Long March to Freedom: Black Abolitionists, the Civil War, and Reconstruction

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The American Civil War brought into the limelight bitterness, anguish, aggravation, and discontent that wracked the country since its independence from Britain. The abolition of slavery, so feared by the South, was the war's most direct and profound impact. Historians have written much on the wartime activity of abolitionists. What has been under-examined, however, is the role Black abolitionists played in the conflict. Prominent figures, such as Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, Henry Highland Garnet, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, and the Hamilton brothers publicly expressed their views on the war and what its aftermath would mean for Blacks in the reunified country. Abolitionists saw the alternatives as either colonization outside the U.S., possibly in Africa, or integration within the U.S., as free citizens. Black abolitionists saw the war as an opportunity to completely abolish slavery and bring social and political rights to the Black population, but integrationists became dominant as the war progressed, marginalizing supporters of colonization. Abolitionists' commitment to America was on display in the following Reconstruction period with their work to integrate the newly freed population into mainstream American society. Importantly, their work is a rebuttal to accusations on the political right that patriotism is lacking among African Americans today.

Historiography and Description of Sources

Slavery has long been obscured in the historiography of the Civil War, often distorted by pro-Confederate Lost Cause propaganda. Textbooks published in the 1930s mentioned figures such as Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, and Nathan Bedford Forrest as many times as they mentioned Abraham Lincoln or Ulysses S. Grant.[1] In the twenty-first century, two historiographic positions on the Civil War existed: fundamentalism and revisionism. Fundamentalism "emphasizes the intrinsic, inevitable conflict

[1] Jennifer Rainey Marquez, "Rewriting History," *Georgia State University Research Magazine,* July 8, 2021.

between slavery and free labor." Revisionists "emphasiz[e] discrete events and political structures rather than slavery itself."[2] This paper, however, will contribute more to the fundamentalist viewpoint of the war. Black abolitionists saw slavery above all other factors as the reason the war erupted and directed their wartime activities according to that view.

The historiography of the Reconstruction era has similarly been distorted. In the early twentieth century, it was, for a large part, dominated by the Dunning school of thought. Taking a conservative historiographical approach, the school venerated those who established the Jim Crow system, describing them as rescuers of the South from newly freed Blacks. The school depicted Blacks as incapable of governing themselves, and that granting them the right to vote was a serious mistake.[3] The school effectively marginalized any academics who held positive views of the Reconstruction era and made it difficult for their voices to be heard. Contemporary historians have shifted away from this discourse, working to bring the voices of Black abolitionists to the forefront and redefining the historiography of the Civil War.[4] A comprehensive understanding of the activities of Black abolitionists is now feasible with the creation of the Black Abolitionist Papers, a database maintained by ProQuest. It comprises articles, speeches, correspondence, and literature from a wide range of Black abolitionists from the period of 1830-1865.[5] This database was resourceful for defending the arguments made by this paper.

Beginning of the War

Contributors to the *Anglo-African* newspaper best reflected the general attitude of Black abolitionists during the Civil War. The New York-based paper in its July 1859 opening edition described its mission as "to present a clear and concise statement

[2] Edward L. Ayers, "What Caused the Civil War?" *North & South: The Official Magazine of the Civil War Society* 8 (2005): 12

[3] Mike Konczal, "How Radical Change Occurs: An Interview with Historian Eric Foner," *The Nation,* February 3, 2015.

[4] See Eric Foner, David Blight, Nell Irvin Painter, Kate Clifford Larsen, Manisha Sinha; see also Henry Louis Gates, *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (Penguin Press, 2019).

[5] See Black Abolitionist Papers, ProQuest, accessed October 27, 2023, https://about.proquest.com/en/products-services/blk_abol_pap/.


The Weekly Anglo-African

Figure 1: *Weekly Anglo-Africa*n, July 23, 1859, Library of Congress

of the present condition, the past history, and the prospects of the colored population of the United States, free and enslaved…besides the intrinsic interest which attaches itself to a magazine with such scope and information, the aid of all who wish to advance the great cause of Immediate Emancipation, is earnestly solicited for its support."[6] The concept of immediately abolishing slavery was controversial at the time, stirring passions in the South and North, and it was perceived as an idea that would lead to war if it were seriously considered. Nevertheless, Black abolitionists publishing in this paper early in the war viewed immediate emancipation as the one sure way to secure Black rights and liberties after the war, and they believed that supporting the war effort was essential to this goal.

Editor Robert Hamilton expressed commitment to the war effort in an 1863 edition of his newspaper that detailed why recruiting troops was necessary. Hamilton warned that if Northern Blacks failed to participate in the war effort alongside emancipated slaves, "a century may elapse before another opportunity shall be afforded for reclaiming and holding our withheld rights."[7] Hamilton puts this conflict over rights in absolutist terms, indicating no other occasion in his readers' lifetimes would arise for Blacks in the United States to obtain liberty and equality. A hyperbolic statement such as this reaffirms how vital the outcome of the war was for Hamilton in the context of Black rights.

A commitment to the war effort was accompanied early on by support for colonization. Colonization was directly addressed by another contributor to the paper, Rev. Henry Highland Garnet,

[6] Debra Jackson, "A Black Journalist in Civil War Virginia: Robert Hamilton and the 'Anglo-African,'" *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 116 (2008): 48.

[7] Robert Hamilton, "The Present and its Duties," *Weekly Anglo-African,* January 17*,* 1863.8

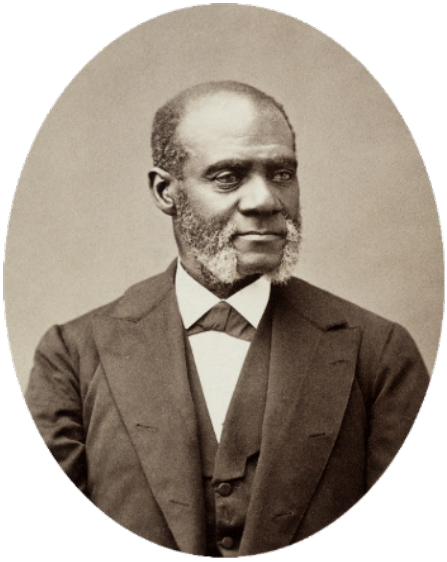


Figure 2: Henry Highland Garnet, c. 1881, National Portrait Gallery

a leading advocate of the settlement of freed slaves in Africa. His viewpoint on the Civil War was clear in a September 1861 letter written while in London to Rev. Henry M. Wilson, acting director of the African Civilization Society. Garnet wrote that "the system of negro slavery is rapidly passing away, and ere long it will thunder to the ground." It is remarkable that, at this early stage of the war, a prominent figure openly expressed his view that the Union would triumph, and slavery would be abolished at the war's conclusion. However, Garnet, in his letter, focused more on the potential for the settlement of freed slaves in the Niger Delta, expressing his belief that Britain supported his goal. He wrote that "it seems to be the policy of the British Government to introduce agricultural improvements into Africa, on an extensive scale, especially in the department of cotton, accompanied by the various appliances of Christian civilization…thus in the providence of God the plant which has been the curse of her exiled children, will by intelligent labor become the blessing of her children at home."[8] Garnet believed resettled slaves could work in, and profit from, these newly established cotton fields. He also expressed no concern about the paternalistic nature of this endeavor. Garnet's early enthusiasm for colonization was grounded in his belief that freed slaves would immediately succeed in their adopted homeland.

Garnet hoped to arouse support for colonization while touring England, attempting to make his case in a speech in October while visiting Birmingham. In a humble and conciliatory tone, Garnet discussed the disruption of the Atlantic cotton trade result-

[8] Henry Highland Garnet, "Letter from Henry Highland Garnet to Henry M. Wilson," *Weekly Anglo-African,* September 27, 1861.

ing from the Civil War, referring to it as a "famine."[9] The disruption had particularly great effects on the cities of Manchester and Birmingham, both heavily industrialized cities that relied greatly on American cotton shipments for textile production. Attempting to bolster official British support for the formation of an African American colony in the Yorubaland region of what is now Nigeria, he asserted that the creation of such a colony would provide Britain with an alternative source of cotton shipments, helping to "annihilate" slavery in America.

This speech is notable since Britain practiced neutrality during the Civil War.[10] The Confederacy was seeking military aid from Britain for its cause, but Garnet attempted to divert attention to those demands with the appeal to spreading Christianity and the economic benefits of his proposed project. A supporter of colonization, Garnet's appeals did not need to stress patriotic feelings toward America. However, like Frederick Douglass' appeals, they stressed the need to support the Union's war effort, as this was the one way to achieve their shared goal of abolishing slavery in the United States.

Garnet acknowledged doubts about his cause, reflected in a complaint that "an agent who was sent out here by the African Civilization Society two years ago, had preceded [him] with his libelous letters, in which he vainly attempted to depreciate [him], and [their] cause."[11] Despite this, Garnet asserted that his efforts in Great Britain to attract support for the abolitionist cause had been largely successful, stating "the kindness and noble sentiments of the people here are very gratifying…coming from scenes of continual conflict, I am now enjoying a few moments of peace, only, however, to renew my strength to enter the field again—for I am enlisted for the war."[12] This reaffirms Garnet's opinion of the Civil War was well within the mainstream of abolitionist thought, despite not being an integrationist.

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[9] Henry Highland Garnet, "Rev. H.H. Garnet's Speech at Birmingham," *Weekly Anglo-African,* November 16, 1861.

[10] See Patrick Gaul, *Ideale und Interessen: Die mitteleuropäische Wirtschaft im Amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg* (German Historical Institute of Washington, 2021).

[11] Garnet, "Letter from Henry Highland Garnet to Henry M. Wilson."

[12] Garnet, "Letter from Henry Highland Garnet to Henry M. Wilson."

Back in America, Garnet acknowledged arduous conditions for Blacks living in the North in an 1862 speech to a church congregation in Philadelphia. However, he said such struggles should not detract from their support of the war effort, stating that these struggles were the result of an organized plot by the Northern press, which was against continuing the war.[13] Instead, Blacks should look past those prejudices and continue supporting the war, stating "we declare, without fear of contradiction, that we are loyal to the Government under which we were born, and under which we live, and have never failed as a class to obey the laws of the land… there are to-day in this city and throughout the north and south tens of thousands who are ready and anxious to peril their lives in defense of the Government…."[14] Garnet indicated that taking up arms in defense of the Union was enough to dismiss any anger or prejudice they might encounter from whites. This signaled his support for continuing the Civil War despite knowing the obstacles Blacks faced in their journey to freedom.

Garnet's commitment to the war effort closely paralleled that embodied by Martin R. Delany, a Black abolitionist primarily active in Canada. Like Garnet, Delany was sympathetic to the cause of colonization, and in one 1862 letter discussed the possibility of Black emigration to Haiti. Delany stated he had "no objection to Haitien Emigration,"[13] but indicated "[his] objection is to the fearful manner in which our people are being misled into the belief that Haiti presents the natural advantages and facilities for a great and powerful nation." Delany warned about a lack of preparedness for mass emigration after the Civil War, implying that more organizing had to be done to facilitate a successful migration. Delany concluded by reiterating that he "[does] not object to Haitien emigration, but simply desire that those who go, do so intelligently and know what they are doing."[15] Delany considered that not all Blacks were willing to emigrate and expressed skepticism about how successful colonization would be. Delany believed most Blacks in the United States would remain there and fight for their freedoms and liberty from within.

[13] Henry Highland Garnet, "Speech to Church Audience," *Douglass' Monthly,* September 1862.
[14] Garnet, "Speech to Church Audience."
[15] Delany, "Letter from Martin R. Delany to M.H. Freeman."

Contrasting Views

The views on colonization evinced by Garnet and Delany were in sharp contrast to those of abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass, one of the most prominent Black abolitionists of the era. Originally from Maryland, Douglass escaped bondage and fled North, building a successful career as a newspaper publisher, writer, and orator. Unlike Garnet, Douglass first shared a pessimistic attitude toward the Union war effort. Douglass criticized Lincoln's handling of the conflict, writing in a letter to fellow abolitionist Gerrit Smith that he could not hope of "finding any sound place upon which to build a hope of national salvation. I am bewildered by the spectacle of moral blindness…and helpless imbecility which the Government of Lincoln presents. Is there hope?"[16] Notably, Douglass's despondency concerned not the war itself, but how its operations were being carried out.


DOUGLASS' MONTHLY.

Figure 3: *Douglass' Monthly*, August 1862, Library of Congress

In line with this, Douglass continued to speak publicly in favor of Blacks supporting the war effort. His public speaking duties were accompanied by his efforts in the press; his paper *Douglass' Monthly,* running from 1858 to 1863, allowed his views to be read by a Northern audience.[17] In a speech delivered in Philadelphia in January 1862, and published in *Douglass' Monthly*, Douglass advocated for direct Black participation in the Union army, saying "I believe up to this time, no man…has been able to cast a shadow of a doubt upon the loyalty and patriotism of the free colored people in this hour of the nation's trial and danger… the Washington Government wants men for its army, but thus far, it has not had the boldness to recognize the manhood of the race to which I belong."[18] Douglass' dream would be realized roughly a year later, with the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation.

[16] Frederick Douglass, "Douglass to Smith, December 22, 1861," Gerrit Smith Papers, Special Collections at Syracuse University.
[17] "Douglass' Monthly (Rochester, NY)," *Library of Congress,* Library of Congress, accessed February 18, 2024, https://www.loc.gov/item/2020260054/.
[18] Frederick Douglass, "Reasons for Our Troubles," *Douglass' Monthly,* February 1862.

A Shift in Direction

Despite the idea of colonization gaining support among some Black abolitionists early in the war, a shift in attitude grew as the war progressed, even as support for the war effort did not waver. The Emancipation Proclamation of January 1863 heralded a change in Black abolitionists' views on the possibility of integration after the war. Abraham Lincoln's sympathetic view of colonization had eroded with his acknowledgment that direct Black participation on the front lines was necessary to secure victory. This "led the Lincoln administration to recruit African Americans, including slaves, and grant freedom to those who served and their families."[19] This facilitated a change in strategy for Black abolitionists; while remaining in support of the war effort, their efforts focused less on eventual colonization and more on integration within the United States. Abolitionists also had the ability now to recruit Black soldiers for the war effort.

Across the country, Blacks embraced the issuance of the proclamation with joy and enthusiasm. In New York, the signing of the proclamation was met "with a general burst of enthusiasm." In the Abyssinian Baptist Church, several clergymen had gathered to share the news with the local congregation, with the congregation breaking out with a song about abolitionist John Brown.[20] At the Cooper Institute—now the Cooper Union—Henry Highland Garnet read the proclamation in full, reminding his audience that "we must remember that it is God who brought about this great event. Let us, first of all, rise to our feet, and stand in solemn reverence and thankfulness before him…let us give three cheers for the President of the United States." Garnet's call was then followed by "cheers 'for our native land,' for the Stars and Stripes, for the Abolitionists, and for Horace Greeley." His audience clearly embraced America over Africa, signaling a change in how Blacks would regard his goal of colonization after the war. Garnet remained a supporter of colonization but he knew support for the Union effort was still key to achieving that goal.

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[19] Manisha Sinha, "Allies for Emancipation? Black Abolitionists and Abraham Lincoln," The Gilder Institute of American History, 2008, accessed November 15, 2021. https://ap.gilderlehrman.org/essays/allies-for-emancipation-black-abolitionists.

[20] "Rejoicing over the Proclamation," *Douglass' Monthly,* February 1863.



Figure 4: Martin Delany in Union Army uniform, 1865, *Encyclopedia Virginia*

Martin Delany shifted his focus from colonization to recruiting Black soldiers, outlining his views on Civil War participation clearly in an 1863 letter to fellow abolitionist Mary Ann Shadd Cary on the topic of Black recruitment into the army. He wrote about an effort to recruit a regiment of Black soldiers in Maryland, offering Cary $15 for each formerly enslaved person who was sent to Chicago, where he resided, who might be able to enlist in the army, stating that he would also "[bear] the expense of transportation." He was "anxious to hear from [her], and to get all the men I possibly can in the shortest possible time."[21] Delany offering what, at the time, was a considerable amount of money for potential recruits indicates how much he was willing to sacrifice on behalf of the war effort. Delany himself enlisted in the Union Army.[22]Although his earlier letter indicated sympathy for the prospect of colonization, this one indicated he was refocused on activities in the United States.

Frederick Douglass well represented this shift in support for integration following the war. His enthusiasm for the war effort was captured in a speech delivered in Philadelphia in July 1863. Douglass' speech was published in the anti-slavery newspaper *Liberator,* edited by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, an early influence on Douglass. In the speech, Douglass spoke in support of recruiting Black soldiers for the Union Army. Douglass spoke on his view of the government, stating that he "[held] that the Federal Government was never, in its essence, anything but an anti-slavery

[21] Martin R. Delany, "Letter from Martin R. Delany to Mary Ann Shadd Cary, 7 December 1863," December 7, 1863, accessed November 15, 2021, http://csulb.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/other-sources/letter-martin-r-delany-mary-ann-shadd-cary-7/docview/2522663561/se-2?accountid=10351.

[22] Eric Foner, "Rights and the Constitution in Black Life during the Civil War and Reconstruction," *The Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 865.



Figure 5: William Edouard Scott, "Frederick Douglass appealing to President Lincoln and his cabinet to enlist Negroes." 1943, Library of Congress

Government…such is the Government, fellow-citizens, you are now called upon to uphold with your arms." Douglass' embrace of the wording of the Constitution as being opposed to slavery, despite the institution existing continuously since the Constitution's adoption, indicated optimism that the Constitution's provisions would prevail in the event of a Union victory in the war. To quell concerns about the outcome of the war, Douglass cited the facts that the transatlantic slave trade had already been abolished, and slavery itself had been abolished in other parts of the Americas.[23]

Douglass stated to his crowd that "this is no time for hesitation…the hour has arrived, and your place is in the Union Army…in your hands [the] musket means liberty; and should your constitution right at the close of this war be denied, which in the nature of things, it cannot be, your brethren are safe while you have a Constitution which proclaims your right to keep and bear arms."[24] Douglass leaves no room for doubt about the importance of enlisting in his closing comments, and it reaffirms his staunch support of the Constitution and his belief the war will fulfill its vision.

Douglass acknowledged the difficult war effort and the arduous journey toward abolition. Opposition to the war continued in the North, culminating in the New York Draft Riots of July 1863. Predominantly Irish men resisted being included in a military draft in which Black men, as non-citizens, were exempt. Not wanting to fight in the "nigger war," rioters lashed out in a five-

[23] Frederick Douglass, "Speech of Frederick Douglass," *Liberator,* July 24, 1863; *Liberator* had a peak readership of 3,000, according to "Liberator," in *Encyclopedia Brittanica,* November 12, 2021, Encyclopedia Brittanica, Inc.
[24] Douglass, "Speech of Frederick Douglass."

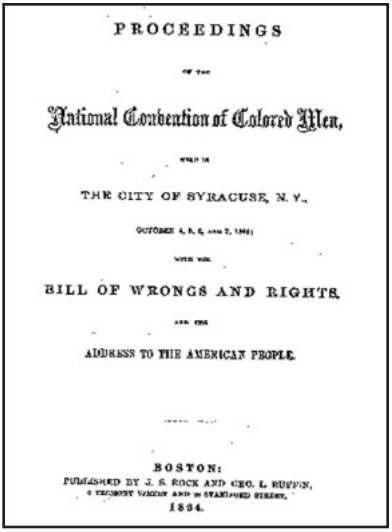
day attack, targeting Black abolitionists resident in the city, and burning prominent Black institutions down, including the Colored Orphan Asylum.[25] Perhaps in reaction to this, Douglass stated in a speech in New York City in 1864 "I look for no miraculous destruction of slavery…I hope much from the bravery of our soldiers, but in vain is the might of armies if our rulers fail to profit by experience and refuse to listen to the suggestions of wisdom and justice. The most hopeful fact of the hour is that we are now in a salutary school—the school of affliction. If sharp and signal retribution, long protracted, wide-sweeping, and overwhelming, can teach a great nation respect for the long-despised claims of justice, surely, we shall be taught now and for all time to come."[26] Douglass believed that justice for all would prevail in the postwar era and that is why the war was worth continuing to fight.

Like Douglass, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, one of the few prominent female Black abolitionists, made a speech in 1865 in which she indicated her optimism for equal rights for Blacks. Watkins stated that "the nation, in reconstructing, should build, not upon the shifting sands of policy and expediency, but upon the granite of eternal justice."[27] Harper implies that rights for Blacks may still be difficult to secure in the war's aftermath, and encourages them to not be passive about it but to actively ensure they are not kept away by the white establishment. Harper contributed to the war effort in own way, by publishing poetry in papers including the *Weekly Anglo-African* and the *Liberator,* helping to increase morale among Black Americans in the process.[28]

Commitment to America

The shift toward embracing integration over colonization was best exemplified in an abolitionist convention held in Syracuse, New York, in October 1864. Garnet participated and

[25] Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 280.
[26] Frederick Douglass, "The Mission of the War," *New York Tribune,* January 14, 1864; *Tribune* had a readership of 200,000 by 1860, according to "New York Tribune," *Chronicling America*, Library of Congress, accessed February 18, 2024, https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/.
[27] Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "Mrs. Frances E. W. Harper on Reconstruction," *Liberator,* March 3, 1865.
[28] Eric Gardner, "Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's Civil War and Militant Intersectionality," *The Mississippi Quarterly* 70/71 (Winter 2017/2018): 506.


PROCEEDINGS

National Convention of Colored Men,

THE CITY OF SYRACUSE, N. Y.,

BILL OF WRONGS AND RIGHTS,

ADDRESS TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

BOSTON:
1864.

Figure 6: Report of Syracuse Convention, 1864, Onondaga Historical Association

"reaffirmed his belief in 'Negro nationality,' but his was a lonely voice, drowned in a sea of support for 'acknowledged American ideas.'"[29] Garnet's commitment to colonization was now rejected by many Blacks in America, as by this time the idea of securing rights in the U.S. for Blacks no longer seemed improbable. Events at the convention primarily focused on the actions of recruited Black soldiers and efforts at enfranchisement. Frederick Douglass spoke of "[promoting] the freedom, progress, elevation, and perfect enfranchisement, of the entire colored people of the United States; to show that, though slaves, we are not contented slaves, but that, like all other progressive races of men, we are resolved to advance in the scale of knowledge, worth, and civilization, and claim our rights as men among men."[30] Douglass was selected as president of the convention, magnifying his influence.[31] His comments indicated a commitment to remaining in the United States and asserting Black rights there, as opposed to colonization.

The conference's most notable moment was a resolution made to "recommend colored men from all sections of the country to settle, as far as they can, on the public lands." This indicated a commitment to settling within the United States and retaining a foothold there, which would weaken concentrated efforts at colonization. The firmest commitment to integration came with a resolution stating "that as natives of American soil, we claim the right to remain upon it: and that any

[29] Foner, "Rights and the Constitution in Black Life," 867.

[30] "Proceedings of the National convention of colored men, held in the city of Syracuse, N.Y., October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864; with the bill of wrongs and rights, and the address to the American people." *Library of Congress*, Library of Congress, accessed November 15, 2021, https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/rbc/rbaapc/20100/20100.pdf.

[31] David Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 441.

attempt to deport, remove, expatriate, or colonize us to any other land, or to mass us here against our will, is unjust; for here were we born, for this country our fathers and our brothers have fought, and here we hope to remain in the full enjoyment of enfranchised manhood, and its dignities." Although another resolution was made "for recognizing the National Independence of Liberia and Hayti (sic),"[32] it was not accompanied by a statement encouraging immigration to either country. Remaining within the United States was firmly the mainstream view of Black abolitionists by the war's end.

Despite Douglass' commitment to the war effort, he became discontented with the pace of the Lincoln administration's efforts to secure the rights of freedmen. Becoming disillusioned enough, he refused to endorse Lincoln for reelection in 1864, instead endorsing John C. Fremont of the Radical Democracy Party, which pushed a much more hardline stance on Black equality than the Republican Party at that point.[33] Only after a meeting with Lincoln in August 1864, in which Lincoln actively sought out Douglass' advice on his critics and treated him firmly as an equal, did Douglass change his stance on the administration and return to the fold.[34]

Active Participation

Contemporaries of Garnet, Delany, Douglass, and Harper did more than attempt to organize Blacks in the North for the war effort. Several took direct action by enlisting in the military, and others worked to rescue and protect enslaved people who attempted to flee to Union lines. Douglass' enthusiasm for the war effort spread to his family. Two of his sons, Lewis and Charles Douglass, enlisted in the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in March 1865.[35] The 54th Massachusetts Regiment, one of the first regiments established for African Americans during the Civil War, saw distinguished service during the conflict. Commanded by Robert Gould Shaw, the regiment participated in a committed, but vain, effort to take the Confederate Fort Wagner in South Carolina in July

[32] Library of Congress, "Proceedings of the National convention of colored men, held in the city of Syracuse, N.Y."
[33] Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom,* 430.
[34] Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom,* 436.
[35] Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom,* 385.

1863.[36] Another son, Frederick Jr., actively recruited formerly enslaved people into the army in Vicksburg, Mississippi, starting in February 1864.[37] Douglass' patriotism certainly influenced those around him.

Harriet Tubman, a prominent abolitionist before the war who actively guided escapees from slavery to freedom in the North, acted behind the front lines by leading spy missions and leading fugitive enslaved people to freedom. This led to Tubman being labeled the "Moses of her people" by those she guided. Tubman's activities in the war began early on, with an invite in January 1862 by Massachusetts governor John Andrew to serve in Port Royal, South Carolina, which was at that point becoming a hub for fugitive enslaved people.[38] Tubman successfully arrived at the fort and took on several duties there, including as a nurse treating wounded Union troops, and as the manager of a cafeteria, personally conducting much of the cooking. Even before Blacks were formally allowed to serve in the Union army, Tubman recognized their importance for the war effort and worked to enroll Blacks present at Port Royal into the rolls.[39]

Tubman's stalwart commitment paid off when she became the first woman during the Civil War to plan and carry an armed raid, with the assistance of newly recruited Black soldiers. Taking place on June 1, 1863, the raid took place 25 miles from Port Royal, in a strategic Confederate installation holding stocks of rice and cotton. Confederate soldiers were caught off-guard and were forced to disperse. The raid successfully destroyed several plantations, allowing enslaved people to escape to nearby Union ships. Thousands of dollars worth of crops and livestock were seized, a certain benefit for the war effort.[40] A news article praised Tubman for her leadership, saying the raid "struck a bold and effective blow…without losing a man or receiving a scratch! It was

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[36] See "Fort Wagner/Morris Island," *CWSAC Battle Summaries*, National Park Service, accessed October 22, 2023, https://web.archive.org/web/20190712043940/https://www.nps.gov/abpp/battles/sc007.htm.

[37] Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom,* 422.

[38] Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero* (New York: Random House, 2004), 203.

[39] Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 206-208.

[40] Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land,* 212-213.

a glorious consummation."[41]

Tubman expressed her attitude toward her work in a letter she wrote to colleagues in June 1863, in which she was somewhat despondent. Writing of her raid outside of Port Royal, Tubman said "you have, without doubt, seen a full account of the expedition of which I refer to. Don't you think we colored people are entitled to some credit for that exploit, under the lead of the brave Colonel Montgomery? We weakened the rebels somewhat on the Combahee river by taking and bringing away seven hundred and fifty-six head of their most valuable livestock, known up in your region as 'contrabands,' and this, too, without the loss of a single life on our part, though we have good reason to believe that a number of rebels bit the dust." Nevertheless, Tubman maintained a sense of duty, writing that "I do not see how I am to leave at present the very important work to be done here."[42] Even without the reward of recognition, Tubman recognized the good work she was doing and would not part ways from it.

Another abolitionist active in the war effort was Rev. Thomas James, like Douglass, a resident of Rochester, NY who had escaped from slavery. Starting in 1833, he began publishing an anti-slavery newspaper, known as *The Rights of Man.*[43] In his work as a clergyman, he was assigned by the American Missionary Society to work amongst escaped slaves in Louisville, Kentucky. James wrote in his 1887 memoir that "the government took me out of the hands of the Missionary Society to take charge of freed and refugee blacks, to visit the prisons of the commonwealth, and to set free all colored persons found confined without charge of crime." He was assigned to supervise a camp of homeless Blacks, mainly women and children, as most men had been pressed into service in the Union Army.[44]

James attempted to make conditions in the camp more palatable, establishing a Sunday and day school and attempting to protect those inside the camp from being reclaimed by former

[41] James Yerrington, "Colonel Montgomery's raid - The Rescued Black Chattels," *Wisconsin State Journal* (Madison, WI), June 20, 1863.
[42] Harriet Tubman, "Harriet Tubman Letter to Boston Friends." *Commonwealth* (Boston, MA), July 17, 1863.
[43] Rev. Thomas James, *Wonderful, Eventful Life of Rev. Thomas James, by Himself* (Rochester, N.Y.: Post-Express Printing Company, 1887), 5.
[44] James, *Wonderful, Eventful Life,* 15.



Figure 7: Sarah Bradford, "Harriet Tubman as a Scout During the Civil War," 1869, National Park Service

masters. He describes one case of a slave trader named Bill Hurd, who attempted to claim a woman named Mary in the camp as his own. The dispute was resolved by army superiors, and James successfully placed Mary on a train to Cincinnati. In another incident, James recounted saving the life of an enslaved person named Laura, "who had been locked up by her mistress in a cellar and left to remain there two days and as many nights without food or drink.[45] James remained at the camp for three years, describing hardship and woe among the people he encountered.

Despite his depressing post-war position, James reflected well on his career. He wrote that his "Anti-Slavery agitation developed an active and generous sympathy for the free colored Man of the north, as well as for his brother in bondage." He somewhat despondently reported that now "that the end of the Anti-Slavery agitation has been fully accomplished, our white friends are inclined to leave us to our own resources, overlooking the fact that social prejudices still close the trade against our youth, and that we are again as isolated as in the days before the wrongs of our race touched the heart of the American people."[46] James recognized that even in the aftermath of emancipation, Blacks were still not being granted the full privileges of citizenship and were being met with a lack of sympathy by the general public.

Similarly to James, Sojourner Truth performed service in refugee camps for enslaved people during and in the immediate aftermath of the war. Enslaved in New York, Truth successfully sued for her freedom and dedicated her life to abolitionism. She traveled to Washington, D.C., in 1864, and had the opportunity to

[45] James, *Wonderful, Eventful Life,* 17-20.
[46] James, *Wonderful, Eventful Life,* 21

meet President Lincoln, describing him as the "best President ever."[47] Her work was based in camps in D.C., where 11,000 Blacks had arrived as refugees.[48] Truth, however, had a very different reaction to James toward her work in the camps. Truth derided those residing in the camps as indolent, urging freedmen to be self-reliant, and not to rely on the government for their needs.[49] Although Truth's attitude was seemingly demeaning, it reflected her view on how newly freed Blacks would best integrate in the post-war era. They now needed to take up new responsibilities to lead independent lives outside the confines of plantations and similar settings. In line with this, Truth assisted the Freedmen's Bureau in finding jobs for Blacks outside of D.C.[50] However, her involvement in the bureau ended after she was accused of embezzlement. Returning home to Michigan, Truth shifted her focus to supporting women's rights and Black male suffrage.[51] Black men and women involved in abolitionism shared the same goals of equality for all, but women such as Tubman and Truth may have played a more significant role with their direct action, going beyond the writing and rhetoric employed by most other abolitionists.

Reconstruction and Building a Better Future

The postwar period exemplified well abolitionists' goals of securing the rights of freedmen, though they employed different strategies for achieving them. Near the war's conclusion, a conflict emerged within the American Anti-Slavery Society over whether the organization should disband in the wake of abolition. One faction, led by William Lloyd Garrison, pushed for immediate dissolution, saying there was no need for the organization to continue existing now that abolition was codified. A larger faction, however, voted to keep the organization alive, saying the fight was not yet over until rights such as full suffrage for Black men were secured.[52] The view of this larger faction would come to represent the most prominent Black abolitionists in the postwar era.

In the aftermath of the war, Blacks began openly organizing

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[47] Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol,* (New York*:* W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 205

[481] Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 213.

[49] Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 215.

[50] Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 218.

[51] Painter, *Sojourner Truth,* 223.

[52] Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*, 468.

in former slave states. In Virginia, a "Convention for Colored People" was held, with Henry Highland Garnet in attendance. Delegates at the convention outlined their desires and demands for the post-war era, stating in a resolution that "we feel no ill-will or prejudice toward our former oppressors; are willing to forgive and forget the past, and so shape our future conduct as shall promote our happiness and the community in which we shall live." Their purpose for holding the convention was to appeal to the citizens of the state of Virginia and to the Government of the United States for that protection which we so much need, and for which freemen of all ages have contended."[53] Participants at the convention were willing to reconcile their struggles with slaveholders in order to form a better future for the country, a sign of patriotism in line with Douglass' vision. In an address to Congress, participants at the convention noted Blacks' loyalty and actions in benefit to the Union during the Civil War, noting "in spite of repeated discouragements we continued to flock to your lines, giving invaluable information, guiding your scouting parties and your minor expeditions, digging in your trenches, driving your teams, and in any way lightening the labors of your soldiers."[54]



Figure 8: Franklin C. Courtier, "Lincoln Showing Sojourner Truth the Bible Presented Him by the Colored People of Baltimore," c. 1893, Getty Images

A list of resolutions was made at the convention's conclusion, among them was one that stated "we return thanks to Almighty God, the giver of all good and perfect gifts, for all things, and especially for the freedom of our race, and that in all the strength of our manhood we agree to agitate, agitate, agitate, until our manhood is respected."[55] Acknowledging the conclusion of the war, the participants of the convention rec-

[53] "Proceedings of the Colored People of Virginia," in *Proceedings of the Black State Convention, 1840–1865*, eds. Philip Foner and George Walker (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980), 262.
[54] "Proceedings of the Colored People of Virginia," 271.
[55] "Proceedings of the Colored People of Virginia," 274.

ognized that the fight for liberty was not over, and action was still needed to ensure Blacks were able to enjoy the rights and freedoms granted under the Constitution. Former abolitionists would be among those taking up that call.

His work to end slavery completed, Frederick Douglass shifted his focus to ensuring economic independence for formerly enslaved people, many of whom were now destitute after being forced from their homes. The federal government's efforts in the Reconstruction period included several initiatives to bolster the economic status of those formerly enslaved, among them the establishment of the Freedmen's Savings Bank. Established in April 1865, the bank's initial capital was provided by unclaimed deposits made by Black soldiers in military banks while the war was ongoing.[56] Forty seven and a half percent of depositors in the bank's D.C. branch were former members of the United States Colored Troops, the remainder primarily being freeborn or formerly enslaved people. Soon, the bank reached other Black demographics, including professionals such as physicians, dentists, and civil servants.[57] This is a testament to the Black population's newfound trust in government institutions in the aftermath of the Civil War. However, this optimism was short-lived. Despite being under the official protection of the federal government, loans provided by the bank were not secured. The bank failed in 1874, causing thousands of customers to lose their savings and potential future livelihoods. This dampened Black Americans' trust in federal institutions and forced them to rely on the private sector.

Douglass described his involvement in the bank's operation in his last autobiography, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Douglass wrote that he was encouraged by colleagues in the aftermath of the Civil War to run for office, now having that privilege, but he declined due to age.[58] Instead, he took up a position with the Freedmen's Savings Bank. Douglass wrote that his

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[56] Barbara T. Josiah, "Providing for the Future: The World of the African American Depositors of Washington, DC's Freedmen's Savings Bank, 1865-1874." *The Journal of African American History* 89 (2004): 2.

[57] Josiah, "Providing for the Future," 5-7.

[58] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Hartford, C.N., Park Publishing, 1881), in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies* (Washington, D.C., Library of America, 1994), 835.

involvement in the bank's operations came relatively late, saying he was approached to become president four months before its closure and "was assured by its President and by its Actuary of its sound condition…" Nevertheless, Douglass wrote of his enthusiasm for the bank's operations, describing feeling like the Queen of Sheba when first learning of the bank.[59] He tried to evade responsibility for the bank's failure, writing "all the loans ever made by the bank were made prior to my connection to it as president," and that he was "married to a corpse."[60] Douglass even noted that he attempted to save the bank by loaning it $10,000 of his own money.[61] He asserted that critiques of his role in the bank came from "unscrupulous aspirants" who only received attention by attacking those with already lofty reputations.

Despite the bank's failure, several of its customers were able to rebound and prosper. Parishioners of Mt. Zion United Methodist Church in Washington D.C. had placed deposits in the bank as savings to renovate the building. The church had $2,500 total in savings at the bank's collapse and was only able to recover $486 afterward. Church members nevertheless bound together to rebuild the church, and it was successfully renovated in July 1884.[62] Through self-reliance, they accomplished what Sojourner Truth wanted Blacks to do for their needs in the post-war era.

A Place for Colonizationists

Though marginalized after the Civil War, supporters of American settlement in Africa continued to promote their cause. The American Colonization Society, founded in the antebellum era by Americans wishing to preserve slavery by ridding the country of free Blacks, continued to operate and maintain a close relationship with the country of Liberia. In 1880, the society reported 143 emigrants from America arrived in Liberia, indicating continued interest in colonization.[63]

Although unable to carry out his dream of a colony along the Niger Delta, Henry Highland Garnet maintained an interest in

[59] Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 838-839.
[60] Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 842-843.
[61] Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 839.
[62] Josiah, "Providing for the Future," 11.
[63] "Sixty-Fourth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society," *The African Repository (1850-1892)* 57 (1881): 13.

Africa. In failing health after the war, Garnet nevertheless continued to advocate for emigration, this time to Liberia. He had the support of radicals including Edward Wilmot Blyden and Alexander Crummel.[64] Blyden, originally from the Danish Virgin Islands, became acquainted with a group of refugees from Arkansas staying in New York who were intent on leaving for Liberia, probably to escape the failures of Reconstruction. Blyden was aware of Garnet's declining health, but he was convinced that Garnet would rise up to the task of supporting potential emigres. In 1881, Garnet was appointed Consul General to Liberia by President James Garfield, in recognition of Black voters' support for him. Unfortunately, delays in taking his post and the long ocean voyage further damaged Garnet's health, and he died in office on February 13, 1882, accomplishing little during his time in Liberia.[65] Relatively unsuccessful politically in life, Garnet nevertheless was fortunate to be laid to rest on the continent he long wanted to reside in. In contrast, Blyden, who had emigrated to Liberia in the 1850s, enjoyed a successful career in the country and elsewhere on the continent, including Sierra Leone and Lagos. He served in various capacities as a teacher, school principal, diplomat, and government minister.[66]

Blyden spoke warmly about the progress he had made within Liberia when visiting Philadelphia in 1880. When asked about conditions in Liberia, he stated that "it stands at the present day more flourishing and important than ever before, notwithstanding that it has been greatly misrepresented." Blyden was possibly referring to opponents of African American settlement in this remark. He claimed that the country "contain[ed] a population hospitable and friendly, ready to welcome to their home their brethren returning from the countries of their exile." Blyden also spoke of settlements expanding into inland areas from the coast, claiming that areas in the interior were more conducive to agriculture, and also contained vast natural resources including gold, rubber, and ivory ready to be traded. He was hopeful that trade between Liberia, the United States, and European nations would increase and allow Liberia to prosper, and even expressed a belief that Liberian unification with the British colony of Sierra

[64] William Seraile, "The Brief Diplomatic Career of Henry Highland Garnet," *Phylon* 46 (1985): 72-74.

[65] Seraile, "Brief Diplomatic Career of Garnet," 78.

[66] Hollis Lynch, "Edward Wilmot Blyden: Pan-Negro Patriot from the Caribbean," *New World Journal,* accessed November 16, 2023, https://newworldjournal.org/africa/edward-wilmot-blyden-pan-negro-patriot-from-the-caribbean/.

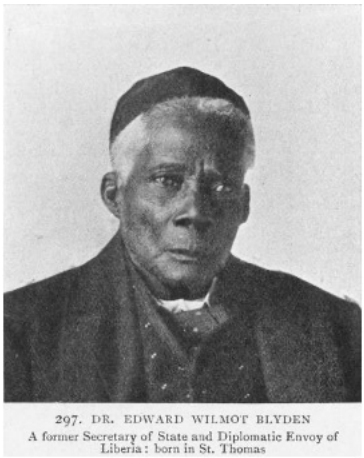

297. DR. EDWARD WILMOT BLYDEN
A former Secretary of State and Diplomatic Envoy of Liberia: born in St. Thomas

Figure 9: Edward Wilmot Blyden, 1910, New York Public Library Digital Collections

Leone was in the near future.[67]

When visiting New York in 1882, Blyden boasted how recent immigrants from North Carolina had successfully built a farmstead in the country, though he did speak despondently about the relationship between Christians and Muslims in the region, claiming the former religion had "not had a fair chance in Africa." However, he appeared to approve of Muslims' mores, saying they were acting to prevent the spread of alcohol among indigenous peoples.[68] He hoped interreligious harmony would emerge at some point. Nevertheless, Blyden was too optimistic about the chances American settlers had of successfully integrating with the indigenous peoples. Americo-Liberians largely maintained a distinct culture from local Liberian groups and held political power over the region to the exclusion of others.[69] Neither Blyden's nor Garnet's dream for a mass return of the African diaspora to Africa and unity among African peoples would be realized.

Conclusion

The under-examination of Black abolitionists and their attitudes and actions regarding the Civil War has been a regrettable aspect of historical study for generations. Historians such as Foner and Jackson have brought attention to their impact, though even their analysis cannot encompass all their feats from their writings and speeches. Despite their array of views, Black abolitionists embraced the Union's effort in the Civil War. Accompanying this

[67] "Liberia's Progress," *Philadelphia Times,* August 20, 1880; *Times* sold 32,500 copies daily in 1880, according to John Henry Hepp, *The Middle-Class City: Transforming Time and Space in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

[68] "Africa for the Africans," *New York World*, August 1882.

[69] Marie Tyler-McGraw, *An African Republic: Black & White Virginians in the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 152.

was a gradual shift from embracing colonization to advocating integration into the United States, as it became clear that securing rights and liberties for Blacks would be possible in the post-Civil War country. Even those contributing to the *Anglo-African,* radical initially in its support for colonization, changed their views as the war progressed. Black abolitionists' support for the Civil War, commitment to equality for all those emancipated, and advocacy for social and political rights all deserve recognition, as do the attitudes and actions of white abolitionists. Although their efforts during Reconstruction were not entirely successful, they exemplified their commitment to this new nation. Moreover, knowledge and research into this will be more critical than ever as the teaching of Black history comes under threat from "divisive concepts" bans in Republican-dominated states, which may bar any education regarding race in grade schools. Future research will strengthen the argument that the efforts of Black abolitionists were anything but "divisive." They were unifying.