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Relocations of the 'Outraged Slave': Transatlantic Reform Conversation through Douglass's
Periodical Fiction

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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May, 2017

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Abstract

RELOCATIONS OF THE 'OUTRAGED SLAVE': TRANSATLANTIC REFORM CONVERSATIONS THROUGH DOUGLASS'S PERIODICAL FICTION

By Nikki Doreen Fernandes, MA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2017

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Through their editorial arrangements of African-American, Euro-American and European poetry, fiction and news, Frederick Douglass's anti-slavery periodicals (*The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*) imagine a cosmopolitan discourse that predates the segregated realities of the antebellum United States. In spite of Southern blockades against the infiltration of Northern texts, Douglass's material space uniquely capitalized on the limited restrictions of his reprinting culture to relocate the voice of the 'outraged slave' onto a global stage. From the poems of

Phillis Wheatley and William Cowper to Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and Douglass's own novella "The Heroic Slave," this project considers how Douglass's literary inclusions—and exclusions—complicate our static considerations of the historicized Douglass and exhibit his savvy insertions of black print into an exclusive, transatlantic nineteenth-century print culture.

Introduction: The Intertextuality of Douglass's Periodical Plane

“Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
Receive our air, that moment they are free,
They touch our country and their shackles fall.
That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud
And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,
And let it circulate through every vein”

William Cowper, 1785 ¹

Instead of the bright blue sky of America, I am covered with the soft grey fog of the Emerald Isle. I breathe, and lo! the chattel becomes a man. I gaze around in vain for one who will question my equal humanity, claim me as his slave, or offer me an insult... I am met by no upturned nose and scornful lip to tell me, “We don't allow n—s in here... A week or two before leaving the United States, I had a meeting appointed at Weymouth, the home of that glorious band of true abolitionists, the Weston family, and others. On attempting to take a seat in the Omnibus to that place, I was told by the driver, (and I never shall forget his fiendish hate,) “I don't allow n—rs in here”! Thank heaven for the respite I now enjoy!”!

Frederick Douglass, 1847 ²

In March of 1847, after a two-year speaking tour in the British Isles, Frederick Douglass delivered his farewell speech in London. While he claimed that the “question of slavery [was] past, so far as England [was] concerned,” he still believed he could “manage to weave out of the scraps of the subject left [him], a coat of many colors.”³ His speech diversely discusses an array

¹ Cowper, William. *The Poems of William Cowper*. ed. by John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995. Volume II: 1782-1785. 140.

² Douglass, Frederick. “To William Lloyd Garrison.” 1 January 1846. *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*. ed. by Philip Foner. New York: International Publishers, 1950. vol. 1. 125. Print. Writing to William Lloyd Garrison in 1846 from his hotel in Belfast, Douglass famously describes his emblematic conversion experience from property to manhood. Interestingly, Douglass appropriates the Romance of England's liberating geography before describing baser experiences of prejudice in the Northern free states. Later that month, Garrison reprinted the letter in *The Liberator*.

³ Douglass, Frederick. *Farewell Speech to the British People, London*. 3 March 1847. Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfd.21007> (2).

of his global concerns, but most emphatically, he insists that he must return to the United States to “unmask her preten[s]ion to republicanism” (7). Earlier in his speech, he hints at a methodology for doing so, promising that he would “make use” of the “kind expressions” of the British towards him (2). Their “expressions” would be “written upon [his] heart,” so that he could use them back home—in “the land of boasted liberty and light” (2). Their sympathies would be “daguerreotyped” within, as well, so that he might strengthen his brethren “in their sufferings and in their toils” (27). His intent to unmask the duplicity of the United States’ “liberty and light” almost immediately manifested itself materially through the publication of his first periodical, *The North Star*. Initially published only eight months after his return to the States, *The North Star* (later *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*) began Douglass’s reign as an idiosyncratic, antebellum African-American periodical editor.

Through his periodicals, Douglass persisted in his predilection to “weave...a coat of many colors” out of “scraps.” By reprinting a juxtaposition of Euro-American, African-American and European excerpts of news and literature, Douglass snips fragments of prose, poetry and essay from their normalized literary and political fabrics only to knit them back together into his own unique cloth. Of course, the general practice of transnational reprinting did not make Douglass’s periodical unique in the early nineteenth century. As Meredith L. McGill asserts in her groundbreaking work *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting*, the Jacksonian antebellum market place of the 1830s and 1840s resisted international copyright legislation in an effort to preserve decentralized, regionally-based publishing houses, unthreatened by monopolistic practices and federal interference (109). Unhindered by an international copyright law, and too disconnected to foster a popularized national literary

identity, publishers and editors reprinted British literature in bundles of uncopyrighted periodicals and cheap, regionally-competitive editions (McGill 1). This preservation of “decentralized culture” did not only delay the cultivation of a centralized American literary identity; as McGill astutely notes, it also fortified Southern resistance to the circulation of abolitionist’s pamphlets which would threaten the “safety” of slaveholding communities (110). In this context, Douglass’s anti-slavery periodicals become strategically subversive reprinting/relocating agents, making use of the absence of federal interference in their production while also demanding national and global interference through their sundry contents and through their foreign funding. In spite of Southern blockades against the infiltration and circulation of abolitionist texts, Douglass’s material space uniquely capitalized on the limited restrictions of his reprinting culture to relocate the collective voice of the “outraged slave”⁴ onto a global stage. In an age that increasingly trusted in media for objective depictions of reality,⁵ Douglass’s periodicals thwart pro-slavery depictions of black Americans while also insisting on a mediated multiracial discourse that could subvert the injustices of a segregated reality. As chapter one discusses, relocating the voices of slaveholders, the enslaved, Northern abolitionists and British abolitionists onto one material plane cultivated a “free” cross-cultural discourse that Douglass believed would shine dismantling light on America’s institution of slavery.

What emerges on Douglass’s multicultural plane for scholars of sundry fields to consider is an underexplored intertextuality replete with opportunities for reevaluating and enlarging our conceptions of Douglass. As we continue to liberate him from the static confines of his

⁴ “The First Volume of the North Star Completed.” *The North Star*. 22, December 1848: 2. Print. • Only a year into its run, *The North Star* insisted that it strove to “at all times...place [itself] in the position of the outraged slave” while “striv[ing] to see and to feel the injustice done him as done unto” the periodical’s persona.

⁵ Dinius, Marcy J. *The Camera and the Press: American Visual and Print Culture in the Age of the Daguerreotype*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Print. • West, Peter. *The Arbiters of Reality: Hawthorne, Melville, and the Rise of Mass Information Culture*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008. Print. • Dinius and West’s scholarship both consider the marketability of “authentic” or “objective” new media technologies in antebellum culture.

canonized pre-England retelling of “facts” in *Narrative of the Life (1845)*, the collection of texts in Douglass’s periodicals may help us to view him as the evolving, philosophizing reading subject he professed to be in his second autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom (1855)*.⁶ As Wilson Jeremiah Moses asserts in his introduction to *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*, Douglass, like many historicized intellectuals, was a “man of more than one mind,”—even though polarized assessments of his unimpeachable greatness or his unredeemable flaws have often attempted to divest him of that complexity (26). Rather than “divesting” Douglass of the “ambivalence” characteristic to most “major thinkers,” Moses insists that we can honor Douglass as a black intellectual by “demonstrat[ing] that we take [him] seriously enough to see how [he] struggled with the problems of human understanding and attempted to reconcile life’s contradictions” (26). As my project recognizes the peculiar literary and editorial arrangements of Douglass’s periodical, it likewise insists on using these arrangements to foster new considerations of Douglass as an evolving reading subject.

At the least, Douglass’s early periodicals exhibit the young editor’s tactical usages of his experiences abroad. Relatively recently, the scholarship of Gregg Crane, Paul Giles, Paul Gilroy and Fionnghuala Sweeney has considered the ways in which Douglass’s first tour of the British Isles largely fashioned his rhetorical and editorial strategies in demanding redress.⁷ As Crane asserts, “meeting with considerably less racism in Britain” exhibited to Douglass “that racism was a piece of human manufacture and the key impediment to a revised social and legal order”

⁶ *My Bondage and My Freedom. Autobiographies*. New York: The Library of America, 1994. 367. Print. • As Douglass relays his experiences as a speaker with the American Anti-Slavery Society nearly a decade after the fact, he expresses his wariness with repetitively relaying his narrative of facts as per the Garrison’s instruction. He claims that eventually he “could not always obey, for [he] was now reading and thinking.”: “New views of the subject were presented to my mind. It did not entirely satisfy me to narrate wrongs; I felt like denouncing them.”

⁷ Crane, Gregg. “Human Law and Higher Law.” *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass*. ed. by Maurice S. Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 89-102. Print. • Giles, Paul. “Douglass’s Black Atlantic: Britain, Europe, Egypt.” *The Cambridge Companion to Frederick Douglass*. ed. by Maurice S. Lee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 132-145. Print. • Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print. • Sweeney, Fionnghuala. *Frederick Douglass and the Atlantic World*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007. 1-12. Print

(95). Likewise, the “cosmopolitan discourse” of Douglass’s periodicals sought to “unmake this majority racism” through utilizing the “influence of foreign reformers whose outsider’s perspective could help to illuminate the provincial biases limiting American justice” (Crane 95). Douglass, who, as Moses writes, was “[i]ntensely aware of America’s conviction of moral superiority,” thus “sought to manipulate the rhetoric of American perfectionism to promote racial equality” (2). His manipulative efforts largely depended on expanding boundaries of a nation fragmented in regards to slavery to create a “new moral consensus” through his usages of England’s boasted moral progress (Crane 95). Primed through his travels by what Giles calls a “more expansive transnational framework” (134), Douglass’s periodical space drags the contextual landscape of England back to the States with him to “make use” of the rhetorical atmosphere in which he rediscovered his innate manhood. In doing so, his space seems to tempt the geographically-rooted, symbolic romance of England’s cradle of liberty to exert its emancipatory force once relocated by mediated space.

Fittingly enough, the initial provisions required to create and circulate such an atmosphere came out of the atmosphere that Douglass hoped to circulate. Dissuaded from editorship by William Lloyd Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass was only able to launch *The North Star* through British abolitionist funds raised to purchase a printing press for his editorial venture. Indirectly deprived of citizenship through the AASS’s refusal to purchase Douglass’s freedom—a move that Garrison believed would only serve to validate property rights—Douglass could only return to the United States to take on his editorial role through British abolitionist funds raised to purchase his freedom (Giles 135-136). Both accepted financings not only illustrate the beginnings of Douglass’s split from the Garrisonians; his acceptance of British funds—in spite of the AASS’s wariness with his new foreign affiliations—

displays Douglass's early predisposition for exploiting, or at least advantageously grasping at, the opportunities available to him in an exclusive print culture. Determined to not allow the cause of the "outraged slave" to slip into obscurity, and also presumably determined to not allow his own perpetually self-represented persona to likewise slip, Douglass looked outside of his national print culture to one that after decades of struggle had managed to successfully inundate its nation with fashionable abolitionist texts. In England, Douglass could rhetorically assert that "the question of slavery" had already "past" when useful to him even while perceptively recognizing England's more "insidious...forms of social and racial oppression" (Giles 136). At times, rhetorically disengaging with the distant realities of England's former colonies or the obscured reality of its working class poor, Douglass pragmatically chooses when to dismantle England's romance of moral progress or to embrace it for the sake of his agenda. The Mansfield Decision of 1772, compounded by the victories for British abolition in 1807 and 1833, would have provided Douglass with ample evidence to support an assertion of England's moral progress. Moreover, a wave of British anti-slavery prose and verse through the pens of William Cowper, Hannah More, Ann Yearsley, William Wordsworth and Thomas Clarkson had in earlier decades cultivated a market open to the circulation of fashionable anti-slavery text. Rather than waiting on the "eradication of slavery in accordance with higher law" to claim his freedom as the Garrisonians would have suggested, Douglass, "who tended politically to take more pragmatic lines" (Giles 135, 136), sidestepped the constraints of his nation for the purchased liberties England could provide.

Like Phillis Wheatley before him, Douglass took advantage of the in-vogue aesthetics abroad for the sake of circulating himself in print. Unlike the period when Wheatley was in-vogue, those aesthetics had significantly changed by the early-nineteenth century to not only

support the production of African-American literature saturated with Evangelical motifs but to also support those writings that variously enforced themes of emancipation. Although his periodical would be rendered forever financially unstable by, as Frank Luther Mott reminds us, “the popular disapproval” of the antislavery cause which challenged the United States “guarantee of the liberty of the press” (307), Douglass attempted to mitigate some of the struggle through his continued affiliation with friends abroad. One particular British friend, Julia Griffiths, came to Douglass’s aid in 1848 to assist with the periodical’s finances when it was on the brink of financial crisis. As will be discussed in chapter one, although Douglass and his initial co-editor Martin R. Delany had initially sought to sustain the periodical through the mobilization of a black readership base, recognizing the impossibility of such a feat early in the *North Star*’s run encouraged Douglass to reach out to Griffiths for secretarial assistance.⁸

Similarly, although Douglass had insisted on the necessity of a black-run abolitionist periodical in which the enslaved could demand their own redress, Douglass’s inclusion of well-known and well-received British literature alongside unknown African-American verse and prose demonstrates Douglass’s pragmatic awareness of how these popularized texts could strategically shine light on the obscured voices of his oppressed community. As Douglass’s early editorial idealisms inevitably succumbed to the realities of his print culture, Douglass’s editorship begins to exemplify the “necessarily contradictory” thinking that Moses attributes to most nineteenth-century “black American intellectuals” (xiii). We see in his periodical’s coverage the “mingling” of “black nationalism” with the “cosmopolitan processes of emulating Eurocentric civilization”; we see an “ethnocentric boosterism...simultaneously blended...with

⁸ Ullman, Victor. *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971. Print · As Ullman’s biography of Martin R. Delany relays, Douglass wrote to Griffiths in 1848, voicing the unexpected instability of his periodical. Douglass implicatively blames at least part of his periodicals instability on unwillingness of black Americans to prioritize education through subscribing to his periodicals contents: “This have not turned out at all as I expected. The colored people themselves owing to the long night of ignorance which has overshadowed and subdued their spirit [sic]” (89-91).

conscious and unconscious striving towards economic and social integration in America” (Moses xiii). And even as Douglass’s periodical attempts to elevate African-American literature by means of its insertion into the Western canon, we see the gaps between the promise of Douglass’s cosmopolitan page and the practical realities which unremittingly threatened the sustainment of Douglass’s periodical. We are caught up in the tension of what presents itself on the integrated page and the segregated inequalities that exist underneath the mediated surface. But even on the page itself, scathing editorial denunciations of social inequality seem incongruously aligned with poetic promises of universal progress. As Elizabeth McHenry writes, “Douglass’s placement of the work of the most celebrated white European and European American writers next to that of black writers insisted on the equality of their literary, cultural and artistic pursuits” even as “the discussion that took place in the pages of Douglass’s papers underscored the extent to which material equality between blacks and whites did not exist” (116).

McHenry’s keen observation reveals other gaps Douglass’s material plane inadvertently closes—not just the gaps that exist between the United States and England or African-Americans and their white counterparts, but also the gaps existing between the luxury of a romantic idealism and the constraints of an oppressive reality’s exclusive print culture. The juxtaposition of idealism and reality in such a cosmopolitan space naturally produces an outgrowth of tensions and seeming contradictions. Yet by situating itself in Moses’s assertion that a “presumed need to create ‘positive images’ means divesting historical subjects and their ideas of flavor and seasoning,”⁹ my project seeks to uncover these tensions, not so much in an effort to reconcile them or to reductively confine Douglass by some of them, but to reveal them as products of a

⁹ Moses, 26.

nuanced literary and political environment: one charged with the urgency of the institution of slavery and softened by the Romanticism of uplifting high ideals; one idealistically united in a growing global rights movements while also confused and scattered by national and/or sectarian priorities, one increasingly looking to the media for objective realities while also recognizing how print cultures control depictions of “reality,” one seeking to democratize the voices of the marginalized but challenged by a literary production economy. In short, one fixated on a series of ideals, but also blatantly and subtly exposing the great distance between those ideals and reality. Consequently, for scholars of various fields, Douglass’s periodical becomes a space replete with opportunities for exploring not only intersectionality, but the breakdown of disciplinary categories in a transnational, anti-slavery, literary space.

Chapter one likewise explores how Douglass’s depiction of his initial cross-cultural experience aboard the steamer the *Cambria* analogues the idealism of his periodical’s global stage. Comparing the “gallant steam-ship” to a “theater,” on his initial voyage to the British Isles, Douglass’s perceives a diverse cast of characters devoted to “the sunshine of free discussion” (qtd. in Foner 14). The romance of *Cambria* discourse is demonstratively tested as Douglass’s periodical struggles to stay financially afloat. Chapter one, consequently considers the crashing together of Romance and pragmatism as Douglass seeks to prevent his name, his cause and his political strategies from fading into obscurity.

Chapter two briefly forays into Douglass’s periodicals’ inclusion of late eighteenth-century poets Phillis Wheatley and William Cowper to continue exploring African-American anxieties surrounding their place in print culture. Beginning with an editorial that appropriates Thomas Gray’s “Elegy in a Country Churchyard” to express that the Milton’s of the African-American community have remained “mute and inglorious,” I consider the irony of Phillis

Wheatley's relative absence in *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass's Paper*. Although Douglass's periodical devoted itself to the exhibition of African-American artwork and expressed anxieties surrounding their race's expungement from the "rolls of heraldry," Douglass's periodical, unlike Euro-American abolitionists periodicals, only features a small selection of Wheatley's 1773 volume of poems one time between 1847 and 1855. By pitting Wheatley's relative absence against Cowper's pervasive presence, chapter two considers the shifting aesthetics of England's print culture during the beginnings of the British anti-slavery society. I view these shifting aesthetics as a contributing factor in Douglass's heroic representation as an uncompromising abolitionist and Wheatley's fading reputation as one simply forbearing with her enslavement. Considering Cowper's freedom to blatantly appropriate the voice of the enslaved in his verse only a decade after Wheatley highlights the dramatic shift in British abolitionism that would eventually assist Douglass in cultivating his own reputation.

Chapter three moves us several decades forward to consider the pretensions of the developed and commodified anti-slavery movement in England during the 1850s. *Bleak House's* serialization in *Frederick Douglass's Paper* between April of 1852 and December of 1853 highlights the ways in which both reformists—Douglass and Dickens—were astutely aware of their respective nations' pretensions to liberty, even as they manipulated these pretensions to bring attention to either the American slave or the London's working classes. Douglass's inclusion of *Bleak House* may cause pause in that the Victorian novel recommends English prioritization of domestic reform over fashionable foreign anti-slavery causes. However, Douglass's steady reprinting of *Bleak House* in its excessive entirety could shine light on the ideological inconsistencies with which Douglass would have had to struggle as one tied—or at the least rhetorically tied—to the British Isles, the United States and the cause of a displaced and

oppressed people. Rather than dismissing what appear to be ideological inconsistencies within Douglass's paper, I look to them as a means of observing a global library which would have caused Douglass to intellectually struggle with the demands of his transatlantic world.

Positioning *Bleak House* alongside Douglass's four-part novella, "The Heroic Slave" brings into relief the similar print culture anxieties displayed in Douglass and Dickens's fiction and the similar literary strategies employed by both social activists to shed public light on themselves and their respective causes. Namely, we see that Dickens was just as willing to capitalize on the fashionableness of American anti-slavery literary realism in *Bleak House* as Douglass was willing to capitalize on the popularity of American Transcendentalism and British romanticism in "The Heroic Slave." My consideration of the "The Heroic Slave" is not inconsequential to *Bleak House* or the confines of Douglass's periodical space. For four issues, between March 5 and March 25, 1853, both works appeared simultaneously in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

Douglass's decision to juxtapose "The Heroic Slave" with *Bleak House* exemplifies McHenry's assertion that his editorial "placement of the work of the most celebrated white European and European American writers next to that of black writers insisted on the equality of their literary, cultural and artistic pursuits" even as "the discussion that took place in the pages of Douglass's papers underscored the extent to which material equality between blacks and whites did not exist" (116). Yet it also reveals Douglass's continued efforts to claim more material equality for himself through profiting on that which had gained traction and monetary success in England.

Chapter 1: The Power of Imagination through Periodical Mediation

“Such is thy pow’r, nor are thine orders vain,
O thou the leader of the mental train:
In full perfection all thy works are wrought,
And thine the scepter o’er the realms of thought.
Before thy throne the subject-passions bow,
Of subject-passions sov’ reign ruler thou:
At thy command joy rushes on the heart,
and through the glowing veins the spirits dart”

Phillis Wheatley, “On Imagination”¹⁰

Two thematically similar anecdotes on the “effects” of imagination appear in the early issues of Frederick Douglass’s anti-slavery periodical *The North Star*. One, entitled “Power of Imagination” describes a New England farmer who believes he has severed his foot through an accidental stroke of his axe.¹¹ In shock, and in perceivable pain, with the sensation of blood filling his shoe, the farmer struggles home on his oxen-pulled sled to his wife. At home, the anxious wife is relieved to discover that her husband had actually not injured his foot at all. His axe had only cut through his shoe and sock to reveal the red protective flannel in which he had wrapped his foot in the morning. The farmer had mistaken the red flannel for his own blood, and because his “reason” did not “[correct] the mistake, all the pain and loss of power which attend a real wound, follow[ed]” (4). In conclusion, the narrator tells us that: “man often suffers more from imaginary evils than real ones” (4). Another anecdote, entitled “Effects of Imagination on

¹⁰ Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings. ed. by Vincent Carretta. New York: Penguin Group, 2001. 37. Print.

¹¹ “Power of Imagination.” *The North Star*. 30 March 1849: 4. Print.

the Physical Frame” describes a death row criminal, who, through deception, becomes an unaware participant in a psychological study.¹² After being blindfolded, the criminal is led to believe through sound effects and sensations, that he is being executed through the gradual letting of his blood. Although no blood is actually extracted, the unfortunate criminal—“a man of very strong constitution”—faints and dies “without having lost a drop of blood” (4).

Both unsigned anecdotes, whose contents take up less than half a column of Douglass’s fourth page, come with no prefatory or concluding remarks apart from the sentence-length conclusion at the end of the “Power of Imagination.” They are ostensibly digressive tales, most likely reprinted from other periodicals, to act as filler text in a newspaper first and foremost concerned with advocating the cause of the “outraged slave.”¹³ However, these tangential tales may be more than tangential; they may suggest a helpful framework through which we can consider the reprinting methodology Douglass utilized to further the cause of the outraged slave. This chapter contends that the “imagination” anecdotes give narrative to the distinctly crafted functionality of Douglass’s periodical space—a space which contains fiction, but also acts as a piece of fiction in itself. Through Douglass’s editorial arrangement of African-American, Anglo-American and European poetry, fiction and news, he imagines and creates a fictional plane for cosmopolitan discourse that predates the segregated realities of his time. In other words, his newspaper is fictional in that its juxtaposed contents imagine a future in which financial disparity, social injustice and enslavement no longer prevent blacks from engaging in a global public discourse with their former and present day oppressors. His periodical in no way attempts to eclipse the cruel realities of slavery with naïve proclamations of an authentic, inclusive

¹² “Effects of Imagination on the Physical Frame.” *The North Star*. 21 July 1848: 4. Print.

¹³ Douglass, Frederick. “The First Volume of the North Star Completed.” *The North Star*. 22, December 1848: 2. Print. • Only a year into its run, *The North Star* insisted that it strove to “at all times...place [itself] in the position of the outraged slave” while “striv[ing] to see and to feel the injustice done him as done unto” the periodical’s persona.

Republic to come. Instead, his periodical figures into Geneviève Fabre's assessment of the commemorative celebrations facilitated by antebellum African Americans of the North.

According to Fabre, as post-Revolutionary free blacks struggled with the inconsistency of a new nation that declared itself a Republic in spite of its institutionalized slavery, Northern blacks utilized the mediated stage of their public celebrations "to accomplish a 'dream deferred'"—or to push forward "an unfinished revolution." Still fixated on the rights denied them, through their celebrations, "African Americans invented a future that no one dared to consider and forced its image upon black and white minds and spirits" (Fabre 72). Rather than simply "performing" their past, their commemorative celebrations were unique in that they used the "power of imagination to invent, visualize, and represent themselves in roles they had always been denied" (Fabre 75).

This chapter will argue that Douglass's periodical similarly sought to "force" an "image" of an authentically inclusive future "upon black and white minds and spirits." To return to our opening anecdotes, it seems that Douglass, like his commemorating contemporaries, recognized an imagined reality's power to effect and disturb what actually exists. My comparison of Douglass's periodical to the imagination anecdotes of course begins to fall apart. Douglass did not seek to use reality to undo the influence of "imaginary evils"; Douglass and his black contemporaries obviously suffered from the realest of evils, and these evils sought to prevent them from obtaining roles that would allow them to participate in their increasingly mediated world. However, as Douglass struggled, suffered and fought to obtain the role of editor for himself—to claim a role that his people had been historically denied—we see him recognizing the burgeoning influence of pervasive mid-nineteenth-century print culture. As Douglass creates an inclusive mediated space that visualizes a multicultural future, he attempts to uphold a vision

that might prevent African Americans from “the pain and loss of power” that should rightfully accompany their real and persistent injuries. If any “imaginary evils” did threaten the hopes of African Americans, they may as well be the falsehood of black inferiority or the falsehood of American “liberty and light”—two imagined realities, perpetuated by the mainstream media, which Douglass’s periodical fought to disturb. Just as Douglass, in his *Narrative*, writes that he “became a man,” in England—that he discovered his latent and rightful manhood while under the influence of an inclusive environment—the environment of Douglass’s periodical attempts to imprint and disseminate the influence that England had on him. Likewise, this chapter considers the antebellum print economies that threatened to thwart African-American participation in the mediated world while also considering how Douglass utilized his hard sought access into the mediated world to create a visionary space of inclusion.

“Of all the stars in this “brave old, overhanging sky,” The North Star is our choice. To thousands now free in the British dominions it has been the Star of Freedom. To millions, now in our boasted land of liberty, it is the Star of Hope. Dark clouds may conceal, but cannot destroy it. Tempests may toss the sea—earthquakes convulse the globe—the storm-bolts shake the sky—it stands as firm as Heaven.”¹⁴

In January of 1848, Frederick Douglass, having published only two issues of his new weekly periodical *The North Star*, boldly guaranteed the longevity of the periodical by characterizing it as “the STAR that never sets.”¹⁵ Douglass, who was tactfully eager to amass a centralized subscription base in the limited reform periodical market, urged African Americans to “lay aside party differences and sectarian preferences” to “rally around” the constancy of *The North Star*. The young editor’s rallying cry was blatantly reactionary. During the Colored

¹⁴ “North Star.” *The North Star*. 3 December 1847: 2. Print. • In its first issue, *The North Star* devotes of its second page to defending its meticulously selected title. The writer asserts that they selected a star that appears at midnight because: “We are over-shadowed by gloomy clouds, and on a dark and perilous sea. We need the Polar light to guide us into the port.”

¹⁵ Douglass, Frederick. “Colored National Press.” *The North Star*. 14 January 1848: 2. Print.

National Convention in October of 1847, the Committee on a National Press, headed by James McCune Smith, proposed the establishment of a new national African-American newspaper. While the committee recognized the existence of earlier black periodicals, they petitioned for “a printing press, a copious supply of type” and “a full and complete establishment, wholly controlled by colored men.”¹⁶ Complete black ownership and participation would distinguish this new black periodical from its predecessors. Its compositors, its “thinking writing” men, its pressmen and its printers would “all, all, be men of color,” and the “establishment” would be “so well-endowed as to be beyond the chances of temporary patronage.” Just as Douglass proposed the permanency of his periodical, the committee proposed that their newspaper would be a “fixed fact” and an “overwhelming argument” against those who would oppose the cause of black advancement. However, Douglass would be the one to oppose the committee at the convention, and he would oppose it again in print in his January 14, 1848 issue of *The North Star*. Highlighting the existence of the printing press he had already purchased through the assistance of British benefactors, he reprimanded the committee for seeking foreign funds to purchase another press. “Use and support the papers you already have” he argued, “for it is not impossible, that by catching at the shadow you may lose the substance” (“Colored National Press”).

The printed dispute between Douglass and Smith on a National Press does more than illustrate a battle between egos. It reveals Douglass’s anxieties surrounding the potential loss of the precarious independent editorial control he recently achieved. By the mid-1840s, Douglass had already gained oratorical fame—a fame which at times, to their chagrin, surpassed that of his white abolitionists friends (McFeely 100). These same friends (as Douglass always referred to them) established him in his oratorical role in the 1840’s while at the same time attempting to

¹⁶ “The Colored Convention. Report of the Committee on a National Press.” *The North Star*. 14 January, 1848: 4. Print.

restrain him within that role towards the end of the decade. William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society hired Douglass at the young age of 23 to be a paid lecturer for the society in 1841 (Giles 133). He had only escaped from slavery three years' prior before he managed to capture the attention of the society through the telling of his story. Through the aegis of the society's authorial umbrella, Douglass published the first edition of his autobiography in 1845 while also flourishing as a touring lecturer at home and abroad. Yet it was his time abroad "that first gave him the taste of a different kind of freedom;" he perhaps recognized during his 1844-1847 tour of the British Isles that he "had moved from being the property of a plantation owner to [being] the property of [American] abolitionists" (Giles 133). As his 1855 narrative would indicate, Douglass had already struggled to "obey" his friends' advice to "be [himself]" and to "tell [his] story" (*My Bondage*). The "self" they proposed Douglass to be was not truly himself after all, but a self that conformed to the popularly portrayed mannerisms of the unlearned slave; the story that they requested he tell was one of facts, deplete of any philosophizing that could invalidate his testimonial to former enslavement. As one now "reading and thinking" with "new views on the subject...presented to his mind," Douglass was no longer content to passively "narrate wrongs" when he was capable of actively "denouncing them."¹⁷

Throughout Douglass's periodical journey, we see his method of denouncement to be contingent upon his ability to use his expanding transnational knowledge base to condemn slavery. Likewise, Douglass's publication of *The North Star* after he returned from the British Isles coincided with his departure from the confined role in which his former abolitionist friends had situated him. Douglass's decision to publish *The North Star* indicated his recognition of print's distinct functionality—a recognition which is directly articulated in an article published

¹⁷ *My Bondage and My Freedom. Autobiographies*. New York: The Library of America, 1994. 367. Print.

within his periodical on March 24, 1848 entitled “The Orator and The Newspaper.”¹⁸ Through a sprawling set of parallels, the article writer—potentially a Ms. Balfour—considers that “The Orator speaks but to a few hundreds, the newspaper addresses millions; [t]he words of the orator may die on the air, the language of the newspaper is stamped on tablets as imperishable as marble...[t]he one shines for an hour, the other glows for all time.” She continues in this style and in summation concludes that:

“printing makes the Orator himself more than an Orator. It catches up his dying words, and breathes into them the breath of life. It is the speaking gallery through which the Orator thunders in the ear of the ages. He leans from the tomb over the cradle of rising generations.”

Ms. Balfour’s conceit, which pits the permanency of print against the temporality of speech, was printed by Douglass only four years after he described himself to abolitionist friend J. Miller McKim as one “quite unaccustomed to write anything for the public eye, and in many instances quite unwilling to do so.”¹⁹ In less than a decade’s time, Douglass recognized the benefit of having his ephemeral speech captured, sustained and widely disseminated by print. He had already begun a journalistic career through his submissions to abolitionists periodicals, such as Garrison’s *Liberator* in the 1840s. Moreover, The American Anti-Slavery Society, alert to Douglass’s rumored plans of starting his own periodical, attempted to dissuade him and placate him by offering him opportunities to write weekly articles for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. However, Douglass was not appeased by their offers; he also recognized the distinct functionality of editorial control. As his biographer William S. McFeely writes:

“From the days of Benjamin Franklin to those of the politically powerful newspaper editors of Andrew Jackson’s America, journalism had been a potent calling. Only a rare black man was a doctor or a lawyer; none was a merchant chief. A black man who would be heard became a man of the cloth, but Douglass had firmly turned his back on that

¹⁸ “The Orator and The Newspaper.” *The North Star*. 24 March 1848: 4. Print.

¹⁹ *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*. ed by Philip S. Foner, 5 volumes. New York: International Publishers, 1950-1975. 5:3. Print.

correct calling. What he could be was an editor” (McFeely 149).

Losing an opportunity at editorial control would of course coincide with losing an opportunity to print the unique “substance”—or the unique content—from the sundry contextual communities that his travels had enabled him to experience. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Douglass’s tour of the British Isles primes the young editor to create a periodical landscape on which African-American prose and verse could be aligned with the works of European and Anglo-American artists. Douglass’s unique inclination to widen the boundaries of his newspaper’s literary canon—to like Wheatley’s poet “grasp the mighty whole” in order to insert black prose and verse into the whole—could have motivated him to oppose the National Press.

For Douglass, the newspaper becomes the medium through which he could do more than convey the personal, factual, static slave narrative of his past. By adopting the title of Mr. Editor, he renounces the obligation to exist solely as an oratorical medium for the the American Anti-Slavery Society.²⁰ In other words, rather than be an objectified medium through which abolitionists could disseminate a tale of slave cruelty, he creates a mediated space to be controlled by his own evolving subjective editorship. His space becomes a sweeping landscape on which the sundry national experiences of African American enslavement and oppression could be disseminated with all the pervasive permanency that Douglass attributed to the newspaper’s functionality. He seeks to achieve one of his periodical’s main objectives, which was to “at all times...place [itself] in the position of the outraged slave” while “striv[ing] to see and to feel the injustice done him as done unto” the periodical’s persona. Unlike the antebellum black periodicals that preceded his, Douglass’s was unique in that it did not gloss over racial

²⁰ McFeely characterizes “Douglass, as an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” who “was still an employee, beholden to others, however great his oratorical powers. As Mr. Editor, Frederick Douglass would have not only a position in society but as his own place in public affairs. He was determined to make the most of both” (McFeely 150)

oppression in an attempt to focus on the upward mobility of the middle-class black community (Hutton 4). While he promotes the events and activities of his Northern free black circles, he also mindfully strives to be the voice of the Southern “outraged slave.” As Fanuzzi implicates, he strives to be the “editorial voice of the people of color” while probably also suspecting that Garrison’s *Liberator* had claimed that position before he could get to it (57). Its subscription base of three black subscribers to every one white subscriber presented its contributors with the best periodical platform of its time to communicate with the literate black community. So why was Douglass discontent to simply write articles for it? Why did he insist on the production of his own space?

One explanation easily presents itself through the assertions made by Douglass in his first issue of *The North Star*. In a standard mission statement article, entitled “Our Paper and Its Prospects,” Douglass conspicuously argues that in spite of the anti-slavery periodical efforts made by his white abolitionist counterparts, African Americans would need to be the ones to “demand their redress” through the establishment of their own newspaper.²¹ While not dismissing the work already done on the behalf of “white laborers,” Douglass contended that “[African Americans] must be [their] own representatives and advocates, not exclusively, but peculiarly—not distinct from, but in connection with [their] white friends” (2). Douglass’s comment, in spite of *The Liberator*’s existence, implies that a primarily black readership base and an array of black contributors was not enough to make a newspaper function in the “peculiar” way he thought necessary to comprehensively “demand...redress.” It suggests that Douglass’s decision to begin his own periodical cannot just be attributed to an overgrown ego, as the Garrisonians were quick to surmise. This particular project contends that as Douglass

²¹ “Our Paper and Its Prospects.” *The North Star*, 3 December 1847: 2. Print.

distanced himself from the Garrisonians, he also distanced himself from the obstinately utilized techniques of partisan Anti-Slavery Societies. Through ideological distance from the partisan group, he crafted new editorial strategies that he hoped to employ in his own newspaper for the “peculiar” assertion of African American liberty.

The distance between himself and the Garrisonians was of course more than ideological. On August 16 of 1845, it became literal and physical when, Douglass, still technically a slave to his former master, set sail for Northern Ireland to avoid legally enforced detainment by his former master. Once aboard the *Cambria* steam-ship, “complexional reasons” forbade Douglass from obtaining a first-class passage and attempted to cloister him in steerage (qtd. in Foner 14). However, during the day, he joined his fellow passengers on the promenade deck where he participated in what he would describe in a letter to Garrison as “a constant discussion of the subject of slavery”—a discussion that was unable to be suppressed, because if suppressed “broke out with redoubled energy, high upon the saloon deck, in the open, refreshing, free ocean air” (qtd. in Foner 14). For Douglass, the *Cambria* became a removed realm of unimpeded cross-cultural discourse—one on which he claimed “the sunshine of free discussion” reigned (qtd. in Foner 14). Douglass would characterize the “gallant steam-ship” as a “theater,” and on its stage, he perceived a diverse cast of characters “made up of nearly all sorts of people, from different countries, of the most opposite modes of thinking on all subjects” (qtd. in Foner 15). Aboard, he experienced the lifestyles of those from various “parties in morals, religion, and politics, as well as trades, callings and professions” (qtd. in Foner 15); but most importantly, the *Cambria* brought Douglass into direct contact with the slaveholders of the South—a territory off-limits for Douglass as one still legally enslaved. His characterization of the steam-ship as a theater is likewise astute in that through the ship’s relocation of its boarders, he was able to participate in a

drama unable to be actualized for him in the antebellum United States. He was brought into proximity with those who could legally detain him if he were in their native states. On the *Cambria*, he was permitted to have a free discussion on the topic of slavery in a transnational forum in spite of the slaveholders' attempts at suppressing an insuppressible open discourse. Based on Douglass's description, the slave owners even tried to quiet him by reminding him of the power they held over him in their respective territories. In other words, they strove to imaginatively relocate him to their regions through chants of "O, I wish I had you in Cuba!" or "I wish I had him in Savannah!" (qtd. in Foner 16). However, on a ship removed from their lands, where the authority resided in the hands of a nonpartisan captain, they were unable to quiet him. The other passengers on the ship requested him to lecture on the topic of slavery, and the captain—disposed to "please all of his passengers"—authorized him to speak "in obedience to [his passengers] wishes" (qtd. in Foner 16).

Douglass's experience on the *Cambria* must have been significant for him in that it permitted a peculiar assertion of African American liberty through the juxtaposition of the "outraged slave," his enslaver and an abstract conception of idealized morality. On the *Cambria*, Douglass experienced an expanded and diversified population in which pro-slavery advocates were but a minority amongst a majority. The majority permitted him to securely speak in front of slave owners, and Douglass took advantage of the opportunity to rhetorically battle with the owners. In one instance, Douglass writes that as he relayed to the crowd that "the colored man, in [his] country, was treated as being without rights," a Mr. Hazzard from Connecticut hollered "That's a lie!" (qtd. in Foner 16) Douglass then, to defend his claim, "endeavor[ed] to substantiate [it] by reading a few extracts from the slave laws"—a tactic which resulted in a mob rush of angry slave owners who had to be subdued by the captain (qtd. in Foner 16). The incident

proved advantageous for Douglass who could now characterize pro-slavery advocates as those “horror-stricken at [the] God-like approach” of “free discussion” (qtd. in Foner 14).

On the other hand, the dispute between Douglass and Smith also reveals the ever present anxiety within antebellum black periodical communities about their ability to sustain the production of a printed material artifact—to maintain the “substance” on which they could preserve what they deemed to be of necessity for the advancement of their race. As Douglass characterizes his periodical as the “star that never sets,” he subtly differentiates it from the short-lived antebellum black periodicals that preceded his. As the committee imagines the existence of a periodical “well-endowed” enough to be “beyond the chance of temporary patronage,” they implicitly remind readers of the financial instability of former black periodicals like *Freedom’s Journal* (1827-1829), *The Rights of All* (1829-1830) and *The Colored American* (1837-1842). Those former periodicals, in spite of their laborers’ tenacious efforts, failed to subsist in a hostile reform climate due to limited circulation, limited staff and limited advertising revenue (Hutton 3, 4). When Douglass and Smith call for permanency and unity—despite their own disunity—they react against the circumstances which produced the precarious print infrastructures of their past. Douglass highlights these “failed” black periodical attempts in his first issue of *The North Star*. He confesses that while “the immediate victims of slavery and prejudice...have frequently undertaken” editorial enterprises, they—“owing to various causes”—have “almost as frequently failed” (“Our Paper and Its Prospects”). He notes that his white anti-slavery “friends” underscored the factual reality of previous black periodical failure to convince him against his current editorial enterprise.²² However, Douglass, in his typical fashion, repurposes the reality of

²² “[William Lloyd] Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and other Boston anti-slavery adherents had persuaded him to give up the idea [of a newspaper], since the only certainty in the Negro press was its financial uncertainty” Ullman, Victor. “The North Star.” *Martin Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971. 77-103. Print. James Cabell Branch Library E 185.97 .D4 U5 1971.

the past. In other words, he only highlights facts of the past to convince potential African American subscribers of their need to revise it. Rather than “convincing [them] of the impolicy of [their] course,” Douglass argues that the past should “confirm them in the necessity, if not the wisdom of their undertaking.” Through print success, Douglass claims that African Americans may be “vindicated from the embarrassing imputations resulting from former non-successes.”

Douglass’s notion of “vindication” through print can be separated into two distinct approaches that his periodical, at one point or another, strives to manifest. For one, as Robert Fanuzzi writes, “Douglass’s advocacy of the colored newspaper had the effect of making the fitness, the equality, even the essence of the race dependent on either the support of black readers or the existence of a reading public” (61). If the newspaper failed, “it testified to a collective tendency toward regression, willing ignorance, and inconstancy, which is what he saw, fairly or not in the history of past African-American journalistic ventures” (Fanuzzi 61). Douglass, along with his initial co-editor Martin R. Delany, quickly discover that a vindication approach which necessitates the existence of a financially supportive black readership base is problematic in that it is “statistically” doomed to fail. A little over a year into *The North Star*’s run—a year during which Douglass regularly prints articles that voraciously petition for new subscribers and timely payments from old ones —Delany writes an article for the April 13, 1849 issue entitled “Highly Important Statistic – Our Cause and Destiny – Endowment of a Newspaper.”²³ Within it, he confesses “that it is morally impossible, in the present state of society, or condition of the colored people of this country, for them to sustain an ably conducted, and efficient newspaper, among them” (2). Through a series of statistics, describing the number of subscribers it takes to support

²³ Delany, Martin R. “Highly Important Statistics—Our Cause and Our Destiny—Endowment of a Newspaper.” *The North Star*. 13 April 1849. 2. Print.

their periodical versus the number of literate blacks able to support one, Delany strives to set the financial impossibility of the “matter in a clear light” (2).

While he does not reveal in the article from where he collected his statistics, over the course of the periodical’s first year, Delany had experienced its financial obstacles firsthand. In addition to contributing articles to *The North Star*, he worked as one of the newspapers’ subscription agents. As Victor Ullman helpfully delineates, Delany travelled the country, diligently lecturing in the anti-slavery cause while simultaneously attempting to promote the new newspaper. The notoriously recorded verbal, and even physical, abuse he experienced in the arduous process displayed the nation’s resistance not only to free blacks but to the anti-slavery cause, in general (Ullman 81). As Delany’s article recognizes, not only black periodicals, but “all reformatory newspapers labor[ed] under disadvantages,” because by “aiming to correct public sentiment,” they are inevitably “in advance of the public.” To be in advance of the public, in this case, unfortunately coincided with unpopularity, “and that which is unpopular,” Delany remarked, “cannot be expected to meet with very particular favor” (“Highly Important Statistics”). The absence of popular favor for the anti-slavery cause not only financially wounded *The North Star*, but it rendered its main content ally and subscription competitor, *The Liberator*, monetarily unstable, as well. Both periodicals regularly struggled with financial difficulties,²⁴ which is a great part of the reason why Douglass’s old friend and editor of *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, tried to discourage Douglass against editorship. Nationally, the mid-nineteenth century was a season of growth for the periodical. While the press industry had previously remained “largely technologically static, serving primarily as expensive, political organs or commercial sheets for educated elites,” by the 1830s, “the introduction of the double

²⁴ Ullman, Victor. Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971. 81. Print.

cylinder stream press and the availability of cheap paper...made daily newspapers possible and affordable” (Gabrial 58). Furthermore, the advent of the telegraph in 1844 cultivated a greater sense of instant interconnectedness across the Nation. However, while technological advancements welcomed the advent of a nation further connected through information, the political climate was not so hospitable to shared news between North and South. As Frank Luther Mott notes in “Attitudes Towards the Press,” “it was the abolition papers that really tested not only the constitutional guarantee of liberty of the press but also the will of the people that such liberty should be maintained in the face of popular disapproval of the cause advocated” (307). Not only did these periodicals struggle to accumulate subscribers, but they faced invasions of their offices and personal attacks on the staff members involved. As noted earlier, Delany was physically attacked in travels. And even white abolitionists—who through their whiteness—could more easily hide or minimize their abolitionists intentions, faced degrees of abuse. Garrison, for instance, was attacked by an angry mob in Boston for his anti-slavery press involvement while mobs “wreck[ed] and destroy[ed] anti-slavery newspaper plants on several occasions” (Mott 307).

A consideration of the general anti-slavery periodical struggles is pertinent to the struggles of the black press because it illustrates that the gradually democratizing press of the mid-nineteenth century was still largely under the control of non-abolitionists. The same public majority which enabled slavery to persist was likewise responsible for funding the country’s subscription-based periodical system. The limited pool of collected funds from the marginalized abolitionists would consequently always be insubstantial. For a black periodical, whose existence innately represented something “anti-slavery” regardless of the content it covered, this limited pool of funds was the only pool from which they could pull apart from overseas aid. Just as

Douglass was fearful that a black national press would steal from his subscription base, Garrison feared that Douglass's periodical would affect the stability of *The Liberator*. While differences of opinion and political technique could more easily co-exist in the mainstream market, the reform market required a non-monolithic unity that its individualized human players were logically not able to perfectly achieve. Financial insecurity, compounded by internal divisions and public hostilities, then compounded again by the ordinary difficulties of running a newspaper, make it surprising that any of the early black periodicals managed to exist at all. As Frankie Hutton reminds us in her discussion of *The Early Black Press in America*, “[g]iven the obstacles with which the editors had to contend, it is a wonder that the black press maintained a positive spirit and that it survived” (3).

The struggles and setbacks of the antebellum black press for sustained survival exemplify that which is problematic about allowing the existence of a print material artifact to be indicative of the capabilities and potential of a people. However, the reliance on print to authenticate identity and citizenship has of course been a distinct reality in the United States—a nation which formed itself through a written document. As Elizabeth McHenry reminds us, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution “secured the status of writing and publication as a condition of legitimacy in the new nation” (42). Likewise, “the press organ,” in Douglass's Northern free black community, naturally began to represent “the bulwark of a free people—in accordance with the tradition of Anglo-American libertarianism” (Fanuzzi 56). What becomes quickly problematic with this framework of obtaining citizenship or American identity through print, are the financial realities of publication that prevent access in spite of capability. Hutton's description of the antebellum black pressmen exposes a persevering, hardworking community, who—when financially able—produced well-edited and well-presented periodicals in spite of the

myriad of obstacles they faced. However, in Douglass's allusion to the early black press, we see the same focus on "inconstancy" that his abolitionist friends referenced to dissuade him from starting his own periodical. The emphasis from Douglass, the committee and the anti-slavery society on the early black press's ostensible failures as opposed to its successes and labors, reveals what print—or the absence of print—hides in an increasingly mediated environment. The antebellum black press's struggle for survival not only exemplifies the general struggle of African Americans for access into the mediated realm—a realm which grew increasingly pervasive during the mid-nineteenth century. It also exposes the distance of the mediated realm from the actual happenings of any given community.

What becomes interesting is how the early black press capitalized on the distance between mediated spaces and reality in an effort to widely disseminate an idealized portrayal of middle-class blackness. As Hutton describes, "the messages of the [antebellum black] press were mostly positive and humanitarian from a small, genteel group of blacks for over a quarter of a century, despite the ostensible pejorations faced by the entire race" (Hutton). Although their periodicals were "operated on a financial shoestring," their monetary issues were "overshadowed by high ideals and remarkably good presentation" (Hutton 5). Their ideals found an established foundation in the "democratic ideals spawned by the Revolution and the United States Constitution" (Hutton xiii). To evidence the manifestation of these ideals in their communities, their columns "pragmatically focused on upbeat news and activities from free black communities" while giving less attention to "horrors of slavery and the ills and crimes" of the community (Hutton 4). In short, what we see in the antebellum black press's columns is an attempt at insertion into the American narrative in spite of its unwillingness to accept them in actuality. In spite of the inconstancy of their print, which seemed to reflect their exclusion from

the narrative, the news they choice to print could maintain the vision of inclusion for which they strove.

We see the same inclination to maintain the visionary space through the Committee's characterization of their proposed newspaper as a "fixed fact." In an interesting repositioning of financial priorities, the committee goes as far as to set the acquisition of a press before the financial promotion of black education. For while the committee declares that education is "the most powerful means for [black] advancement," they uphold the press as "the most immediately necessary" for inspiring the "education of the intellect, of the will, and of character." They insist on keeping the "very fact" of educational need and advancement before the eyes of the black community through the "fixed fact" of their periodical. "Towards" this "fixed fact," they say "the strong and weak amongst [them] would look with confidence and hope; from which would flow a steady steam of comfort and exhortation to the weary strugglers." In their preoccupation with establishing the fact of their periodical before the eyes of the black community, the committee suggests the ability of the mediated realms portrayal of idealized reality to eventually motivate the reform of setbacks faced at large in the black community. They suggest that by magnifying and widely distributing the accomplishments of a segment of the black population in print, the whole will eventually reflect the few. It is therefore the strategically selected content of their periodical that becomes the method of vindication.

Douglass's periodical also attempted to "vindicate" the race from "past imputations" by strategically capitalizing on the distance between the mediated realm of his inclusive periodical landscape and the actual reality in which he and his fellow African Americans struggled for inclusion. Although Douglass had hoped for the existence of a black readership large enough and financially equipped enough to support and sustain his periodical, he was "so determined to

signal the advancement of the race toward its mental liberty that he accepted a white subscription base” (Fanuzzi 61). As his 1848 summation of *The North Star*’s first volume indicates, Douglass, after a year of financial instability, confessed that “a newspaper cannot live by sympathy alone,” but “depends for its existence upon something more substantial—it must live by money. Money.” Likewise, in the spring of 1848, when his newspaper was on the brink of financial demise, he petitioned old friend from England Julia Griffiths to manage the finances of the paper and fundraise, which she did from that point onward (Ullman 90). Douglass allowed the continued patronage of Gerritt Smith and encouraged the merge of his paper with the Liberty Party. His subscription base remained throughout *The North Star*’s run as five white subscribers to every one black subscriber.²⁵ In short, he at least temporarily relinquished his dream of a fully black managed and black funded periodical in exchange for the monetary substance that could keep his periodical afloat. He “never wavered in his conviction that black readers could and should announce themselves to [the] world and manifest their innate capacities” (Fanuzzi 62), yet he more than likely pragmatically recognized that sustaining the unique content of his periodical could “signal” to the world those innate capacities even before they could be pervasively manifested by an oppressed race.

²⁵ Ullman, Victor. Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971. 81. Print.

Chapter Two: Douglass's 'Mute and Inglorious' Wheatley

Fancy might now her silken pinions try
To rise from earth, and sweep th' expanse on high:
From Tithon's bed now might Aurora rise,
Her cheeks all glowing with celestial dyes,
While a pure stream of light o'erflows the skies.
The monarch of the day I might behold,
And all the mountains tipt with radiant gold,
But I reluctant leave the pleasing views,
Which Fancy dresses to delight the Muse;
Winter austere forbids me to aspire,
And northern tempests damp the rising fire;
They chill the tides of Fancy's flowing sea,
Cease then, my song, cease the unequal lay.

Phillis Wheatley, 'On Imagination'²⁶

The American abolitionist periodical *Frederick Douglass' Paper* first finds a place for Phillis Wheatley's name in its columns in its September 23, 1853 issue. Douglass had launched the first issue of his newspaper under the name *The North Star* almost five years' prior in December of 1847.²⁷ As the mission statement in his first issue indicates, he began the newspaper in hopes of creating a space where African Americans could "demand their [own] redress" in the cause of human equality—a space where they could "be [their] own representatives and advocates not exclusively, but peculiarly—not distinct from, but in

²⁶ Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings. ed. by Vincent Carretta. New York: Penguin Group, 2001. 37. Print.

²⁷ Douglass renamed his newspaper *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in 1851 after he publicly separated from Garrison's strict moral suasion to adopt the political activism of Gerrit Smith's Liberty Party. Merging with Smith's *Liberty Party Paper* helped him to keep his floundering periodical financially afloat • Levine, Robert S. "Uncle Tom's Cabin in Frederick Douglass' Paper." *American Literature* Spring 1992: 72-73. Print.

connection with [their] white friends.”²⁸ However, it is almost five years into his weekly periodical’s run before Douglass prints an article that invokes Wheatley’s representative status as the first published African-American poet. In an article entitled “Glances at Our Condition: Our Literature,” a journalist writing under the pseudonym DION laments the absence of the “the name[s]” of “colored American[s]” on American literature’s “rolls of heraldry.”²⁹ While the “descendants of Africa” have proven that they “are not wanting in poetic power” through the international fame of France’s Alexander Dumas and Russia’s Alexander Pushkin, DION looks to poet Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” to express that the Miltons of the African-American community have remained “mute and inglorious” “To their eyes” DION infers, that knowledge chose not to “unroll” “her ample page,” but instead “chill” slavery—he interjects “repress’d their noble rage.” DION considers Wheatley, who “may have sung in brief, yet admirable snatches, while in her chains,” along with poet George Moses Horton—the first black poet to be published in the Southern United States—as exceptions to his evaluation. Yet he mourns that the “lamp which...burned so brilliantly” in the days “when dark-browed Egypt gave letters to Greece” now “flicker—weak and fitfully” after “the baleful damps of oppression...sought to extinguish” it. Finally, he considers forms of materiality. He regrets that even the admirable works of contemporaneous African-American writers—such as Frederick Douglass—must be “contained within the narrow limits of pamphlets, or the columns of newspapers,” all of which are only “ephemeral caskets, whose destruction entails the destruction of the gems which they contain.”

²⁸ “Our Paper and Its Prospects.” *The North Star*. 3 December 1847: 2. Print.

²⁹ “Glances at our Condition.—No. 1: Our Literature.” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. 23 September 1853: 3. Print. All subsequent quotations in the paragraph come from DION’s editorial.

DION's multifaceted evaluation of the absence of renowned African-American authors in the United States' literary canon, may easily suggest to post-twentieth-century readers the idea of an exclusive literary production economy—an economy from which DION implicitly excludes the newspaper, but an economy that Douglass's periodical still sought to affect and become a part of through the rise of the American press as a democratizing print agent in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁰ A number of articles and excerpts that made their way through the intensive screening of Douglass's editorial control, betray Douglass's trust in the newspapers ability to widely disseminate and preserve the ephemeral nature of the written word. In his first issue, he excerpts a passage from the tenth chapter of Alexis De Tocqueville's work *Democracy in America* in which the the French historian argues that “nothing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same time;” consequently, periodicals “become more necessary in proportion as men become more equal.”³¹ On March 24, 1848, Douglass prints an unsigned conceit—possibly attributed to a Mrs. Balfour—in which the writer invests the newspaper with a similar quality of ubiquitous power. Within “The Orator and the Newspaper,” the author asserts that “[t]he Orator speaks but to a few hundreds” while “the newspaper addresses millions.”³² She then comments on the newspapers ability to preserve the widely disseminated word by asserting that “the words of the orator may die on the air” but “the language of the newspaper is stamped on tablets as imperishable as marble” and “the one shines for an hour” while “the other glows for all time.” In summation, printing “makes the orator himself more than an orator; it catches up his dying words, and breathes into them the breath of life.”

³⁰ In his evaluation of the partisan antebellum American press, Brian Gabriel notes that while the press industry had previously remained “largely technologically static, serving primarily as expensive, political organs or commercial sheets for educated elites,” by the 1830s, “the introduction of the double cylinder stream press and the availability of cheap paper...made daily newspapers possible and affordable” (Gabrial 58).

³¹ “Newspapers.” *The North Star*. 3 December 1847. 3. Print.

³² “The Orator and The Newspaper.” *The North Star*. 24 March 1848: 4. Print.

I include these ostensibly digressive excerpts from Douglass's newspaper only to assert that Douglass believed it was within his editorial ability and responsibility to make accessible DION's "ample page of knowledge" to the black community through his periodical space. We see his persistent democratization of knowledge in his constant entreaties to the African-American community to participate in periodical literary communities—particularly his own periodical literary community. Rather than continuing to contribute articles to William Lloyd Garrison's the *Liberator* or the *Anti-Slavery Standard* as he did in the early 1840s, Douglass labored, lectured, struggled and went into personal financial debt all to claim the editorial authority that would enable him control what works would be printed on *his* "ample page" of knowledge. In short, he sought to determine for the black community—and for those observing the black community nationally and abroad—what current events and literary works they should be knowledgeable about. Moreover, he viewed his newspaper as means of preventing the voices of African-American from being rendered "mute and inglorious." As Elizabeth McHenry writes in *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, "among Douglass's other editorial goals, he sought to use his newspaper to "claim artistic license for black literary arts and the works of black authors whose writing, with the rising popularity of the slave narrative in the 1830s and 1840s, had come to be valued only for its veracity and political force" (116).

However, as Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues in "Wheatley to Douglass: The Politics of Displacement," it is the usefulness of the slave narrative to the abolitionist movement—and Douglass's narrative in particular—that renders Wheatley relatively "mute" in the abolitionist periodicals of the 1840s and 1850s. Although Wheatley—as the then representative African American writer of letters—enjoyed the reprinting of 37 of her poems in the *Liberator* as well as

biographic sketches and accolades of her literary ability in periodicals such as *The Christian Examiner*, *The Anti-Slavery Record* and the black-run *Freedom's Journal* between 1827 and 1836, Gates argues that after the publication of Douglass's narrative in 1845, "Wheatley disappeared almost entirely from the abolitionist press" (50). After mentioning a few exceptions, Gates writes that "between 1845 and 1860...only the *Anglo-American*, among all the abolitionist and black periodical publications, discussed Wheatley and her place in the history of black letters" (51).

Wheatley's brief inclusions in *Frederick Douglass's Paper* seem to have escaped Gates's assessment. However, her minor mentions do little to dramatically affect his argument. Other than the clause she receives in DION's 1853 article, Wheatley is only mentioned one other time in Douglass's periodical between 1847 and 1855.³³ The second appearance of her name comes again not through Douglass's voice but through a letter to the editor submitted from a contributor hiding under the acronym H.N.G. In his letter, the contributor claims that he has "just come across a little book of poems written in the year 1773 by Phillis Wheatley, negro servant to Mr. John Wheatley and printed by Archibald Bell, Bookseller No. 8, Aldgate Street, London." The contributor—ostensibly oblivious to Wheatley's many reprintings in the abolitionist press of the 1830s and 1840s—proceeds to provide a "sketch" of Wheatley that is simply a reprinting of John Wheatley's 1772 description of his "negro servant" in the 1773 first edition of her poems. Lastly, the contributor suggests to Douglass's periodical "a specimen or two of [her] shorter poems"—including "On Being Brought from Africa to America," "A Hymn to Humanity" and "Ode to Neptune"—before promising to send more of her poems to the periodical in the future for

³³ According to *Accessible Archives*, which currently holds the most exhaustive digitized collection of Douglass's periodicals, *Frederick Douglass's Paper*—which followed his first paper *The North Star* (1847-1851)—was printed from 1851 to 1863. However, both *Accessible Archives* and Gale's *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive* only have complete runs of his issues through 1855. Unfortunately, DION's warning that we may lose the printed "gems" of thought through the "ephemeral caskets" of periodicals finds its validity through over eight years of undigitized issues of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

Douglass to reprint if he deemed them “acceptable.” Whether or not the contributor stayed true to his promise and whether or not Douglass did deem her poems acceptable for future reprinting is outside my current realm of research possibilities.³⁴ However, even if Douglass did choose to continue reprinting Wheatley’s poems either through the contributor H.N.G. or apart from the contributor, his considerable silence concerning Wheatley is striking, considering the previously mentioned democratic literary concerns of his periodical. The fact that he never directly addresses Wheatley in his own words is also noticeable. Douglass often contributed his personal editorial writings—and in one instance, his personal fiction—to his newspaper. He could have used the growing credibility of his now “imperishable” and pervasive editorial voice to more firmly, through repetition, affix Wheatley’s name to the “rolls of heraldry.” Instead, Douglass remains “mute” concerning her, and allows the coded, confining, eighteenth-century description of her former slave master to portray her in his columns. Douglass, who was unsurprisingly an avid reader of the abolitionist press, regularly reprinted articles from similarly minded periodicals, and he had ample opportunities to reprint sketches already written on her by those periodicals. His decision to not even reprint some of her poems that regularly decked the columns of the *Liberator* suggest that he actively chose not to reprint Wheatley in the early stages of his newspaper.

Gates likewise seems to view Douglass as more than passively forgetful of Wheatley but perhaps actively dismissive of her work, possibly for the covert motive of obtaining her title as the representative African-American writer—a title which Douglass, after all, did obtain.³⁵

Douglass’s overgrown ego was often identified by his contemporaries and particularly so by his

³⁴ Two of the most exhaustive digital archives of Douglass’s periodicals have not digitized his issues from 1856-1863; My hope is that those issue are not all missing or destroyed.

³⁵ Gates supports his argument through a discussion of Douglass’s response to an editor who asked Douglass “for the names of famous black women authors.” Gates writes that Douglass “scornfully” wrote back to the editor “to say that he could think of none, and he could think of none because there were none. He also chastised his correspondent for claiming too much for black women writers and thereby engendering the contempt of white Americans who knew better” (51).

fellow black abolitionists. Gates's implication that Douglass may have actively sought to displace Wheatley is certainly plausible, however, Gates's assessment is perhaps reductive of some of Douglass's larger political objectives. Douglass, indeed claimed to be an advocate of African-American letters, and it is possible that he had other reservations or concerns about Wheatley's place in his anti-slavery newspaper. Consequently, if we momentarily refrain from a judgment on Douglass's narcissism, it becomes necessary to evaluate what elements of Wheatley's verse may have disqualified her, in Douglass's eyes, from being a part of his "ample page."

William Cowper's Presence in Abolitionist Periodicals

The frequent presence of British poet William Cowper's name and verse in Douglass's periodical may provide insight into some of the poetic qualifications of Douglass's space that prevented Wheatley from finding a noticeable place in it. While Wheatley's name appeared in the newspaper only twice between the years 1851 and 1855, Cowper is either referenced or quoted in Douglass's columns on at least 23 different occasions between the years 1848 and 1855.³⁶ Perhaps a comparison of Wheatley's mid-nineteenth century inclusions in the abolitionist press to Cowper's is not a fair one. As a free male British citizen, Cowper had the luxury of penning politically charged, overtly anti-slavery verse in which he strove to vocalize the "complaint" of a fictionalized enslaved man. Cowper, through his friendship with John Newton, enjoyed the publishing support of the newly established Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. As the British anti-slavery movement grew during the last two decades of the eighteenth-century and into the nineteenth century, Cowper's verses were adapted into ballads of

³⁶ To peruse William Cowper's references in the *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, look to issues published on the following date: *The North Star*: February 11, 1848; March 10, 1848; April 28, 1848; May 26, 1848; June 30, 1848; October 5, 1849; October 26, 1849. *Frederick Douglass' Paper*: July 24, 1851; December 25, 1851; September 24, 1852; October 8, 1852; October 15, 1852; August 5, 1853; January 6, 1854; February 24, 1854; April 21, 1854; June 2, 1854; October 27, 1854; November 17, 1854; November 24, 1854; January 18, 1855; September 14, 1855; December 14, 1855.

the anti-slavery cause, and in at least one instance—a children’s book. The quotability of Cowper’s partisan stanzas earned him epigraphical access onto the title pages of late eighteenth-century British reform works, such as the third edition of *The History of Mary Prince* and the tenth edition of William Fox’s *On the Propriety of Refraining from the Use of West India Sugar and Rum*; his stanzas would only persist in their profitability to the American Anti-Slavery movement of the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, even if we only look to the stanzas excerpted on the titles above, we can trace their persistent presence in nineteenth-century periodicals. The tenth edition title page of Fox’s address excerpts the third stanza of Cowper’s “The Negro’s Complaint,” which ends with the lines “think how many backs have smarted / for the sweets your cane affords.” The same two lines are woven into the anti-slavery editorials from five American periodicals and two British periodicals between 1832 and 1851.³⁷ The third edition title page of *Mary Prince* excerpts parts of the final two stanza of Cowper’s “The Negro’s Complaint,” which contains lines such as “Deem our nation brutes no longer” and “By our sufferings, since ye brought us / To the man-degrading mart.” The verses from *Prince*’s title page excerpt can likewise be found in the editorials of the American press on at least five different occasions between 1831 and 1848.³⁸ I mention these instances not only to exhibit the transatlantic persistence of Cowper’s verse, but also to demonstrate the usefulness of the fictionalized enslaved voice he crafted in “The Negro’s Complaint” to the abolitionist cause.

³⁷ For mentions of the third stanza of Cowper’s “The Negro’s Complaint” in the British and American anti-slavery press, look to: “Cruelties of West India Slavery.” *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*. 1 November 1832: 1-2. Print. “Ladies’ Repository.” *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*. 1 June 1833: 2-3. Print. “What Does Your Sugar Cost.” A Cottage Conversation on the Subject of British Negro Slavery.” *The Emancipator: And Journal of Public Morals*. 20 May, 1834: 4. Print. “The Iniquitous Sugar Bounty System.” *The British Emancipator: Under the Sanction of the Central Negro Emancipation Committee*. 27 June 1838: 3. Print. “General Intelligence: Beet Sugar.” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. 11 February 1841: 3. Print. “The Family: Sugar, and Rice, and Cotton.” *Liberty Standard*. 16 November 1842: 4. Print. “Free Labor vs. Slave Labor.” *The Non-Slaveholder*. 9 December 1850: 7. Print. “Free Labor vs. Slave Labor.” *The Anti-Slavery Reporter: Under the Sanction of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society*. 1 January 1851: 15. Print.

³⁸ For mentions of the seventh stanza of Cowper’s “The Negro’s Complaint” in the British and American anti-slavery press, look to: “An Ingenious Sermon.” *The Liberator*. 19 March 1831: 1. Print. Junius. “Inconsistency.” *The Liberator*. 11 June 1831: 2. Print. P. J. “Gerrit Smith.” *The Liberator*. 21 March 1835: 1. Print. “Extract from Benjamin F. Hughes’ Eulogium on the Character of Wilberforce.” *The Colored American*. 13 May 1837: 1. Print. “A Tribute for the Negro.” *The Non-Slaveholder*. 1 April 1848: 11. Print.

Ironically, as one actually enslaved, Wheatley did not have the privilege to overtly vocalize her own complaints; any complaints she wished to exist in her verse had to be skillfully coded underneath the subsuming conspicuous messages of her verse. When Douglass began his conspicuously *anti-slavery* periodical in 1847, his freedom had recently been purchased by British supporters. Even when he wrote his 1845 slave narrative as a still legally enslaved man, he composed it on “free” Northern soil and through the protection and support of the Garrisonians. When Wheatley sought to publish a volume of her poems in 1772, she was still an enslaved woman navigating under the gaze of her enslavers. Therefore, there is a dependable possibility that Wheatley, recognizing their gaze and the gazes of those from literary economy on which she depended for publication, censored her content accordingly.

In his introduction to Phillis Wheatley’s *Complete Poems*, Vincent Carretta focuses on Wheatley’s tact for “exploit[ing]” the “legal as well entrepreneurial opportunities” accessible to her in the time periods and geographies in which she operated. While her works have been slighted in the later decades of the twentieth century for the Christian piety they display at the expense of a condemnation of slavery, it was piety of her verses that probably enabled her works to be published. Through the assistance of the Wheatley family, Phillis—who was unable to find a publisher in the United States—found one in London’s Archibald Bell—“a relatively minor publisher and bookseller of primarily religious texts” (Carretta xvi). Her patronage for the volume came through Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon and a devout Methodist participant in the eighteenth-century religious revival. Wheatley had already captured the Countess’s attention through an elegy she addressed to her in 1771 honoring Hastings’ late chaplain George Whitefield (Carretta xv), and addressing an elegy to Hastings was a skillful move on Wheatley’s part, for although Hastings owned slaves herself, she would become known

for publishing the “religiously-oriented works” of black authors such Olaudah Equiano and John Marrant (Carretta xvi). Prior to the publication of Wheatley’s volume in 1773, the countess had already supported James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’s narrative in 1770. As Carretta acknowledges it is likely that Wheatley would have been aware of the Countess’s publication Gronniosaw’s narrative, and therefore, likely that she took advantage of Countess’s religious predilection. Furthermore, the evangelical neoclassicism of her verse with its iambic pentameter and rhymed couplets conformed to traditional aesthetic of England’s greats. Through both form and content, she was able to gain cultural capital in London that Carretta claims may have enabled her to publish subsequent volumes if she had stayed in London.

However, Wheatley returned to the United States shortly after the publication of *Poems*. In spite of the recent passage of the Mansfield Decision which would have permitted her to live “freely” in England, she returned to the States to care for her dying mistress. She returned possibly a decade too soon, before the growing anti-slavery sentiments in England could have afforded to her the similar freedoms of expression afforded to Cowper and Douglass. While the content of her verses helped her to achieve access into a religious publishing circle, perhaps part of the reason Douglass did not quote more Wheatley in his columns was because her verse did not do the denunciatory work that his periodical prided itself on. In short, it seems that what gained Wheatley access into one literary economy potentially prevented her from excelling in another. The style of verse potentially contributed to her disqualification from Douglass’s periodical, as well. As Rowan Richardo Phillips reminds us, Wheatley was born right before the onset of English Romanticism. Rather than looking to Coleridge and Byron, both of which were also frequently quoted in Douglass’s columns, she looked to Pope (Phillips 16), and the Romantic idealism that largely lent its aesthetic to the anti-slavery movement did not largely

characterize her verse. Cowper, on the other hand, as a forerunner of Romantic poetry, more easily fit into Douglass's periodical aesthetic. Perhaps if Wheatley had not died so young, or perhaps if she had stayed in England, or had sought to publish in England a decade later, her reputation today, and her reputation throughout the abolitionist movement and the Civil Rights movement may have been different. She may have been known not just as the first African-American poet but as a spokeswoman for human equality. As recent scholarship of her verse looks behind her conspicuous messages to the many possible meanings the ambiguity of verse conveys, her reputation seems to move in that direction.

Chapter 3: Transatlantic Aesthetic Swapping in “The Heroic Slave” and *Bleak House*

Though Winter frowns to Fancy's raptur'd eyes
The fields may flourish, and gay scenes arise;
The frozen deeps may break their iron bands,
And bid their waters murmur o'er the sands.
Fair Flora may resume her fragrant reign,
And with her flow'ry riches deck the plain;
Sylvanus may diffuse his honours round,
And all the forest may with leaves be crown'd:
Show'rs may descend, and dews their gems disclose,
And nectar sparkle on the blooming rose.

Phillis Wheatley, “On Imagination”³⁹

In its April 8, 1852 issue, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* announced its intention to “commence the publication of Charles Dickens' last work” in its next issue.⁴⁰ The periodical would “treat” its readers to the “celebrated Story” *Bleak House*, and it assured them that it would continue to reprint its installments “from week to week as promptly as [they] receive[d]” them (2). Dickens, himself, had only begun his monthly serialization of the soon-to-be twenty-part novel in March of that year. Yet, losing no time at all, New York's newly established *Harper's Magazine* reprinted *Bleak House's* first number of four chapters in its April 1852 monthly issue. Following pseudo-plagiaristic suit, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*—which often included literary notices on *Harper's* contents—reprinted the entirety of the novel in smaller segments on its fourth page in no less than 80 of its weekly issues from April 15, 1852 to December of 1853.

³⁹ Phillis Wheatley Complete Writings. ed. by Vincent Carretta. New York: Penguin Group, 2001. 37. Print.

⁴⁰ “Following the wake of the *Boston Commonwealth*” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. 8 April 1852. 2. Print.

Prior to April 1852, Douglass's seven-columned, fourth page had been more or less devoted to poetry, short fictional works, literary notices, artist sketches, descriptions of national literatures, descriptions of the latest technologies, and a variety of community advertisements. For the next 80 issues, other artist works and artist descriptions were nudged off the page, as chapters of *Bleak House* monopolized up to three to four columns in an issue at a time.

Daniel Hack's 2008 article "Close Reading at a Distance: The African Americanization of *Bleak House*" first directed lengthy attention to Douglass's extravagant Victorian serialization. More recently, in 2017, Hack expanded the thematic threads of that article into his latest book *Reaping Something New: African American Transformations of Victorian Literature*. In hopes of outlining an "underexplored transatlantic, interracial encounter," Hack attempts to analyze black American appropriations of Victorian texts through a technique he calls "close reading at a distance"—or, a recognition that the "methods of close reading and formal analysis, on the one hand, and of book history and reception studies, on the other, need to be combined if we are to grasp as fully as possible *either* a text's intrinsic features *or* its cultural impact, let alone the relationship between the two" (4, 23-24). Primarily focused on how black usages of Victorian texts highlight the absence of black communities in Victorian texts, Hack's Andersonian⁴¹ analysis of *Bleak House* thematically reduces Dickens's novel into one that "does not merely fail to imagine a community that includes Africans, African Americans, slaves, and people of color in general," but also "consolidates the national community it does imagine by means of their exclusion" (24). Stressing *Bleak House's* critique of the mid-nineteenth-century British anti-slavery movement, Hack finds Dickens's novel to be incompatible with Douglass's impassioned

⁴¹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983. Print • Hack utilizes Anderson's *Imagined Communities* to remind us that "the cultivation of national identity" was one of the novel's forms primary "cultural task" (Hack 24).

exhortations for a transatlantic reform movement—one that would dismantle the institution of slavery not just in the British empire, but in the United States, as well.

Hack's contention is not without basis. *Bleak House* is home to one of Dickens's most unredeemable female caricatures, Mrs. Jellyby, whose subtle self-aggrandizement, household pandemonium and satirically vague "African Project"—dedicated to the "cultivation of the coffee berry - AND the natives"⁴²—mocks those who would flippantly devote their totalized energies to the latest in-vogue, overseas cause at the expense of those nearest to them.⁴³

Dickens's critique of his "telescopic philanthropist"⁴⁴ finds a direct vocal outlet in Mrs. Jellyby's foil, Dickens's morally immaculate protagonist Esther Summerson. Esther timidly asserts after her first encounter with the Jellyby's domestic chaos that "perhaps" it would have been "right" for Mrs. Jellyby "to begin with the obligations of home...and that perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them" (*BH* 76).

Throughout *Bleak House*, Esther actualizes her own counsel by seeing and attending to those overlooked people within her "circle of duty" that the fashionable society in her vicinity neglect to witness. She becomes, what James Buzard calls a "boundary-crossing" character—a character utilized by the British Social-Problem novelists of the 1840s to promote "communication and commitment across class boundaries" by gaining access into the "alien domain of workers" (105, 106). Like Hack, Buzard ultimately sees *Bleak House* as a novel which attempts to cultivate the romance of an imagined specific British culture by means of foreign exclusion. Buzard argues that while Esther and Dickens's omniscient narrator manage to connect England's stratified class

⁴² *Bleak House*. ed. by Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. 44. Print. • From hereon referred to in-text with page numbers as *BH*.

⁴³ Contemporaneous readers of *Bleak House* would have understood Mrs. Jellyby's African Project to be an allusion to the failed Niger Expedition of 1841. Led by Thomas Fowell Buxton's *Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade and for the Civilization of Africa*, the missionary effort attempted to promote increased trade on the West African coast and spread Christianity to its peoples. The mission quickly came to an end due to rampant disease.

⁴⁴ The first chapter in which Mrs. Jellyby appears is entitled "Telescopic Philanthropy"—a clear stab at Mrs. Jellyby's inability to see those close to her due to her fixation with those at a distance. This chapter appears in the first published number of *Bleak House*. Consequently, Douglass and/or his editorial staff would have had been able to read its contents before deciding to reprint the entirety of the novel in *Frederick Douglass' Papers*.

system through their visions and interactions with all strata, Dickens enforces an exclusive British national identity by preventing his narrator from flying off into territories outside of England's mainland. By forging the connections within the mainland and disavowing the connections without, Dickens presents the the global as "an unmappably vague and destructive realm" (Buzard 113). When caricaturing British philanthropists who invest overseas, Buzard claims that *Bleak House's* omission of the actual affect of their charity in these distant realms convinces readers to protest against a "waste of resources needed in the bounded region" (Buzard 116).

In line with Buzard's argument, Hack attempts to display Dickens's defense of transatlantic reform to be antithetical to Douglass's endorsement of it. Turning to Douglass's often anthologized speech "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,"⁴⁵ Hack attempts to reveal Douglass's trust in the developing technologies of his age to undo the bounds of nations and to facilitate clear discourses across oceans. Within his speech, he idealistically argues that "thoughts expressed on one side of the Atlantic" can be "distinctly heard on the other" (qtd. in Foner 205). He finds hope in the belief that "no abuse, no outrage...can now hide itself from all-pervading light" (qtd. in Foner 205). "No nation" he insists, "can now shut itself up from the surrounding world, and trot round in the same old path of its fathers without interference" (qtd. in Foner 205). Douglass's faith in print mediation's ability to uncover hidden atrocities and to mobilize efficacious, transatlantic, anti-slavery campaigns seems to undercut *Bleak House's* critique of Britons who would participate in increasingly fashionable, inefficacious, anti-slavery campaigns at the expense of London's working class poor. Consequently, Hack determines that

⁴⁵ "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro, Speech at Rochester, New York, July 5, 1852." *Frederick Douglass Selected Speeches and Writings*. ed. by Philip S. Foner. Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999. 188-206. Print. (subsequently cited as "July Forth") • As Hack notes, Douglass's reprinted his speech in the June 10, 1852 issue of *Frederick Douglass' Papers*. The inclusion is noteworthy in that it puts the speech in material proximity with Dickens's *Bleak House*.

while *Bleak House*'s inclusion in *Frederick Douglass' Papers* could be chalked up to Douglass's unawareness of the text's localism at the printing of the first four-chaptered number, Douglass's decision to continue reprinting the installments, even as the text's problematic ideologies unraveled, more likely display Douglass's willingness to persist in enlisting "the universal favorite of the people" in the cause...despite himself" (28).

Like Hack, I also assert in this chapter that Douglass's periodical, aware of Dickens's unparalleled popularity, sought to enlist the British author's fame for its own objectives. Namely, I consider how *Bleak House* may have been of use to Douglass in bringing attention to his only known fictional work "The Heroic Slave." However, straying from Hack's distant close reading—a reading, which in this case, strips *Bleak House* of its thematic complexity by reducing it to prejudiced nationalistic propaganda—I analyze those other "intrinsic features" of *Bleak House* which may have been appealing to Douglass as a complex, politically pragmatic intellectual, who like Dickens, was highly attuned to the moral pretensions of nations. By freeing Douglass's periodical from the obligation to "African Americanize" Victorian literature—or to be preeminently preoccupied with highlighting the absence of black communities in Victorian literature—I also hope to free Douglass from Hack's presumptions about his static mono-ideological reformist thinking. As I have previously argued, Douglass was in many cases willing to capitalize on England's assertions of moral superiority to shame the United States out of its pretensions. He was also more than willing to utilize English funds and English literature to keep his periodical afloat. Yet his speeches, observations abroad, and possibly even his inclusion of *Bleak House* suggest his willingness to also shed light on England's pretensions to liberty and light when useful to him. As Paul Giles asserts, Douglass, "like other African Americans of his time" could dualistically view "Britain as a safe haven in legal terms" while also recognizing that

the “country’s forms of social oppression” might be “more insidious than some of those holding a candle to the memory of William Wilberforce would have cared to admit” (138). We see Douglass’s willingness to even momentarily align himself and his cause with England’s oppressed in a recorded instance noted by his biographer William S. McFeely:

“In one of [Douglass’s] rare metaphoric uses of the word “slavery,” which a reporter took down with care, he “spoke of ‘political slavery in England’” and of “slavery in the army,...the navy, and, looking upon the laboring population, he contemplated them as slaves. He then asked, ‘Why does not England set the example by doing away with these forms of slavery at home, before it called upon the United States to do so?’” This odd, upside-down bit of anti-anti-Americanism was coupled with a firm declaration of common purpose with Chartists” (141)

This would not be the only time that Douglass, like *Bleak House*, encouraged a nation to focus its attention first and foremost on its domestic needs. During the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society (whose recorded proceedings were published in *The North Star*) Douglass admonished the American church for “printing tracts and bibles, sending missionaries abroad to convert the heathen” and “expending her money in various ways for the promotion of the Gospel in foreign lands” while “the slave not only lies forgotten—uncared for, but is trampled underfoot by the very churches of the land.”⁴⁶ Douglass even asserts that American sympathies for Pope Pius IX’s Catholic emancipation efforts prove “inconsistent” while the United States was “yet a nation of slaveholders” (2). Turning to John Greenleaf Whittier’s poem “Our Countrymen in Chains” he insists that expressing such sympathy for the “oppressed of other lands,” might earn them the rebuke: “Go loose your fettered slaves at home / Then turn and ask the like us” (2).

Whether challenging the collective self-righteousness of England or the United States, Douglass seems keen on recommending that both nations remove the plank of systemic

⁴⁶ “Fourth Annual Meeting of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society.” *The North Star*. 7 January 1848. 2. Print.

oppression from their own land before seeking to remove it from another. However, even as he enforces a prioritization of domestic reform similar to that which Buzard and Hack espy in *Bleak House*, Douglass was also inclined to rhetorically bring distant geographies into proximity with one another when it served the immediate cause before him. In an article published in *The North Star* entitled “France,” Douglass writes in response to the French revolution that:

“... while Europe is becoming republican, we are becoming despotic; while France is contending for freedom, we are extending slavery... While humanity, justice, and freedom are thawing the icy heart of Russia into life, and causing, even there, the iron hand of despotism to relax its terrible grasp upon the enslaved peasantry... we of the United states are buried in stone-dead indifference.”⁴⁷

All of these invocations and dismissals of foreign geographies exhibit Douglass’s elastic propensity to rhetorically engage with and disconnect with the progresses and shortcomings of nations whenever it best served the argument at hand. Hack’s assessment of *Bleak House’s* incompatibility within Douglass’s periodical suggest Douglass’s incapacity to recognize England’s legislative usefulness while also critically acknowledging its fashionable pretensions. Rather than discounting texts within Douglass’s periodical as incompatible with his presumed ideologies, these texts may instead give us insight into Douglass’s expansive, diverse and, at times, necessarily contradictory understandings of his nuanced world, and its debatable problems and solutions.

Moreover, any supposed contradictions within Douglass’s periodical may also attune our awareness to the contradictions which persist in dynamic orator’s speeches as byproducts of his perpetual rhetorical maneuverings. Even as Douglass’s July Fourth speech voices hope in the developing technologies of his age to shed light on national atrocities, minutes earlier, it also reminds his audience that “the distance between [his current] platform and the slave plantation

⁴⁷ “France.” *The North Star*. 28 April, 1848. 2. Print.

from which [he] escaped is considerable—and the difficulties to be overcome in getting from the latter to the former, are by no means slight” (qtd. in Foner 189). Just as it defends the decision of the Founding Fathers to free themselves from “tyrannical” England, it also esteems England’s proclaimed moral supremacy, for “[binding] up the wounds of the West Indian slave” (qtd. in Foner 202). And just as it implicatively promotes the “interference” of nations in the unjust affairs of neighboring countries, it also censures the United States for publically condemning the “tyrants of Russia and Austria” only to be hypocritical “body-guards” for the “the tyrants of Virginia and Carolina” (qtd. in Foner 202). Within Douglass’s speeches (as in Douglass’s periodicals), we see his ability to marry an almost naïve hopefulness for the future with the impossibilities of the present—to acknowledge the principled progress of nations while also acknowledging the ways in which their globally proclaimed principles cover up the injustices that exist within their own territories. Within *Bleak House*, we sense Dickens’s weariness with England’s pretensions to moral supremacy as he caricatures those who are oblivious to the domestic chaos their global preoccupations produce. A similar weariness—or, to alternatively describe it—a similar “blasting reproach”⁴⁸ exists in Douglass’s Fourth of July speech as he upbraids the United States for being on “fire at the mention of liberty for France or for Ireland” while being “as cold as an iceberg at the thought of liberty for the enslaved of America” (qtd. in Foner 203).

Generally, Douglass and Dickens become similarly aligned in the themes of their critiques and proposed solutions even as they primarily advocate for the oppressed in their respective nations. Positioning *Bleak House* alongside Douglass’s four-part novella, “The Heroic Slave” complicates Hack’s conclusions about *Bleak House*’s periodical incompatibility by

⁴⁸ Douglass asserts in “The Meaning of the July Fourth to Negro”: “O! had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would, to-day, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke” (Foner 196)

bringing into relief the similar print culture anxieties displayed in Douglass's and Dickens's fiction and the similar literary strategies employed by both social activists to shed public light on themselves and their respective causes. Namely, we see that Dickens was just as willing to capitalize on the fashionableness of American anti-slavery literary realism in *Bleak House* as Douglass was willing to capitalize on the popularity of American Transcendentalism and British romanticism in "The Heroic Slave." My consideration of the "The Heroic Slave" is not inconsequential to *Bleak House* or the confines of Douglass's periodical space. For four issues, between March 5 and March 25, 1853, both works appeared simultaneously in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* with "The Heroic Slave" taking center stage on Douglass's front page and *Bleak House* continuing its lengthy sprawl on the fourth. Douglass's decision to juxtapose "The Heroic Slave" with *Bleak House* exemplifies McHenry's assertion that his editorial "placement of the work of the most celebrated white European and European American writers next to that of black writers insisted on the equality of their literary, cultural and artistic pursuits" even as "the discussion that took place in the pages of Douglass's papers underscored the extent to which material equality between blacks and whites did not exist" (116). Yet it also reveals Douglass's continued efforts to claim more material equality for himself through profiting on that which had gained traction and monetary success in England.

As his newspapers' literary notices display, Douglass was well aware of the stir *Bleak House* had already managed to cause with its first published number in March of 1852. In its April 1, 1852 issue, the periodical's notices, signed by Julia Griffiths, pronounces that *Harper's Magazine*, which "is attractive as ever," "is enriched by the opening of a Story, from the pen of Charles Dickens."⁴⁹ In its April 8 issue, it announced its intentions to likewise enrich its

⁴⁹ "Literary Notices: Harper's New Monthly for April." *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. 1 April 1852. 3. Print.

columns, by “following in the wake of the *Boston Commonwealth*.”⁵⁰ And then, in its April 15 issue—as if to defend its decision to devote over half of its fourth page to the novel—Douglass’s periodical printed a description of *Bleak House*’s immediate monetary success in the first issue in which the work appeared. An article reprinted from the *National Intelligencer* by a “foreign correspondent” documents that:

“... the “Bleak House” has had the largest sale of any works of Mr. Dickens, so far as read.—The first impression of twenty-five thousand copies was swept up by the trade at once;—twenty thousand were put to the press immediately after which have been nearly disposed of. Take the whole issue at forty thousand and say half is clear profit (a moderate calculation,) there is 1,000 [pounds] a month from this source alone, saying nothing of the value of the copyright.”⁵¹

Printed on the same page just above the foreign correspondent’s statistical boasts is a complimentary biographical sketch of Dickens, reprinted from *The N.Y. Times*, in which Dickens is characterized not only as the “the most popular writer of the present day,” but also as one, who “has lately entered on a path not dissimilar to our own.” The sketch concludes with the vague assertion that “he has our very best wishes,” for “[t]he cause of social melioration needs a union of hearts and hands.”⁵²

All of the above articles on the fame of either *Bleak House* or Dickens exhibit the attention given by Douglass’s editorial staff to a larger print network whose contents recommended that which was popular, and whose strategies of reprinting that which was popular (in the case of *Harper’s Magazine* and *The Boston Commonwealth*) were also utilized by *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* for its own profit. These reprinting strategies become specifically

⁵⁰ “Following in the wake of the Boston Commonwealth.” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. 8 April 1852. 2. Print.

⁵¹ “Bleak House.” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. 15 April 1852. 1. Print.

⁵² “The following brief sketch of the most popular writer of the present day, Mr. Charles Dickens.” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. 15 April 1852. 1. Print. • The vague description on Dickens’ “social melioration,” moreover, display Douglass’s attempts to associate the famous British author’s social activism with the activism of his own periodical. We again see Douglass’s willingness to smudge distinctions between domestic and foreign oppression and reform when erasing said distinctions would enable him to promote his cause.

significant in the case of Douglass's periodical as he utilizes popular texts to illuminate the written works of those oppressed communities often uncatalogued in the popular textual histories and literatures of oppressive, stratified nations. The periodical strategy of utilizing that which is well-known to reveal that which is overlooked not only also becomes essential to Douglass's novella "The Heroic Slave"; it is likewise utilized in *Bleak House* as both fictional works suggest that their nation's respective textual pretensions obscure communities in need of public attention.

Just as *Bleak House* famously opens with its repetitive, pervasive fog—a fog which conspicuously insinuates London's blindness to its systemic injustice and its subjugated working classes—"The Heroic Slave" opens with clouds and darkness which threaten to obscure our awareness of its enslaved protagonist's plight. And just as *Bleak House*'s second chapter then quickly transfers us to the "In Fashion" world of Lady Dedlock whose every tedious move is recorded by the "fashionable intelligence," "The Heroic Slave" juxtaposes its discussion of its enslaved protagonist's elusive, incomplete or threatened history with the preserved histories of Virginia's numerous Anglo-American statesmen. As Douglass's narrator informs us:

"The State of Virginia is famous in American annals for the multitudinous array of her statesmen and heroes...History has not been sparing in recording their names, or in blazoning their deeds...Yet not all the great ones of the Old Dominion have, by the fact of their birth-place, escaped undeserved obscurity. By some strange neglect, one of the truest, manliest, and bravest of her children,—one who, in after years, will, I think, command the pen of genius to set his merits forth, holds now no higher place in the records of that grand old Commonwealth than is held by a horse or an ox. Let those account for it who can, but there stands the fact, that a man who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry,—who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson—and who fought for it with a valor as high, an arm as strong, and against odds as great, as he who led all the armies of the American colonies through the great war for freedom and independence, lives now only in the chattel records of his native State"⁵³

I include the bulk of Douglass's opening to "The Heroic Slave" here because it reveals the anxiety at the heart of his novella, and also, perhaps, at the heart of his periodical. It reveals

⁵³ *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*. ed by Robert S. Levine, John Stauffer, and John R. McKivigan. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. 3, 4. Print. • From hereon referred to in-text with page numbers as *HS*.

what Ivy G. Wilson describes as the “ancillary travesty of United States slavery,” which “was that although blacks and blackness were nearly everywhere in the Americas...they were also on the verge of being expunged from the annals of official history” (454). “Underserved obscurity” threatens to condemn “the truest, manliest, and bravest” of Virginia’s Old Dominion to the chattel records, but Douglass, anticipating the potential tragedy his three opening sentences have already advanced is quick to prophetically hint at the future solution to come: one day, one of Virginia’s unrecognized children “will...command the pen of genius to set his merits forth.”

Of course, to our knowledge, the historical protagonist on which the novella is based would never command such a pen for the public eye. Responsible for leading nineteen enslaved passengers in “one of the most successful slave revolts in North America,” Madison Washington’s redirection of the *Creole* brig from New Orleans to Britain’s Caribbean Nassau port in November of 1841 eventually gained 128 slaves their freedom in March of 1842 (*HS xi*). Apart from oral disseminations of Washington’s anti-slavery victory, news of the *Creole* revolt swiftly spread on the surfaces of both Southern and Northern periodicals throughout the 1840s. Robert S. Levine, John Stauffer and John R. McKivigan’s *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition* conveniently exhibits an array of contemporaneous periodical responses to the revolt while also noting that the *Creole* incident never gained the degree of public notice the *Amistad* revolt gained two years before (*HS 59-107*). Sheltered from their Southern slaveholders in the British Bahamas, the *Creole* revolutionaries, unlike the *Amistad* ones in Cuba, “were not available for newspaper interviews or other forms of publicity” (*HS 57*). Any news that did circulate throughout the States on the *Creole*’s events would have predominately come from the testimonies of the surviving whites aboard (*HS xxvi*). The scant evidence encouraged a wide divergence of periodical adaptations of the *Creole* incidents; Southern newspapers characterized

Washington as a violent tyrant while the Northern anti-slavery press rhetorically worked to romanticize him into a revolutionary, exemplifying the principles of the American revolution.

Once Douglass departed from the strict moral suasion of the pacifistic *American Anti-Slavery Society* to embrace an abolitionist approach that dualistically embraced rhetorical political activism and violent insurrection, he too, grabbed hold of the *Creole* anecdote, utilizing it within his speeches to frighten complicit Southerners with forewarnings of more 1776 inspired slave revolts to come.⁵⁴ Douglass, ostensibly discontent with the sparse information he knew about Washington, may have been interested in interviewing the revolutionary for himself; in February of 1852, he announced that he was planning a trip to Nassau in hopes of “obtain[ing] “antislavery impressions” that would give him “ample materials” for writing an account of the rebellion” (*HS* xxiv). However, Douglass never made the trip, and he would not set Washington’s merits forth in a lengthy historical narrative of facts. Instead, in his novella, he commanded the pen of *artistic* genius to situate Washington’s story in what is known as “one of the earliest examples of African-American fiction” (*HS* xii). As William L. Andrews writes in the “The Novelization of Voice in Early African American Narrative,” “The Heroic Slave” represented the “evolution of African American narrative from “natural” to “fictive” discourse” (206). Douglass’s timing was opportune. Riding on the coat-tails of the extraordinarily successful historical fiction anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Douglass, likewise, chose to intermingle history with fiction as the now famous Harriet Beecher Stowe stood by to endorse his work.

As Douglass takes advantage of the burgeoning American historical fiction genre, he simultaneously makes use of the absence of recorded, factual information on his novella’s titular

⁵⁴ Before describing Madison Washington. “Resolved, that if it be left optional with a slave to go to Africa or not, we advise him not to go, but rather to remain here and add to the number of those who may yet imitate the example of Fathers of ‘76” *Slumbering Volcano*

character. His third paragraph, (which follows the two excerpted ones above), hints at these information gaps. “Glimpses” of Washington’s “great character are all that can now be presented,” Douglass’s narrator writes.

“He is brought to view only by a few transient incidents, and these afford but partial satisfaction. Like a guiding star on a stormy night, he is seen through the parted clouds and the howling tempests; or, like the gray peak of a menacing rock on a perilous coast, he is seen by the quivering flash of angry lightning, and he again disappears covered with mystery. Curiously, earnestly, anxiously we peer into the dark, and wish even for the blinding flash, or the light of the northern skies to reveal him. But alas! he is still enveloped in darkness, and we return from the pursuit like a wearied and disheartened mother...Speaking of marks, traces, possibles, and probabilities, we come before our readers” (*HS* 5).

What we see between the first and second paragraph is Douglass’s eagerness to, as Andrews writes, make “the lack of knowledge about Washington as opposed to wealth of historical information about other champions of liberty from Virginia the gambit of the text” (204). In other words, “[u]nlike typical slave narrators, who promised the readers facts based on the most intimate knowledge of their subjects...the authority of fictive discourse in African American narrative depends on a sabotaging of the presumed authoritative plentitude of history as “natural” discourse so that the right of the fictive to supplement (that is, to subvert) “history” can be declared and then exploited” (Andrews 204, 206). Consequently, “The Heroic Slave” simultaneously mourns the obscurity of black-American heroes and their plights even as it imaginatively fills in the gaps of Washington’s threatened history to imbue it with anti-slavery rhetorical discourse.

In this regard, Douglass’s novella figures into Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovskii’s conception of artistry. For Shklovskii argues that to make an object an “artistic fact,” one must “pry it loose of the facts of life.”⁵⁵ To do so, the artist “snatches a notion from the semantic plane

⁵⁵ Shklovskij, Viktor. “Parallels in Tolstoy.” *Twentieth-Century Russian Literary Criticism*. ed. by Victor Erlich. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975. (81-85). Print.

at which it is usually found” and “transfers it to a new semantic plane” (Shklovskii 81). The result is then that “we are struck by the novelty resulting from placing the object in a new ambience” (Shklovskii 81). Washington, who is unavoidably divorced from the facts of his life, becomes more warrantably transferable in the hands of Douglass’s embellishing pen. Moreover, even the little bits of information known about the historical Madison Washington assist Douglass in his artistic relocations. By geographically transferring himself from Virginia to Canada to Nassau, Washington, like Douglass, pried himself loose from the facts of his legislated enslavement to claim freedom in England’s romanticized realm of emancipation and liberty. As the fictional Washington writes to his abolitionist friend within the novella, by relocating himself to Canada he can “nestle in the mane of the British lion, protected by his mighty paw from the talons and the beak of the American eagle” (*HS* 27). Through Washington’s geographical relocation into freedom, he can be used by Douglass to shame those who would savagely demand him to be re-shackled. In other words, he can further discomfort those Southern slave owners who “increasingly saw themselves as living on an island of slavery in a growing sea of freedom” (*HS* xiv).

“The Heroic Slave” does more than relocate Washington geographically; it relocates him chronologically, as well, inserting him into the ostensibly irreproachable narrative of the American Revolution. Knowing the country’s fierce commitment to the democratic values of its origin story, Douglass lifts Washington from a pro-slavery atmosphere that was eager to depict black revolutionaries as savage insurrectionists, to settle Washington in the more palatable “semantic plane” of America’s revolting Founding Fathers. As one “who loved liberty as well as did Patrick Henry” and “who deserved it as much as Thomas Jefferson,” Douglass attempts to

characterize Washington's actions as those which unimpeachably promote the principles of the Revolution in a nation falling away from the moral progress of its forefathers.

Washington's use of language throughout the novella serves to substantiate the narrator's assertions about the fugitive slave's right to liberty. As Shelly Fisher Fishkin and Carla L. Peterson write, in Washington, Douglass "creates a powerful black hero who, through soliloquy, speeches, and storytelling is granted full status as speaking subject" (82). We know very little about the historical Washington's oratorical skills as a revolutionary leader.⁵⁶ We have no evidence of the historical Washington's literacy. Yet, to borrow a phrase from Toni Morrison's "The Site of Memory," Douglass relies on imagination to grant his readers "access into the unwritten interior life" of the obscured fugitive slave. He endows Washington's fictive persona with the ability to understand the wickedness of his condition, poetically articulate it, demand his own redress and even write coded letters describing his escape. In "The Heroic Slave," Washington has the opportunity to orally and through writing "set his merits forth." His expressive consciousness of the injustice done unto him gives battle to those who would—as Douglass writes in *My Bondage*—believe blacks to be "so low in the scale of humanity, and so utterly stupid, that they are unconscious of their wrongs, and do not apprehend their rights" ("My Bondage" 106). In the words of Celeste-Marie Bernier, his voice "undermines associations of black slave heroism with 'savagery'" as Douglass "juxtaposes the physical spectacle of the slave with a superlative performance of black male intellectual prowess in Madison Washington's exemplary command of language" (Bernier 227, 226).

⁵⁶ "The only hint in the historical record of Washington's oratorical skills is his brief, arresting address to his fellow mutineers to commence the rebellion, followed by his threat to the slaves. From the historical silences, Douglass uses fiction to give Washington the voice that dominates the novella" (HS xxix, xxx).

Like Tom in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Washington's impressive physical form is described to awe readers with a sense of his physical heroism. In a description oddly reminiscent of Tom's, Douglass's narrator asserts that Washington was:

“...of manly form. Tall, symmetrical, round and strong. In his movements he seemed to combine, with the the strength of the lion, the lion's elasticity. His torn sleeves disclosed arms like polished iron...His whole appearance betokened Herculean strength; yet there was nothing savage or forbidding in his aspect. A child might play in his arms, or dance on his shoulders. A giant's strength, but not a giant's heart was in him. His broad mouth and nose spoke only of good nature and kindness. But his voice, that unfailling index of the soul, though full and melodious, had that in it which could terrify as well as charm” (HS 7)

Washington's description, like Stowe's description of Tom, marries strength with a tender gentleness that insinuates both Washington and Tom's capacity for sensibility, self-control and familial affection. However, unlike Stowe, before entering into a description of Washington's physical form, Douglass's hero is first understood through his “full and melodious” voice. His soul's index charms the soon-be-abolitionist Listwell to stealthily eavesdrop on Washington soliloquy in the forest and eventually resolve to become an abolitionist himself. The “full fountain” of Washington's voice—“now bitter, and now sweet”—overflows with “scathing denunciations of the cruelty and injustice of slavery; heart-touching narrations of his own personal suffering,” concluded by “an emphatic declaration of his purpose to be free” (HS 8). All of Washington's convoluted rhetoric serves to forcefully interpolate a fugitive slave's imagined thought processes into a Romantic conception of personhood—one which often prejudicially predetermined that the intellectual inferiority of people of color excluded them from said personhood. In “Douglass Among the Romantics” Bill E. Lawson's reminds us that American Transcendentalists inspired by the European Romanticism of Carlyle, Coleridge and Kant viewed man as one “endowed with a natural intuitive sense of self” and “a soul that is infused with a desire for divine inspiration and a love of freedom” (120). As Douglass attempts to speak

“both for blacks and to whites in a manner that exemplifies the humanity of black,” he creates a fictive self that “appears fully moral and intelligent in spite of the horrors of slavery” (Lawson 126). Evading empiricist’s conceptions about the development of morality and intellect, Douglass embraces fiction to inject Washington with a vernacular that could prove his heroic manhood to a Western audience in an age of Romanticism.

While Douglass demands that the “history” of Madison Washington be inserted into the rolodex of Virginia’s historicized political heroes, Dickens demands that the cruelties endured by Britain’s working class be granted with as much—if not more—attention as the oppressed and deprived abroad. In a paradoxical reversal of literary objectives, Douglass attempts to elevate his titular character into the ranks of America’s elite as Dickens attempts to descend factions of London’s population into the ranks of the neediest economical strata. Douglass demands respect for the intellectual humanity of the enslaved African American while Dickens demands sympathy for the growing inhumanity and intellectual deprivation he perceives in London’s oppressed working classes. We see this clearly in the way Washington and *Bleak House*’s young impoverished crossing sweeper Jo are distinctly equated with or differentiated from the animals they the interact with. “How mean a thing am I?”—a downcast Washington soliloquizes in the forest. Comparing himself to an “accursed and crawling snake,” he considers how “that miserable reptile...is freer and better off than [himself]” (*HS* 5). While the snake can glide to safety, escaping Washington’s blows, and maybe even turning to give Washington battle, the heroic slave mourns that he “dare[s] not do as much as that” towards his slave masters (*HS* 6). “I neither run nor fight, but do meanly stand, answering each heavy blow of a cruel master with doleful wails and piteous cries” (*HS* 6). However, he does not persist in his self-degrading despondency for long; questioning his initial declarations of his lowliness, he asserts, “No,—I

wrong myself,—I am no coward. *Liberty* I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it...I will stand it no longer” (*HS* 6). Jo, on the other hand, is not conscious enough of the meanness of his life to demand a life of liberty or to make firm resolutions towards obtaining it. As Jo sits alongside the dogs in the dilapidated, maggot-infested wasteland of Tom’s-All-Alone, Dickens’s narrator compares Jo’s mental faculties to that of a nearby dog:

“He and Jo listen to the music, probably with much the same amount of animal satisfaction; likewise, as to awakened association, aspiration or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par.” (*BH* 238)

While Douglass, in his idealism, attempts to rid his protagonist from the stereotype of intellectual inferiority through creating him into a philosophizing, soliloquizing speaking subject of the Enlightenment, Dickens, in his realism, strips his working classes of the ability to recognize their condition and aspire for more. Jo must “shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes and in utter darkness as to the meaning of those mysterious symbols so abundant over the stores” (*BH* 237). In his illiteracy, Jo observes horses, dogs and cattle go by him, and, if he could consider his condition, would have to consider “that in ignorance, [he] belong[s] to [them], and not to the superior beings in [his] shape” (*BH* 238). Jo “sits down to breakfast on the door-step of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts” viewing the “size of the edifice” while having “no idea ... what it costs to look up the precious souls among the cocoa-nuts and bread fruit” (*BH* 237). By situating Jo on the society’s steps, Dickens conspicuously asserts that attending to Jo’s dehumanized state should take precedence over precious souls abroad. While it is costly to even look up those in exoticised regions, Dickens’s realistic depictions of London’s impoverished, challenge local readers to consider what they could see and attend to within their immediate sphere. As Grace Moore writes, through a “process of displacement,” Dickens, like his contemporary Henry Mayhew, aligned the urban poor “with the colonized, both as a means

of stimulating public interest in their less-than-exotic lives, and as a way of emphasizing their complete alienation” (2).

In “Pictures in Bleak Houses: Slavery and the Aesthetic of Transatlantic Reform,” Rachel Teukolsky argues that the “boldly accurate visual reportage” utilized in *Bleak House* “was also a recurring trope in the slave narrative, which promised to present slavery “as it is”” in an effort to promote reform (Teukolsky 501, 502).

“The insistence upon a window-life view of social horrors was especially necessary given that slavery itself proved to be such a desirable commodity in the entertainment worlds of both America and Britain. American reading audiences showed an insatiable appetite for slave narratives, inviting the efforts of profiteering white imitators. In Britain, slavery itself was one of America’s greatest selling points; at the Royal Victoria Hall a panorama advertisement made the sensationalist sights of slavery from the famous sites of American tourism” (Teukolsky 502).

Bleak House simultaneously satirizes the commodification of American slavery while also utilizing the popularity of its aesthetics to widely disseminate views into London’s social horrors. Embedded within Dickens’s appropriation of the slave narrative aesthetic is an inconspicuous racism that was ironically common in the writings of Victorian abolitionists (Moore 43). For instance, as he “propagate[s] the trope of the homegrown savage,” by coloring *Bleak House*’s working classes and exploited laborers with dirt, mud and ink (Teuokolsky 495, 496), he perpetuates a system of racial categorization that Moore identifies as a vestige of eighteenth-century classifications of men by their complexions (44).⁵⁷

However, Dickens’s subtle usages of race seem less intended to demean people of color abroad as they are utilized to demean rich Londoners blind to the relation between their wealth and their working classes. Connections had been forged in previous decades between West Indian slave labor and England’s commercial wealth. William Fox’s “On the Propriety of

⁵⁷ Moore directs our attention Linnaeus’s *Systema Naturae* (1782) and Soame Jenyn’s ‘Disquisition on the Chain of Universal Being,’ intimating that these categorizing works may have been a part of Dickens’s reading base.

Abstaining from West Indian Sugar” (1791) and Amelia Opie’s “The Black Man’s Lament; or How to Make Sugar” (1826) became popularized texts of Britain’s anti-slavery movement that drew connections between England’s wealth and its foreign colonies. Moore contends that Dickens attempts to forge similar connections between London’s capital and its impoverished workforce (23). His problematic usage of the popularized slave aesthetic furthers this objective as does the omniscience of his roaming narrator and the surprising links between characters formed through plot.⁵⁸

Aside from utilizing popularized aesthetics to shed light of their nation’s respective working classes, both Douglass and Dickens utilize their fiction to model what they perceive to be appropriate ways of interacting with those in need. While Mrs. Jellyby overlooks her children—namely the dirty and bruised Peepy—to fix “her fine eyes on Africa” instead (*BH* 49), Esther notices Peepy, supervises him in his distracted mother’s stead. While *Bleak House*’s second self-aggrandizing philanthropist Mrs. Pardiggle barges into the home of the impoverished brickmaker, distributing religious tracts to the illiterate family and reading said tracts with mechanical force, Esther instead notices the dying child in the home and tends to it as it dies, comforting its mother as best as she can (*BH* 122, 124). As Joyce Kloc McClure suggests in “Seeing Through the Fog: Love and Injustice in Bleak House,” it is Esther’s ability to adequately appraise her immediate situations and love accordingly that drives forward justice in her circle of

⁵⁸ “This is the Court of Chancery, which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire, which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse and its dead in every churchyard, which has its ruined suitor with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress borrowing and begging through the round of every man’s acquaintance, which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearing out the right, which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope, so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart, that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, “Suffer any wrong that can be done you rather than come here!”” (*BH* 13).

“What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of the great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together!” (*BH* 235).

duty (39, 40). As she foils the pretensions of the fashionable philanthropist she interacts, she models a form of social reform that is dependent on truly seeing the afflicted.

Similarly, in “The Heroic Slave,” Douglass attempts to model perceptive interactions with his nation’s obscured injustices. Even with his opening, he tempts his readers to likewise “curiously, earnestly anxiously...peer into the dark, and wish even for the blinding flash, or the light of the northern skies to reveal” the obscured plight and heroic deeds of Washington. Douglass’s entreaty is reified in the character of Listwell, who as his name implies, listens well. While those who idle around Petersburg decaying tavern—symbolic of the inevitable demise of slavery—preoccupy themselves with retelling stories of the past, Listwell is made to appear more in control of his environment in that he actually perceives his immediate environment. More than perceiving his environment, Listwell acts upon what he hears. After listening to the tragic story of Washington, Listwell makes his sentimental pledge to be an abolitionist: “I have seen enough and heard enough” he declares. “I shall go to my home in Ohio resolved to atone for my past indifference to this ill-starred race” (“HR” 9).

Just as the contents of Douglass’s periodical attempt to model a future reality in which African Americans are equally given a public voice alongside their white contemporaries, both Douglass and Dickens create fictional works intended to model methods of spying and listening to those marginalized people often outside of public notice. Utilizing the popularity of the aesthetics and movements they simultaneously critiqued, both authors attempted to prevent the stories of the oppressed in their respective nations from the clouds and fog of obscurity.

Conclusion

“The future may yet reveal to us—and in the feelings of hope, we dare predict, that the future *will* yet reveal to us the names of colored Americans so gloriously illustrated in the catalogue of literary excellence... This hope is based upon the efforts which have been made by various colored Americans, from time to time, to preserve the ancient glory of Africa, and to furnish the pledges of her future glory in the persons of her sons, who have been cast upon a distant shore. Still, even those efforts are not to be spoken of without regret, for they were mainly contained within the narrow limits of pamphlets, or the columns of newspapers, ephemeral caskets, whose destruction entails the destruction of the gems which they contain... In view of such danger, it is to be hoped that some capable person may take measures to effect a speedy collection of those valuable evidence of the genius and integrity of our gifted bretheren. Such a work is due to them, is due to ourselves, is due to posterity.”⁵⁹

Prior to graduate school, I knew nothing of Frederick Douglass as a periodical editor. I am almost embarrassed to admit now that I only knew of the famous abolitionist through anthologized passages from his first autobiography *A Narrative of the Life*. I did not know that he had continued to refashion sketches of his evolving interior life through two subsequent autobiographies printed in 1855 and 1881, respectively. I, like many others, knew nothing of his fictional novella “The Heroic Slave.” I did not know that he was the most daguerreotyped man of the nineteenth century, grabbing hold of the new technology to capture variously crafted portraits of himself.

⁵⁹ Glances at our Condition.—No. 1: Our Literature.” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 23 September 1853: 3. Print.

In spite of all of Douglass's attempts to preserve his varied personas through print and photography, I, as student in the humanities, could speak of him only through "marks and traces" (to borrow from novella). In spite of my ignorance, it seems as though Douglass, with all of his savvy awareness of popular print culture, was determined to find me because I rediscovered him in a very unlikely place—a Charles Dickens seminar.

While reading *Bleak House*, I was drawn to Dickens's critique of the pretensions embedded in the mid-nineteenth century British anti-slavery movement. Dickens unapologetically caricatured those who might engage in inefficacious fashionable philanthropic and commercial activities abroad while remaining ignorant and apathetic to the oppression within their own city. My research of this critique led me to Daniel Hack's 2008 article: "Close Reading at a Distance: The African-Americanization of *Bleak House*." Through Hack's research of Douglass's periodical, I learned of the novel's serialization within it, but I questioned Hack's assessment of the novel's incompatibility with the ideological essence of Douglass's newspaper. Without knowing much of Douglass, I still felt that Hack's assertion was perhaps reductive of Douglass's capability to also perceive the legitimacy of Dickens's critique. I wanted to consider how Douglass's other periodical fiction might have been discoursing with *Bleak House*. Consequently, I accessed the newspapers for myself and was overwhelmed by the diversity of its at times miscellaneous contents. Through Elizabeth McHenry's 2002 book *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, I began to consider what kind of literary culture Douglass was attempting to cultivate through his arrangements.

Interested in how Douglass's first tour of the British Isles may have developed his affinity for British culture and literature, I turned to Phillip S. Foner's *Selected Speeches and Writings of Frederick Douglass*. While focusing on the letters of the 1840s that Douglass wrote

to Garrison from the British Isles, I discovered one letter which described his cosmopolitan experience aboard the *Cambria*. I began to view Douglass first cross-culture experience as an analogy for the crafted juxtapositions of text within his periodical. Consequently, I decided to devote my first chapter to exploring how Douglass's travels abroad may have encouraged him to cultivate a space of imagined cross-cultural discourse which predated the segregated realities of his time.

I continued to struggle with thematically limiting my analysis of the literatures that made up this discourse. One course during my second semester and another during my third helped me to develop at least a few parameters. During an antebellum literature, I wrote a book review of Marcy J. Dinius's *The Camera and the Press*. Dinius's book details the advent of the daguerreotype, contemporaneous print advertisements of its supposedly objectifying capabilities, and how antebellum authors, including Frederick Douglass, interacted with the new technology in their fiction. Dinius's scholarship redirected me to speeches written by Douglass on daguerreotypy and his growing trust in print to shed light on the hidden cruelties of slavery. Through her scholarship, I also discovered that Douglass had reprinted his own novella in his periodical after its initial publication. When I learned that the serialization of "The Heroic Slave" overlapped with the serialization of *Bleak House*, I decided to limit one of my chapters by focusing on select issues between 1852 and 1853 when both works appeared.

An eighteenth-century literature course reintroduced me to the neoclassical verse of Phillis Wheatley. A DNB entry written on the poet by John Shields claimed that all of Wheatley's poems had been reprinted in Douglass's periodicals. However, when I searched for the poems in Douglass's newspapers through Gale's *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive* I only discovered three of her poems reprinted in the periodical in 1855. Recognizing

that Wheatley's name may have been misspelled, I searched for lines of verse and poem titles, but still only found the three poems published in 1855, eight years after Douglass's periodical began. Consequently, I decided to devote a chapter to the relative absence of Wheatley in *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Papers*. Reading Vincent Carretta's introduction to Wheatley's *Poems on Various Subjects* reminded me of how Wheatley, like Douglass, and even, to a certain extent, like Dickens, borrowed from literary conventionalities of other cultures to ensure that their works would endure for future generations of readers. It is remarkable for me to think that Douglass's acute decision to reprint *Bleak House* urged me as a twenty-first century researcher to shed more light on the intertextual possibilities of his space.

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