectively in his role as a slave. He observes sailing ships passing on their way northward and experienced what can be labeled a significant numinous experience. Numinous experience is both a pathway to divine intervention and an opening to the divine by virtue of its position to experience. Again, in Douglass own words:

> My thoughts would compel utterance; and there, with no audience but the Almighty, I would pour out my soul's complaint, in my rude way, with an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships:—You are loosed from your moorings, and are free; I am fast in my chains, and am a slave! You move merrily before the gentle gale, and I sadly before the bloody whip! You are freedom's swift-winged angels, that fly round the world; I am confined in bands of iron! O that I were free! O, that I were on one of your gallant decks, and under your protecting wing! Alas! betwixt me and you, the turbid waters roll. Go on, go on. O that I could also go! Could I but swim! If I could fly! O, why was I born a man, of whom to make a

[6] *Narrative*. *Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 1:30.
[7] *Narrative*. *Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 1:30.

> brute! The glad ship is gone; she hides in the dim distance. I am left in the hottest hell of unending slavery.[8]

Douglass was in a state of deep despair at having been returned from Baltimore to rural Talbot County, Maryland. He could not adjust to the expectations of his owner Thomas Auld, who had inherited Douglass on the death of his wife, the more benevolent Lucretia Anthony Auld. Seeking to have Douglass accept his status as a slave, Auld hired him out to a local White farmer, Edward Covey, who maintained a reputation as a "slave-breaker." Douglass was placed under the total control of Covey, who had acquired a significant measure of cunning insight into methods of breaking down the self-worth and any sense of independence in the slaves placed in his charge. Douglass recounts how within six months Covey had left him, according to the *Narrative*, "wearied in body and broken in spirit"[9] and, as described in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, "humbled, degraded, broken-down, enslaved, and brutalized."[10] In an epic battle inside a farm barn with Covey, the young slave successfully resisted all efforts by the slave-breaker to whip him. This fight was a truly transformative experience for sixteen-year-old Douglass.

This was Douglass at his absolute low point as a slave and as a human being, but his numinous "resurrection" was at hand, which typifies the way in which archetypal energies in the unconsciousness manifest into awareness as intuition. Jacobi (1959), a student of Jung's, similarly describes these as "phenomena, sometimes interpreted as 'miracles' and sometimes as 'pure chance,' in which inner perceptions (forebodings, visions, dreams, etc.) show a meaningful simultaneity with outward experiences" (p. 62). Jung (1960) describes these occurrences as synchronicity—as being "meaningful coincidences . . . that seem to rest on an archetypal foundation" (para. 846). Jung's meaningful coincidences of synchronicity is illustrated by Douglass's belief that Providence guided his life's trajectory. Jung says in his work *Synchronicity* (1960) that one category of events that he calls "synchronistic" is a "psychic state with a corresponding, not yet existent future event that is distant in time and can likewise only be verified afterward" (para. 984). Douglass frequently refers to believing as though he was meant to be free and recalls moments of insight into his enslaved condition, which he describes throughout his autobiographies. Douglass reflects upon the role of Providence that guided him during his pivotal fight with Covey the slave-breaker quite similarly in each autobiography, but in no place better than in the *Narrative*, the account closest to the actual event:

> This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact.[11]

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[8] *Narrative*. *Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 1:49-50. Quoted in *My Bondage and My Freedom. Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 3:98.
[9] *Narrative. Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 1:52.
[10] *My Bondage and My Freedom. Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 2:127–28.
[11] *Narrative. Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 1:54. See also *My Bondage and My Freedom. Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 2:141.

The reasons that Douglass did not collapse in fear when confronted with Covey, and instead contemplated freedom is elaborated upon by Yancy (2002) who argues essentially that because Douglass forgot the color of the slave-breaker Covey when he was fighting him, that "Douglass was no longer fearful of (or seduced) by whiteness" (p. 311). Douglass simultaneously seems to have lost the fear of death. Yancy argues, that via "his act of challenging Covey's white authority, Douglass is living the existential credo that one *becomes* a human being . . . realize[s] that the price of his ontological freedom is death; for he refuses to be treated as an object" (pp. 310–11). Douglass does more than exist, he is his existence. The temporary loss of the fear of death gave him the power for self-definition. He felt imbued with a sense of empowerment that allowed him to become free of his fear of the slaveholder and, in fighting for his life, became the one who held power over his life, not the slaveocracy.

Douglass describes his thoughts turning to the possibility of freedom in 1835, following his fight with Covey, a year-and-a-half before he will be sent to Baltimore once again, and finally escapes from bondage. In the *Narrative* he writes: "On the one hand, there stood slavery, a stern reality, glaring frightfully, —its robes already crimsoned with the blood of millions, and even now feasting itself greedily upon our own flesh period. On the other hand, a way back in the dim distance, under the flickering light of the north star, behind some craggy hill or snow-covered mountain, stood a doubtful freedom—half-frozen—beckoning us to come and share its hospitality."[12]

Douglass's desire for freedom was justifiably immeasurable. His feelings and thoughts about selfhood can be understood from a Jungian framework in which individuation, reflects themes related to the idea of God in Douglass's autobiographies. Individuation is a process of making unconscious factors conscious that is bounded by archetypal structure. As the archetype of the Self becomes "perceptible to the conscious mind" like Douglass's premonitions of freedom, there is an "*'introspectively recognizable form of a priori psychic orderedness'*" that Jungian Jacobi (1959) explains as the primary principle that organized psychic structure according to Jung (p.64). The Self has an integrating tendency that organizes "a process of psychic development that aims at the broadening of the field of consciousness and a maturation of the personality . . . which appear regularly in the material of the unconscious, e.g., in dreams, visions, fantasies, and which compel the individual to come to terms with them" (1959, p. 133). Reading Douglass's autobiographies, one can imagine how his lifelong intuition of his destiny to be free influenced the actions he recounts, as theses seemed to be pushing him forward to make choices that were inevitable and would result in freedom.

The concept of numinous encounters sheds light on Frederick Douglass's psychological development as he emerged from slavery and became one of the nation's leading champions of emancipation and civil rights. His search for selfhood impacted his religiosity and shaped his views on slavery and abolitionism. This is especially evident in his body of work produced over the course of his lifetime as he continued to develop his thoughts regarding the abuse of fundamental Christian principles in the "slave-holder's religion."[13] His autobiographies and many speeches contain not only scathing criticism of the hypocrisy of this religious mind-set, but also numinous

[12] *Narrative*. *Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 1:64

[13] Some examples of numinosity in Douglass's antislavery oratory include *Douglass Papers*, ser. I, 1:35; 2:482; 3:169: 3:463; *Douglass Papers*, ser. 2, 3:429.

encounters indicated by his sense of destiny and relationship to "providence."[14] Douglass's being seemed to draw upon an inner reservoir of wisdom that was on full display in his eloquent and powerful oratory, and that guided him until death in 1895 between speaking engagements at a woman's rights convention. In his final moments his last breath was drawn not for just himself but for all of humanity, and his timeless message of freedom and equality continues to resonate for all of us.

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'I Bow to No Priest Either of Faith or Unfaith': Frederick Douglass's Afro-Agnosticism

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By the time twenty-year old Frederick Douglass (né Bailey) escaped bondage in Talbot County, Maryland, landing at last in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1838, this fugitive's faith in the providence of God was already severely damaged. His first violent encounter with "the merciless negro breaker," Edward Covey, not only brutalized his body—Covey assaulting the sixteen-year-old with a barrage of heavy booted kicks to his side and bloodletting blows to his head—but tormented his still-young mind as well with anguished feelings of doom and divine judgment. Cutting and running to the woods surrounding Covey's farm, still smarting from Covey's cold-hearted battering and anxious about returning to him (having as yet hatched no plans for a full-out escape from enslavement), young Douglass, withdrawn to the trees, bore his own Gethsemane there: "After lying there about three quarters of an hour, brooding over the singular and mournful lot to which I was doomed, my mind passing over the whole scale or circle of belief and unbelief, from faith in the overruling providence of God, to the blackest atheism."[1] The echo of the Garden of Gethsemane aside, the leafy grove shrouding Douglass from detection on his getaway to St. Michael's could scarcely have been a more felicitous setting for Douglass's Christ-like travail. For it was the dark night of the soul Douglass was to suffer there. Proximate to the main road but deep enough into woods to evade Covey's enraged pursuit, "through bogs and briers" (*MBMF*, 274), Douglass wandered clumsily toward St. Michael's to make a complaint about Covey to Captain Thomas Auld, his owner. Unbalanced by a bloodied head wound, his strength failing him, Douglass recalled:

> suffer[ing] more than I can describe. There I was, in the deep woods, sick and emaciated, pursued by a wretch whose character for revolting cruelty beggars all opprobrious speech—bleeding, and almost bloodless. I was not without the fear of bleeding to death. The thought of dying in the woods, all alone, and of being torn to pieces by the buzzards, had not yet been rendered tolerable by my many troubles and hardships. (*MBMF*, 274)

As his next words make clear in their expression of surrender "to the whole scale or circle of belief and unbelief, from faith...to the blackest atheism," Douglass experienced his ordeal in the woods as a crisis of religious belief equally as much as it was a physical trial or emotional torment. Though most often looked over in favor the triumphant second battle with Covey days later which Douglass called "the turning point in my '*life as a slave'"* (*MBMF*, 286. Emphasis Douglass's), it is in (or, more precisely, immediately after) his *first* row with Covey that Douglass arrived at a turning point in his life as a Christian toward some dimly irreligious awareness of the divine in the woods, "buried in its somber gloom, and hushed in its solemn silence; hid from all human eyes, shut in with nature and natures God" (MBMF, 278), that he would spend much of adult life,

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[1] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 274. All subsequent reference to *My Bondage and My Freedom* (*MBMF*) are to this edition and are indicated in parentheses in the body of the text.

especially its latter years, trying to square theologically with Christian orthodoxy. In this, Douglass was not an apostate, to be clear; he was, rather, a kind of theologian for whose faith, far from forsaken as the freethinker critics suggest, came to be intelligent and intelligible rather more than a soulful feeling or mythos.

While the majority of Douglass biographers since James Monroe Gregory, Charles Chesnutt, and Booker T. Washington in 1893, 1899, and 1906,[2] respectively, have consistently portrayed Douglass as "a man of lasting faith,"[3] to echo a more recent critic, and as a Christian believer who "sustained a faith in a Christianity" in spite of duplicitous men like Covey, incredibly a leader in the Methodist church, Douglass's fealty to orthodoxy over his long career was not unswerving. To imagine that Douglass's Gethsemane experience in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (to be repeated in *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*) was an aberration from an otherwise constant piety is to read too much—or, better, *too little*—into John Ernest's broadly hagiographical remarks about Douglass's religious life. To take his estimation of Douglass as "a man of lasting faith" for a declaration of unqualified, undiminished adherence to Christianity's organizing precepts is to fail hearing Ernest qualify the excellence of Douglass's religiosity. In "Crisis and Faith in Douglass's Work," Ernest commends Douglass's "complex" faith. He describes Douglass's determined comportment toward Christianity's Protestant representation as preserved "only by way of resistance to the violated religion that surrounded him."[4] This complexity of conflict, crisis, and resolve, Ernest argues, typified Douglass's religious experience. "Ultimately, Douglass can be identified as a man of lasting faith and a religious leader not in spite of the ongoing crisis [of faith] he experienced but because of it."[5] To repeat, Douglass was no apostate; but he was scarcely a votary either.

If *My Bondage and My Freedom* portrays Douglass's suffering in the woods near Covey's rented farm as the elemental scene of religious experience in Douglass, and we are to understand that experience as constituted by a *dialectic* of feelings—belief and unbelief, "faith...and the blackest atheism"—then, inasmuch as Douglass's devotion to the Christian faith may have unfolded from the positive impressions felt in this biblically evocative scene, might not that radical doubt that also issues from it—that "blackest atheism" Douglass grieved over—have simultaneously cultivated faith's opposite condition, unbelief, or what we may call Douglass's "irreligion" as well? In his race to see Auld about Covey, passing through the woods along the main road to St. Michael's but "far enough...to avoid detection and pursuit" (*MBMF* 273), Douglass offers a dramatic visual for the analogous relation of irreligion to religious faith over his career. That is, the deep woods are related to the twelve-mile stretch of road to St. Michael's as the knotty heterodoxy of irreligion is to the authorized path to God that is Christianity. The woods enfigure a darkly apposite (though by no means wholly opposite) agnostic orientation of the self

[2] While Benjamin Quarles is regularly credited with composing the first biography of Douglass, Gregory, Chesnutt, and Washington each produced earlier books on Douglass. It may be that Quarles's 1948 *Frederick Douglass* was the first *academic* biography of Douglass (that is, written by a trained historian), however. Even so, I dare not say that Gregory, Chesnutt, or Washington *weren't* scholarly, despite what must have been the popular appeal of their works. (It may be worth noting as well that Washington may have relied on an amanuensis, Samuel Laing Williams, for his *Frederick Douglass* [1906]). Williams was the first African American graduate of George Washington University Law School.)

[3] John Ernest, "Crisis and Faith in Douglass's Work," in Maurice S. Lee, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 62.

[4] Ernest, "Crisis and Faith," 62.

[5] Ernest, "Crisis and Faith," 62.

or soul that is at once orthodoxy's critique and limit. In them lies that internal, if disavowed, difference in orthodoxy's conceptual content without which orthodoxy cannot apprehend itself as such, even if it cannot own the incoherencies internal to it either. Against his "lasting faith," I mean, Douglass's irreligious instincts, though experienced as something like "the blackest atheism," are not so wholly atheistic as it seems. They are not so counterposing as this. Unfolding according to a more dynamic logic, they are, one might say, *paratheistic*, set in proximate, tensive relation to the dogmatic devotions of the self-justifying church-going class. If Douglass did not testify to his irreligion as a young man, it is perhaps because he would have no language or leadership to express or understand it in a systematic way for many more years. Eventually, he'd entertain both.

Between 1859 when Ottilie Assing introduced Douglass to Ludwig Feuerbach's religious critique in *The Essence of Christianity* (first published in English in 1854 by George Eliot) and 1892 when Douglass gave his last word on religion in the expanded De Wolfe, Fiske, and Company edition of *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (this opinion being repeated often over the remaining three years of his life), the nineteenth century's most distinguished race man developed his own critique and theory of religion beyond that which is expected of the prophet given to moral outrage and portent over a nation's sins. Over three decades, Douglass dared approach pen and platform more and more as a religious reformer, if not as a speculative theologian in his own right, keen on decolonizing American religious thought of its dominative notions of God and God's earthbound elect. For nothing struck at his sense of what it meant, or should have meant, to be a religious American then so awfully as "the pregnant and striking fact that American slavery never was afraid of American religion."[6] Try as he might to overcome it in his early-career speech-making and writing (including, powerfully, his "Appendix" to the *Narrative* of 1845), Douglass could not abide the sacralization of the slave order in American religious training and institutional practice, especially in the United States South. It was an aporia he could not abide and still keep to faith. Over against the prophet-critic sent to exhort the wayward to repentance for their spectacular hypocrisies, that is, Douglass would at last lay his axe at the very root of the tree. He would forgo orthodoxy for reformation by way of a post-confessional (in the anti-dogmatic sense) hermeneutics of suspicion.

To put this another way, in appropriating the logging trope above which I have marshalled from Scripture (Matthew 3:10, Luke 3:9), I mean to offer up to readers a figural type and shadow for the anti-foundationalism nineteenth-century religious liberalism exercised on systematic Christian theology and for Douglass's connection to that movement. In calling up this image, however, I do not propose to portray Douglass as a rebellious—or worse, some say, godless—iconoclast, I want it to be clear (although his sternest critiques of religious faith ring with a cynicism not unlike that of an erstwhile believer disabused of his unseen enchantments[7]). Douglass was not anti-religious, I maintain. Rather his turn away from evangelical Methodism toward strains of Unitarian, agnostic, even atheistic thought around 1859 (with his introduction to Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* and the state execution of the zealot John Brown in December) accords with biographer David Blight's reminder that Douglass's "condemnation of religious

[6] Douglass quoted in Frederic May Holland, *Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator* (New York: Haskin House, 1891), 333.

[7] Douglass's pronouncement that man "is to be his own savior . . . [having] neither angels to help him, nor devils to hinder him," for example, in addition to such characterizations of prayer and divine favor as "absurd" are reflective of just such defiance and disillusion.

contradiction" by American moralists in the slave era "is not itself an antireligious prescription."[8] To be sure, denunciation is not a blanket disavowal always. After 1859, Douglass would come to publicly *denounce* some of the most orthodox rites and ideas inhering to established Christian opinion, including creationism and the efficaciousness of prayer[9], but *disavowing* religion outright was not the end Douglass's denunciations sought or came to. To reason against Blight this way and mistake "condemnation of religious contradiction" for "antireligious prescription" is particularly consequential to any attempt by Douglass scholars to set down in critical biographical writing the shape of his religious life and leanings rightly. For it is to neglect, among other key subtleties, the Unitarian distinctives that Douglass embraced from the New England abolitionists he joined with as partners in reform thought and activism. Theodore Parker, the notable transcendentalist and abolitionist; Frederic May Holland, a Massachusetts admirer and early biographer of Douglass; William Channing Gannet, minister at Rochester's First Unitarian Church, a temperance crusader, and Douglass's eulogist at the latter's 1895 obsequies in Rochester; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, commander of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers (USCT) and Civil War hero; and Ralph Emerson, the most influential religious reformer of Douglass's day, were not only Unitarian in religious thought and inclination, but each received formal ordination to Unitarian parish leadership. Among other omissions the race to anti-religion in the reform age produces, we might pause further to examine an agnostic tilt in American culture away from traditional leanings in belief. Standing by nothing so much as an aporetic (non)belief in God's ontotheological indeterminacy as a transcendent power or personality, agnosticism neither confesses nor denies belief in God, therefore. Its adherents thus go on willfully unreconciled in matters of divine debate, like Douglass "bow[ing] to no priest either of faith or unfaith" as I set out to stress in the title of this little study of Douglass's religious evolution after Feuerbach and the execution of John Brown.

Although greater space and subtler attention to Feuerbach and Brown (not to mention the special bond Douglass shared with Assing, an avowed anti-religionist) are important subjects for ongoing research and writing about what I prefer to call Douglass's religious *lives*, to borrow an approach to Douglass proffered by Robert Levine[10], in this article I want to explore the formally

[8] David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 515.

[9] As to the former, Douglass would be attacked by the pastor of the Nineteenth Street Baptist Church for Douglass's seeming sympathies with evolutionism in the speech "It Moves" and his claim there that "the Genesis of Moses is less trustworthy as to the time of creating the heavens and the earth than are the rocks and the stars." Frederick Douglass, "'It Moves'; or the Philosophy of Reform: An Address Delivered in Washington D.C. on 20 November 1883" in eds. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews,* vol. 5 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 131. On prayer, see, for example, "It Moves," p. 137 and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* in ed. Gates, *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, p. 913.

[10] Levine, closely reading Douglass's gesture toward having lived "several lives" near the end of *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, asks: "[W]hat if we were to take seriously Douglass's notion of having lived several (or much more than several) lives as one?" Robert S. Levine, *The Lives of Frederick Douglass* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016), 2. Here, I note as well my ongoing curiosity about the so-called Douglass-Truth debate and the extent to which said debate, so far from being reducible to a challenge by Truth—"Frederick, *is God dead*?"—to a call by Douglass's to Black revolutionary violence, was, at root, a theological disagreement. While Douglass's position that Black slaves "had no possible hope except their own right arms," expressed at the 1860 (not likely 1852 as widely held) antislavery meeting in Salem, Ohio (not Boston, after all), sounded like just such a call, at a deeper level his reference to the slaves' "own right arms" reflected Douglass's growing convictions that belief in God's active, interventionist role in human history was superstitious and that rescue from famine depended, therefore, not on prayer but on plowing, for instance. Whereas Truth held to a God-centered religious philosophy, Douglass was steering toward a humanistic one, in other words. On the question of the historical Douglass-Truth

agnostic influence on Douglass's ontotheological critique of God (hinted at by the deep woods as a reminiscently scriptural metaphor for wayward [non]belief) and God's deeply personalist representation in early American religious life and theology. From 1865 to the turn of the century, few Americans were untouched by the public force of agnosticism's critique of creedal Christianity in the United States if only because it was in those years that Robert G. Ingersoll, "The Great Agnostic," was one of the best-known Americans of the post-bellum period. An American lawyer, Republican politico, and acclaimed orator (Walt Whitman declared him the greatest of the nineteenth century), Ingersoll spoke fluently on matters as diverse as prohibition, republicanism, literature, music, capital punishment, and anti-slavery. Yet no interview or article by any partisan or newspaper that followed him ever got far before its interests turned expressly to Ingersoll's deep, considered animus toward Christian orthodoxy and the abiding hold of its premodern mythic-ness on modern minds. Always, the country's most popular apostate answered his interlocutors philosophically with an almost unmatched argumentational facility. By his death in 1899, Ingersoll was thus a known quantity the country over. Very nearly a household name then, he was perhaps the most famous American of the nineteenth century whom the twentieth century all but forgot. If, then and now, religious studies and studies in the philosophy of religion had approached the negative dialectics of disbelief as commensurately available to investigation as their historical and abiding concerns for systems of positive belief and belief-thought, then the twentieth and twenty-first centuries might never have lost sight of one of the nineteenth century's most important irreligionists and, thus, of confessional agnosticism as a meaningful field of critical religious inquiry.

If Ingersoll's popularity as a thinker/lecturer and reputation for oratorical virtuosity were not enough to warrant his consideration alongside Douglass, Ingersoll's closest Black counterpart in religious thought and nearest rival (of any stripe) in podium oratory, biographical and archival evidence suggests that Douglass closely interacted with Ingersoll on at least three occasions. Twice, in 1869 (possibly 1870) and in 1880, Douglass and Ingersoll met socially—first, in Peoria where, famously, Ingersoll welcomed Douglass into his home after the city had been perfectly *in*hospitable to Douglass on a previous visit; then later, in Washington where, by chance, both had resettled their families. Records show that Assing, whose influence on Douglass's personal and business affairs alike was not slight, joined the reunion of men in Ingersoll's parlor as Douglass's plus-one. Though Assing's earnest desire to disabuse Douglass of all religious sympathy is very clearly noted by Blight and William McFeely, Maria Dietrich and Leigh Fought,[11] all acknowledge the extent to which Douglass had already "shifted emphasis from a determination of human life to the human will long before he read Feuerbach,"[12] Assing's effusive self-congratulation for introducing Douglass to Feuerbach, notwithstanding. Similarly, though Booker T. Washington claimed that it was Theodore Parker, the Transcendentalist and outspoken abolitionist, to whom Douglass looked to for inspiration as a religious reformer, I want to pursue how Douglass, already inclined to paratheistic ideas owing to that "complex" dialectic of religious feeling he'd nursed since childhood, reexamined the divine idea alongside Ingersoll's agnostic contrarianism.

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debate specifically, see Tim Bruno, "Rewriting Rebellion: The Douglass-Truth Debate," *ESQ* 65. no. 1 (2019): 33–72, and Alex Schwartz, "'Is God Dead?': Frederick Douglass's Recollection of a Contentious Moment in Abolitionist History," *New North Star* 3 (2021): 64–66.

[11] Blight as cited above. William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Maria Diedrich, *Love Across Color Lines: Ottilie Assing and Frederick Douglass* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1999); Leigh Fought, *Women in the World of Frederick Douglass* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[12] Diedrich, *Love Across Color Lines*, 229.

Despite so little having been said in the twentieth or twenty-first century about Ingersoll, it is a wonder still that he has passed so long unmentioned in Douglass studies. The two were, after all, twin peas in a cultural pod, sharing very nearly identical distinction within White and Black publics respectively as singular orators, wide-ranging intellectuals, sage statesmen, biting satirists, and, more and more, (ir)religious thinkers. Proximate as they were to one another in Washington, how could either one ever escape the high standing, and thus the public speech or published ideas, of the other? Douglass's three documented encounters with Ingersoll (which, in light of their equal celebrity and political consonance as progressives, may not have been their only meetings) could only have informed and sharpened their thought separately on the religion question specifically in nineteenth-century reform discourse. Now, while there's much to explore regarding the potential for Douglass's association with Ingersoll to have utility for Ingersoll's liberal credibility, it may be more urgent (and less cynical) to consider Douglass as essential, from a certain point of view I want to call "Afro-agnostic," to the very possibility of agnostic thought in itself. By this I mean that if, in metaphysical terms, "the [B]lack or blackness" names the disavowed internal difference of a thing, or the "absence (of difference) that defines and is internal to" what is called White, in other words,[13] then Douglass's particular agnosticism, fashioned in (and metaphorized by) the deep woods where slave religion was born and ritualized apposite to establishment religion, represents the very "failure" of agnostic thought always already embedded, if denied its being there, in agnosticism's nineteenth-century voicings by White anti-clerics like Ingersoll. Despite so many diverse claims on him by religious and non-religious humanistic traditions, claims of philosophical and faith-based belonging by African Methodists, New England Unitarians, and disestablishment Freethinkers, focusing on Douglass's late career specifically, there is no more prominent or prolific nineteenth-century Afro-agnostic for the Whiteness of agnostic thought and sentiment to strive with.

When Douglass met Ingersoll in Washington late in 1880, he had already encountered and begun grappling with Feuerbach's arresting demythologizing of the Christian God-story. So compelling was it, in fact, that it was likely *The Essence of Christianity* that Douglass was crediting when he allowed to a Glasgow audience not long after opening Feuerbach, "I have been very much modified both in feeling and opinion.... [Formerly,] I was young, had read but little, and naturally took some things on trust. Subsequent experience and reading have led me to examine for myself. This has brought me to other conclusions. When I was a child, I thought and spoke as a child."[14] But whether or not Douglass was counting *The Essence of Christianity* in the "[s]ubsequent experience and reading" that revised his opinion of orthodoxy and called its clerics into derision, one thing at least is unquestionable: pace William Van Deburg, Ingersoll's generosity toward Douglass in Peoria years earlier was key among the varied "reasons for his drift toward a liberal concept of God,"[15] at least as much as Feuerbach's masterwork was. For by 1870, Douglass had come to understand that the acts of "those faithful men and women, who have devoted their great energies of their souls to the welfare of mankind"—those only through whom he could "get any

[13] I am borrowing language here from Fred Moten, "The Case of Blackness," *Criticism* 50, no. 2 (2008): 191.
[14] Frederick Douglass, "The Constitution and Slavery" in Philip S. Foner, ed, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Volume 2, Pre-Civil War Decade, 1850–1860* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 479–80.
[15] William L. Van Deburg, "Frederick Douglass: Maryland Slave to Religious Liberal" in *Maryland Historical Magazine* 69, no.1 (Spring 1974): 40. As far as this writer knows, Van Deburg is the only writer to situate Douglass's evolution to liberal theology alongside Ingersoll whom Douglass praised in *Life and Time of Frederick Douglass* as "a man with real living human sunshine in his face and honest, manly kindness in his voice" (895). It is hoped that, on the whole, the present article pays Van Deburg's a compliment as an essential, if neglected, study of the arc of Douglass's religious thought.

glimpse of God anywhere"[16]—were a fairer index than creedal pronouncements of the religious character of a man. Ingersoll's liberality, he said, "greatly tended to liberalize my views as to the value of creeds in estimating the character of men.... [G]enuine goodness is the same, whether found inside or outside the church and...to be an 'infidel' no more proves a man to be selfish, mean and wicked, than to be evangelical proves him to be honest, just and humane."[17] Although it is not clear that Douglass had read C. P Farrell's 1878 volume of Ingersoll's lectures before their 1880 tête à tête at Ingersoll's Lafayette Square home (though we know said volume was on the shelf of Douglass's Anacostia study at his death), he almost certainly knew of Ingersoll's set piece oration "How to Be Saved." Delivered twice at Washington's National Theater, in April and October 1880, "How to Be Saved," which would also see print in October (at the very time Douglass met Ingersoll for what Assing observed to be a "lovely evening"[18] making conversation) argued strenuously against creedal "belief" in favor of "the gospel of deed, the gospel of charity, the gospel of self-denial."[19] It was an ethical if not behavioralist orientation toward the question of salvation "How to Be Saved" assumed. "I tell you to-night," he theologized at the National Theater, "that God will not punish with eternal thirst the man who has put the cup of cold water to the lips of his neighbor. God will not leave in the eternal nakedness of pain the man who has clothed his fellow-men."[20] Live or in print, Douglass could hardly have taken in such words by Ingersoll then and failed to remember the wholly unexpected hospitality of the "famous and noted 'infidel'"[21] who had received Douglass, deprived public quarters, into his Peoria home. In *Life and Times*, Douglass had declared after all that Ingersoll's act was "one which I can never forget or fail to appreciate."[22] Whether Douglass and Ingersoll amiably dialogued about "How to Be Saved" on the "lovely evening" they met in Lafayette Square, or Douglass set alone listening to or reading Ingersoll's oration, what else could Douglass have felt but buoyed (if not intellectually liberated) by the force of Ingersoll's most devout profession in "How to Be Saved"?: "There is but one worship, and that is justice!"[23] In so many words, this would be Douglass's credo too.

If these coincidences of common living and thinking and crusading as irreligionists in Washington (where Douglass delivered *his* most extensive preachment on the problem of religious orthodoxy at Bethel Hall at Metropolitical AME Church in 1883) seem a priori still and not enough on their face to establish Ingersoll's influence on Douglass, or Douglass's symbolic value to Ingersoll's credibility among the New England liberals who were Douglass's intimates, then we have the archived record of another meeting of the minds to turn to. No private affair, this coming-together was of a decidedly impersonal, but no less dialogical, sort. Exactly three years from the "the lovely evening" in 1880 Assing boasted of sharing with the two principals—"We were truly

[16] Frederick Douglass, "A Reform Absolutely Complete: An Address Delivered in New York, New York, on 9 April 1870" in eds. John Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, 264.
[17] Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994), 896.
[18] Ottilie Assing describes the event this way in a November 13, 1880 missive to "Mr. [Sylvester Rosa] Koehler." "Recently I spent a lovely evening with Douglass at Robert Ingersoll's," she wrote to Koehler. Since neither Douglass nor Ingersoll write about the meeting, we are left to interpret "recently" as a few short days or weeks. Ottilie Assing to Sylvester Rosa Koehler, 13 November 1880, Sylvester Rosa Koehler Papers, Archives of
[19] Robert Ingersoll, "What Must I Do to Be Saved," in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, vol. 1 (New York: Dresden, 1902), gutenberg.org.
[20] Ingersoll, "What Must I Do to Be Saved."
[21] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 895.
[22] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 896.
[23] Ingersoll, "What Must I Do to Be Saved."

in our element and it was as if one was among old friends," she crowed[24]—Douglass and Ingersoll shared billing on a Washington dais, both headliners at a Lincoln Hall mass meeting called to renounce the United States Supreme Court's striking down of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, dashing America's Reconstruction hopes. It was a supremely spirited protest event.

While Ingersoll's biographers cover the occasion of his appearance at Lincoln Hall to their credit,[25] curiously their representation of the business of the night consistently subordinates Douglass's role to Ingersoll's as though the latter was but a hype man for the former, Douglass's significance being limited to properly introducing Ingersoll to the mass gathering. Perhaps the two-hour duration of Ingersoll's address, a rather pedantic prosecution of the court's decision to overturn the Civil Rights Act, gave just such an impression to the more than two thousand seated and standing in front of him, too. Dedicated students of Ingersoll, neither Orvin Larson (1993) nor Susan Jacoby (2014), particularly, seems to have understood that the 1883 Lincoln Hall assembly was by and large a Black affair, however, and that it was likely Douglass somewhat more than Ingersoll who gave the gathering its gravity.[26] Both surely had their acolytes on hand.[27] But while Douglass did introduce Ingersoll on concluding his own address—this detail in Larson and Jacoby is not in dispute—such gesture did not mean a higher regard for Ingersoll's talents was being observed by it the way Ingersoll's biographers suppose. On the contrary, Douglass's introduction, such as it was, had the effect, it seems, of underscoring *his* celebrity in this Black-led setting. His special care to present Ingersoll to a crowd of his familiars on bringing his own lengthy address to its jeremiadic close undoubtedly conveyed to some Douglass's exclusive reach and company. Whatever the motivation, both the form and content of Douglass's introduction, such as it was, worked just as much to disclose the common commitment of the two reformers to good religion as humanistic praxis, a devotion to which Douglass was to claim later on—and this,

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[24] Ottilie Assing to Sylvester Rosa Koehler, 13 November 1880, Sylvester Rosa Koehler Papers, Archives of American Art, edan.si.edu.

[25] Orvin Larson, *American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll* (Madison, Wisc.: Freedom From Religion Foundation, 1993); Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought (*New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013), 210.

[26] For an outline of event organizers and participants, overwhelmingly Black (James Gregory, Francis Grimké, Lewis Douglass, E. M. Hewlett, Rev. W. B. Jefferson, A. T. Augusta, Solomon Brown, Wiley Lane, Christian A. Fleetwood, *inter alia*) see the headnote to Douglass's "This Decision Has Humbled the Nation: An Address Delivered in Washington, D.C. on 22 October 1883" in eds., John Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, Vol. 5, 1881-1895* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 110 and *Proceedings of the Civil Rights Mass-Meeting Held at Lincoln Hall, October 22, 1883; Speeches of Hon. Frederick Douglass and Robert G. Ingersoll* (Washington D.C., 1883), 1 omeka.coloredconventions.org.

[27] Since Black religious history has given little attention to the early outliers from Christian orthodoxy, it is difficult to point to those who were Douglass's fellow skeptics. According to Christopher Cameron, however, two local African American freethinkers, W. C. Martin and Julius Chilcoat, organized a Washington D.C. meeting of like-minded race men in 1901 to laud and memorialize Ingersoll. Neither man is named in the proceedings of the 1883 event discussed here but, given the Lincoln Hall headliners, it is not unreasonable to imagine that one or both had been attendees at the October mass meeting. Among the more widely known race men to express deep doubts about the Christian faith and Black religiosity, more specifically, William Wells Brown was not silent, according to Cameron in *Black Freethinkers* (2019). While Brown and late Douglass may have been peculiar among public figures to set themselves against dogmatic Christian theology, this is not to say they were alone as irreligionists. One source in Cameron's study, a "Lord A. Nelson from San Francisco," for example, claimed in 1888 that he was "an Atheist of the olden type" and that "[t]he woods were full of us." In whatever way(s) the "olden type" atheist differed from the later one, as Nelson imagined him, the difference could hardly overshadow how aptly expressed the heterodoxy of slave religion was by Nelson, developed as I have emphasized in the deep woods recalled by Douglass in *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

unapologetically—was the right of free men. With a verse by the English poet and essayist (James Henry) Leigh Hunt marshaled for the occasion, Douglass's presentation of Ingersoll was merely ceremonial:

> Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
> Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
> And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
> Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
> An angel writing in a book of gold:—
> Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
> And to the presence in the room he said,
> "What writest thou?"—The vision raised its head,
> And with a look made of all sweet accord,
> Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord."
> "And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"
> Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
> But cheerly still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
> Write me as one that loves his fellow men."
>
> The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
> It came again with a great wakening light,
> And showed the names whom love of God had blest,
> And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.
>
> I have the honor to introduce ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

Given Douglass's much wordier, even protracted, habits of public discourse, and the comparative brevity of this rhetorical baton-pass to Ingersoll relative to the long address it served to tie up, his Huntian outro was almost curt. Still, in the person of Abō (Abou) Ben Adhem, the eighth-century Sufi mystic, Douglass found not only an apt figure for flattering the magnitude of *Ingersoll's* eminence and importance to American religious reform, but a convenient guide and model *to himself*, a hero-muse of humanistic theology. Put another way, if Douglass's auditors took his poetic summoning of "Abou Ben Adhem" to exalt Ingersoll, they were not necessarily wrong to think this about Douglass's intention; only this understanding of Douglass's invocation of Hunt's poem does not exclude the possibility that Douglass thought to marshal it, *not* in order to flatter the great American infidel, but in order to ribbon his address with a verse to draw together the virtues of the Declaration of Independence, the Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule, the Constitution, and the Civil Rights Bill of 1875 into a single vision of incarnational post-orthodoxy. "If [the Civil Rights Bill] is a Bill for social equality," he started his speech's close. Against those outraged that the bill would, in their judgment, presume to legislate or design social (as opposed to civil) equality, Douglass declared:

> so is the Declaration of Independence, which declares that all men have equal rights; so in the Sermon on the Mount, so is the Golden Rule, that commands us to do others as we would that others should do to us; so in the Apostolic teaching, that one blood God has made all nations to dwell on all the face of the earth; so is the Constitution of the United States, and so are the laws and customs of every civilized

> country in the world; for nowhere, outside of the United States, is any man denied civil rights on account of his color.

Viewed as a poetic peroration to Douglass's discussion, then, rather than a poem properly belonging to his presentation of Ingersoll—that is to say, rather than the poetic first part of a two-part introduction of Ingersoll (three stanzas and the reveal)—Hunt's "Abou Ben Adhem" would seem to offer up its namesake as a figure for Douglass's own emulation in incarnational religion and emancipatory practice, in living and leading "as one who loves his fellow men."

Douglass, of course, was not unaware of the heresy charges he risked with those he called "my old religious friends" in venturing to imagine, and approach, religion ungodded. "I have no doubt," he granted in 1870, "that the avowal of my liberal opinions will drive many from me...and even exclude me from many platforms upon which I was a welcome speaker, but such is the penalty which every man must suffer who admits a new truth to his mind. . . . .I bow to no priest either of faith or unfaith. I claim as against all sorts of people, simply perfect freedom of thought."[28] Nor was Douglass indifferent to the prospect of his standing diminished among the Black Methodists (AME and AME Zion) and Presbyterians who were his peers (many with previously welcoming pulpits) in the Black world. Notwithstanding his confidence in the cause of liberal religious individualism and a righteous man's willingness to suffer for his convictions, Douglass's hope of remaining in good standing, if not the good graces, of Black religionists and their churches was a sensitivity not easily overcome, it seems. What else could account for a late nineteenth-century agnostic and humanist's devotion to the *AME Zion Quarterly Review*, writing the editor only two months before his death to commend journal's contents long after he'd criticized Black clergy (for their trafficking in "superstition, bigotry, and priest-craft"[29]) and voicing irreligious sentiments? Or, of what other value could continuous Black church membership at Memorial AME Zion Church in Rochester and Metropolitan AME Church in Washington well after Douglass's agnostic turn?[30]

I surmise that despite having "receive[d] but limited endorsement among my people"[31] for his late theological ideas—renouncing prayer and divine judgment and yielding nothing to religious myth in an age of reason—Douglass kept faith and religious assembly far apart and thus saw no contradiction between his paratheistic musings and his ongoing engagements in and with Black American ecclesiality. In a way, Douglass followed Ingersoll's tack: "Do not imagine for a moment that I think people who disagree with me are bad people," Ingersoll proclaimed in "What We Must Do the Be Saved":

> I believe that most Christians believe what they teach; that most ministers are endeavoring to make this world better. I do not pretend to be better than they are. It is an *intellectual* question. *It is a question, first, of intellectual liberty, and after that, a question to be settled at the bar of human reason*"[32]

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[28] Frederick Douglass, "Frederick Douglass to S. R. Koehler" in *Journal of Negro History* 44, no. 3 (July 1959): 278.

[29] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 913.

[30] On the four stages of Douglass's career, see Holland, *Frederick Douglass*, 402ff. Holland posits 1851 at the end of the second quarter with Douglass's renunciation of disunionism.

[31] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 914.

[32] Ingersoll, "What We Must Do to Be Saved" gutenberg.org.

Douglass's ongoing convoking with Black religionists and religious bodies—"my old religious friends"—on the other hand, even if it was not against intellectuality, was sacramental beyond reason, its theology rather more felt than cognized. If, as he decried the religious order of his day (circa 1869), "Nothing [was] so imperious, exacting, unreasoning, and intolerant as faith, when it takes full possession of the human mind,"[33] he kept faith in any case with *the religion of Black gathering*, a convocational imperative not unlike the art and practice of assembly enacted at Lincoln Hall. In Sara Jane Cervanak's *Black Gathering: Art, Ecology, Ungiven Life* (2021), Black gathering refers to "the possibilities of a togetherness that exceeds understanding...forms of togetherness ungivable to axions of reason and category."[34] Black gathering then is always already religious, then, inasmuch the assembly "exceeds...reason" and agnostic insofar as it is "ungivable to . . . category." Whereas the new truths of religious liberalism that Douglass took up afforded him platforms no less prominent or far-reaching than those granted Ingersoll, Douglass's commitment to Black gathering, salvific in itself it seems, located Douglass "within the circle" of the slave sublime again where, in its postbellum reconfiguration, a new calculus of Black social thought and religious feeling obtained, and the gift that was, and is, the gathering of Black people unencumbered by the worldly weight of antiblackness grants to imagination unthought possibilities of sociality having nothing to do with orthodoxy. In this sense, and in spite of himself, Douglass could be said to have disavowed Black religion, perhaps, but not the Blackness *of* religion that is its paratheological under/other side. Though "bowing to no priest, either of belief or unbelief," the religion of Black gathering—not to be confused with Black religion—still captivated Douglass apparently. How could it not? For in Black gathering, as Cervenak helps us see, lay not only the possibility of free religion but its practice, even if it passes for the most part unthought. But if free religion lay in Black gathering, then the Blackness of religion must come to be something else other than Black religion in its (White) orthodox, institutional cast. This, it seems, kept Douglass, the agnostic, coming back to Black churches, again and again, in Baltimore, New Bedford, Rochester, and Washington. If the Black church has been orthodox in its precepts, it has been heretical in its promise to refuse bowing as, at last, free people. It was for just such a promise that Douglass's heart could not resist praying, one parish to another, if standing all the while.

[33] Douglass, quoted in Holland, *Frederick Douglass*, 333.

[34] Sara Jane Cervenak, *Black Gathering: Art, Ecology, Ungiven Life* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021), 17.

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Frederick Douglass, Slum Landlord?

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One aspect of Frederick Douglass's post-Civil War life largely ignored by historians is his non-journalistic business enterprises. One of these was Douglass's ownership of multiple residential properties in Rochester, New York, that he rented to tenants. Some of these properties Douglass owned were for the use of family members and in-laws and to retain his ability to vote in New York elections after his principal residence had been destroyed in a fire in June 1872. Other Rochester houses, however, Douglass purchased as investments and paid local realtors to maintain and rent them for his profit. An accident affecting a tenant, Henrietta Lynne, of one of these houses at 113 Hamilton Street would ensnarl Douglass in a protracted and rancorous legal controversy. In a letter from Douglass to a Rochester attorney, William J. McPherson—hired to resolve the dispute—reproduced below, Douglass decides he has no responsibility for his tenant's injury although her fall seems to have been caused by a rotten plank on the house's rear porch. Rejecting his lawyer's advice to offer a cash settlement, Douglass announces his willingness to be sued in court: "to let the law do me right and justice, for it seems to me that there is a determination to make me responsible for an accident that I had no means of preventing."

Further details of this dispute are revealed in a series of more than twenty letters between Douglass, John D. Tomlin, Douglass's Rochester property manager, McPherson, Lynne, and her lawyers. Douglass had placed the two-story Hamilton Street house under Tomlin's care in 1887, and the latter advised him of its deteriorated condition. In early May 1888, Tomlin leased the house at a rent of $5 a week to John E. Lynne, a house painter, and his wife Henrietta, who sometimes worked as a singing instructor. The couple and their family moved into the house on 14 May 1888 and, ten days later, Henrietta sustained an injury to her right leg when it broke through a rotten plank on the house's rear stoop. Tomlin notified Douglass of the accident in a letter on 25 July 1888 because the Lynnes were unable to make their rent payments. In mid-August, lawyers representing Lynne wrote Douglass that they had advised her to contact Douglass to make a settlement for her injury. Douglass replied to those lawyers that he had no direct knowledge of the circumstances of Lynne's injury, said she was negligent in not informing his property agent Tomlin of defects in the porch, and concluded: "Of course I cannot but regret Mrs. Lynn's misfortune, but, as I have said, I am not aware that she has any claim against me, legal or moral." Henrietta Lynne then wrote directly to Douglass, charging Tomlin with misrepresentation and negligence in the care of the Hamilton Street house. Douglass apparently hired McPherson to investigate the matter provoking Henrietta Lynne to write Douglass that the lawyer was "a sneak and a drunkard."[1] McPherson had offered Douglass advice to pay his injured tenant Henrietta B. Lynne $500 "as a gift on your part and to avoid the expense of litigation" in a letter dated 14 September 1888 and must have repeated it at a 1 October 1888 meeting between the two men. In the letter, McPherson claimed that Lynne had been seen moving around the house without the aid of crutches, branded her a liar, and declared that "she is after bloodmoney."[2]

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[1] John D. Tomlin to Frederick Douglass, 25 July 1888, reel 4, 829–31L, Frederick Douglass to Donald McNaughton and Joseph W. Taylor, 20 August 1888, reel 5, frames 50-51L, Henrietta B. Lynne to Frederick Douglass, 28 August, 23 September 1888, reel 5, frames 68–72, 105–08L, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

[2] William P. McPherson to Frederick Douglass, 14 September 1888, General Correspondence File, reel 5, frames 113–14, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

The legal dispute between Douglass and the Lynnes eventually reached the Municipal Court of the City of Rochester. Incomplete records indicate that Douglass was suing John E. Lynne, apparently over unpaid rent on the Hamilton Street house. The property manager, Tomlin, had recommended that Douglass allow the Lynne family to remain in the house that winter despite their inability and/or refusal to pay rent because he feared the vacant dwelling would be vandalized. Tomlin successfully requested that Douglass release him from managing the house in January 1889. In the meantime, Douglass engaged a new lawyer, John Van Voorhis, who advised him to ignore the Lynne's lawyer's requests for settlement negotiations, suggesting: "Let them perspire for a while. I am convinced the case is put up against you & I would resist it by all fair means." A deposition for the Rochester Municipal court proceeding was taken on 2 February 1889 in the Hamilton Street house from Henrietta Lynne before a court referee. Lynne was represented by Joseph W. Taylor and Douglass by Van Voorhis. Lynne testified that Douglass had visited her in the house the preceding August and promised that her family could remain there rent-free until she recovered from the fall. She also claimed that Douglass had promised additional financial compensation to be agreed upon later. The results of the legal action for eviction are not known but the Lynnes ultimately vacated the house. As late as May 1894, Henrietta Lynne, now separated from her husband, was writing Douglass requesting a payment of $5,000 in damages for her accident.[3] Douglass died the following February, his legal dispute with Henrietta Lynne apparently unresolved.

In many ways, what is most surprising about his letter to William McPherson is just how unremarkable Douglass's response was. Like many (if not most) landlords, Douglass chose to ignore his tenant's complaint and refused to accept any responsibility for what had occurred. Today there is, of course, no way for us to judge the merits of either party's case. Surviving correspondence does indicate that Douglass paid to have the necessary repairs made to the back porch to prevent further accidents, but other letters indicate that the overall condition of the house remained poor at best. Similarly, there are indications that Henrietta Lynne was truly injured by the accident, although as time passed, Douglass's representatives clearly believed that both the extent and the duration of her injury was much exaggerated. Given all that followed as the case dragged on year after year, however, it is hard not to wonder if both landlord and tenant might have been better served had Douglass simply accepted McPherson's advice and reached a settlement with the Lynnes in the fall of 1888.

Perhaps the most compelling aspect of this document, however, is the light it sheds on a largely unexamined part of Douglass's business interests: his engagement in the real estate business. Scattered throughout his surviving correspondence and financial records, most of which are part of the Library of Congress's Frederick Douglass collection, are numerous references to Douglass's real estate investments. Indeed, aside from his rental properties (which included not only those in Rochester, but at least four houses in Washington, D.C., as well as five houses in the Fells Point area of Baltimore), Douglass also held notes on dozens of properties scattered across three states (New York, Maryland, and Ohio), as well as the District of Columbia, worth tens of thousands of dollars.[4] Properly investigated, this material might not only

[3] J[ohn] D. Tomlin to Frederick Douglass, 7, 26, 31 December 1888, 9 January 1889, reel 5, frames 222–23, 234–35L, 242, 246–47; Henrietta B. Lynne to Frederick Douglass, 7 May 1894, General Correspondence File, reel 7, frames 759, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, Deposition for the Municipal Court City of Rochester, 3 February 1889, Legal File, 1843–1900, reel 30, frames 483–96, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.
[4] In a ledger entry dated 1 October 1889, Lewis H. Douglass records dozens of notes on properties held by his father, the total value of which came to just over $56,000. Financial Papers, General Accounts File, reel 28, frames 652–54, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

provide a window into the extent and nature of Douglass's venture into the real estate business, but also provides unique insight into the world of Black business and entrepreneurship in late nineteenth-century America.

[n.p.] 3 October 1888.

MR. MCPHERSON.[5]

DEAR SIR

Given our conversation on Monday last, I have thought much of your proposition that I should offer Mrs. Lynn[6] five hundred dollars for the alleged damage she has received by reason of a fall through a defective plank in the platform at the kitchen door of the house she rents on Hamilton Place. I have been carefully reading her letters and those of her attorneys[7] and have arrived at the

[5] A native of Scotland, William J. McPherson (1831–1910) spent most of his life in Rochester, New York and by 1863, he was running his own law firm there. Once a successful attorney, McPherson spent much of his later career entangled in a series of legal problems that stemmed from a very brief second marriage to a widow, Mary Locke McVean of St. Louis, Missouri that took place in February 1895. Widowed within weeks of the marriage, McPherson used his late wife's wealth to, among other things, purchase several properties in Rochester, claiming that she had no heirs and had died intestate. However, his wife's brothers promptly sued him, and McPherson was ultimately ordered by courts in both Missouri and New York to make full restitution to her family of all her property. Although he continued to practice law until he retired in 1908, McPherson's reputation was shattered, and he never recovered from the financial losses he incurred because of his legal troubles. McPherson spent his final years confined as a patient in the Rochester State Hospital for the Insane, where he died in 1910. Alexander McPherson, *Glimpses of Church and Social Life in the Highlands in Olden Times and other papers* (Edinburgh, Scot., 1893), 349–57; "The East Savings Bank of Rochester vs. William J. McPherson, Impleaded with Others," *Supreme Court Appellate Division-Fourth Department* (Rochester, 1899), 74–116; *United States Circuit Courts of Appeals Reports, with Annotations,* 171 vols. (Rochester, 1903), 58:455–62; 1850 U.S. Census, New York, Orleans County, 21B; 1880 U.S. Census, New York, Monroe County, 442A; 1900 U.S. Census, New York, Monroe County, 85B; 1910 U.S. Census, New York, Monroe County, 293B; "U.S. City Directories, 1822–1995," Ancestry.com; Find a Grave (online).

[6] Henrietta Bradt Allen Lynne (1852–1930) was born in Oswego County, New York. Her father, Peter Bradt was a farmer and descended from seventeenth century Dutch colonists. By 1870, she was married to Stiles Allen, a drugstore clerk. Allen died in Cayuga County in 1875 leaving Henrietta a widow with an infant daughter. Later that same year she married Canadian John Edward Wellington Lynne (1847–1913) and settled in Port Hope, Ontario. The family, which expanded to include an additional six children, remained in Canada until 1886 when they moved to Rochester, New York, and rented one of Frederick Douglass's properties. In 1887, Lynne was employed as a foreman, but after that he mostly worked as a house painter. Henrietta, who taught music, seems to have separated from her second husband sometime in the 1890s, and by 1900 she was living in Harrisburg Pennsylvania with four of her children by Lynne, three of whom were working in a local bindery. Lynne, however, remained behind in Rochester where he lived with one of their daughters and her family until he died in 1913. At the time she died in 1930, Henrietta was living in Philadelphia. 1860 U.S. Census, New York, Oswego County, 10; 1870 U.S. Census, New York, Oswego County, 259; 1881 Canada Census, Ontario, Durham East, Ancestry.com; 1900 U.S. Census, Pennsylvania, Dauphin County, 7A; 1910 U.S. Census, New York, Monroe County, 245B; "Pennsylvania, U.S., Marriages, 1852–1968," Ancestry.com; "U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995," Ancestry.com.

[7] By this date, Douglass had received at least four letters from Henrietta Lynne and two from her lawyers, the Rochester legal firm of Donald McNaughton and Joseph W. Taylor. In her February 1889 court deposition, Lynne claimed that Douglass had also visited her in the Hamilton Street residence in August 1888. Lynne's correspondence also mentions receiving visits from several other members of Douglass's family. Lynne's letter claimed that doctors had told her that she might need to be on crutches for life and implied that Douglass could afford to pay her

conclusion that in view of the demands made on her part and by her attorneys, it will be useless to make such a tender as you propose. I have no idea that the tender would be accepted, while at the same time, I am quite sure that it would be used to my disadvantage I am obliged to you for the interest you have thus far taken in the matter, and will be glad to compensate you for the same. Please send me your bill[8] and do nothing more in the case unless further advised. I propose to let the law do me right and justice, for it seems to me that there is a determination to make me responsible for an accident that I had no means of preventing.

Very truly Your friend

FREDERICK DOUGLASS.

ALS: General Correspondence File, reel 5, frames 131–33, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

considerable financial compensation. Donald McNaughton and Joseph W. Taylor to Frederick Douglass, 16 August, 24 September 1888, reel 5, frame 46R, 108R–109, Frederick Douglass to Donald McNaughton and Joseph W. Taylor, 20 August 1888, reel 5, frames 50–51L, Henrietta B, Lynne to Frederick Douglass 23, 28 August, 23 September, 1 October, reel 5, frames 57–58L, 68–72, 105–08L, 127–29L, General Correspondence File, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.

[8] McPherson wrote Douglass on 28 January 1889, acknowledging receipt of a payment from Douglass of twenty-eight dollars for his legal services. He told Douglass "I think that if I had had the matter of the removal of Lynn in hand, he would have been removed or we would have known the reason why not. *I think she is a tough lot to deal with* & he Lynn is simply her simple henchman." William P. McPherson to Frederick Douglass, 28 January 1889, General Correspondence File, reel 5, frames 258R–59L, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.