
“As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends”:
The Emergence of African American Politics in the
British Atlantic World, 1772–1861

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The English are the best friends the coloured people have upon earth. Though they have oppressed us a little and have colonies now in the West Indies, which oppress us sorely.—Yet notwithstanding they (the English) have done one hundred times more for the melioration of our condition, than all the other nations of the earth put together. The blacks cannot but respect the English as a nation, notwithstanding they have treated us a little cruel.

There is no intelligent black man who knows any thing, but esteems a real Englishman, let him see him in what part of the world he will—for they are the greatest benefactors we have upon earth. We have here and there, in other nations, good friends. But as a nation, the English are our friends.

David Walker, *Walker's Appeal . . . to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, 1830¹

WE KNOW LITTLE ABOUT DAVID WALKER. Yet in his day, he was the most notorious black man in the United States. Probably born in 1796, a free emigrant from the lower South who became a used clothes dealer in Boston, in 1829 and 1830 he published three editions of his pamphlet *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, planning to smuggle it into the South via the black and white sailors who were his customers. His hope was to confront slave owners, warning them with apocalyptic arguments to repent, and the slaves themselves, demanding that they renounce enslavement. If the masters refused their just demands, he said, justice should come down in blood.²

When several hundred copies of the *Appeal* reached southern ports, the effect was spectacular. The governors of three states mobilized against it. Along with contemporary events, including the appearance of William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* on January 1, 1831, and Nat Turner's August 1831 rebellion in Southampton, Vir-

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¹ David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. and with a new introduction by Peter P. Hinks (University Park, Pa., 2000), 43. This is a reprint of the third edition of *Walker's Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*, from 1830; the passage is marked "Addition."

² Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, Pa., 1997), is the most complete account of Walker's life, correcting many previous assertions.



FIGURE 1: "Monkey Uncommon Up, Massa!" This cartoon by the celebrated English illustrator John Tenniel projects in very graphic form the *schadenfreude* of the English regarding American slaveholders immediately following Lincoln's election. The old expression "to get one's monkey up" means "to get angry." *Punch* 39 (December 1, 1860): 119.

ginia, it spurred the hardening of slavery as a system of pervasive control. The rights of southern free people of color were curtailed, teaching slaves to read and write was barred, and a range of proscriptions were enacted to block further northern interference.

To any student of antebellum U.S. history, Walker's *Appeal* is a familiar landmark. Generally overlooked, however, are the passages inserted in its second and third editions in early 1830 where he repeatedly asserted that "the English are our friends . . . our best friends." Despite numerous editions of the *Appeal*, and many analyses of its rhetoric, Walker's fervent Anglophilia has almost completely escaped scholarly notice.³ This lacuna is part of a larger gap in our understanding of black American politics between the American Revolution and the Civil War. In those decades, Britain's aid was seen by all sides, from the strongest supporters of slavery to the fiercest abolitionists, as decisive in empowering African Americans as political actors at home, despite their enormous disabilities. That common understanding among enemies requires recovery.

AFRICAN AMERICANS FIRST EXERTED EFFECTIVE POLITICAL POWER outside the United States, using the transatlantic state apparatus of the British Empire. Thomas Bender has called for "a respatialization of historical narrative in a way that will liberate us from the enclosure of the nation." In the antebellum era, this liberating "respatialization" was carried out by historical actors themselves, rather than latter-day scholars.⁴ Various aspects of Britain's arc of refuge have been investigated by scholars such as Robin Winks, Betty Fladeland, and Richard M. Blackett, but it has never been approached in the way that Americans, black and white, then understood it—as an imperial totality.⁵ It is well established that Canada was a sanctuary for American fugitives; that a slave who found himself in Nassau or Bermuda suddenly became free; that audiences in England, Scotland, and Ireland flocked to hear black American orators; and that from 1838 to 1861, African Americans across the free states celebrated West Indian emancipation on August 1 as their own vicarious Independence Day. What we must consider is how the various pieces of the Anglo-African American partnership fit into a front of official, elite, and mass solidarity linking the British Atlantic in the era when Britain became the first world-hegemonic nation. Taken together, these instances suggest a long-term intention to extend English abolitionism to the larger Atlantic world, and the United States in particular, thus guaranteeing England's claim to global leadership as a power both great and beneficent, a beacon of liberty versus the upstart Americans. This exercise in table-turning, in which black Americans were gleefully complicit, benefited the British on

³ Simon Schama reduces it to "a sentimental notion of British freedom"; see Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution* (London, 2005), 13. More useful is James Brewer Stewart, "Boston, Abolition, and the Atlantic World, 1820–1861," in Donald M. Jacobs, ed., *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston* (Bloomington, Ind., 1993), 101–125, stressing Walker's role in an abolitionist culture that was "irrevocably anglophile, subversively patriotic, and based on an African American view of history's moral direction" (111).

⁴ Thomas Bender, "Historians, the Nation, and the Plenitude of Narratives," in Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 8.

⁵ The major exception is the chapter titled "Duet with John Bull" in Benjamin Quarles's seminal *Black Abolitionists* (New York, 1969).

multiple levels, while benefiting African Americans even more. From a position of great weakness, they derived a startling degree of political agency.

No hindsight was needed for African Americans to understand the effectiveness of British solidarity; only much later, with America's rise and Britain's fall, did we lose sight of what was then quite evident, especially to architects of the "Slave Power" (northerners' term for the South's political domination of the federal government) such as John C. Calhoun. There is ample proof that black Americans saw themselves exactly like the tiny individual who, standing at a certain angle upon the axis of the world, spins a weighty opponent off into space. While touring England, on May 12, 1846, at Finsbury Chapel in Moorfields, London, Frederick Douglass delivered one of his most famous speeches, in which he reveled in his role as representative of the enslaved, proclaiming with his characteristic *schadenfreude* that "some negro of theirs has broken loose from his chains . . . and is now exposing their deeds of deep damnation to the gaze of the christian people of England." Later in the speech, discussing the outcry that his speeches had caused at home, he defended himself against the charge of disloyalty:

I am here, because you have an influence on America that no other nation can have . . . let one of the slaves get loose, let him summon the people of Britain, and make known to them the conduct of the slaveholders toward their slaves, and it cuts them to the quick, and produces a sensation such as would be produced by nothing else. The power I exert now is something like the power that is exerted by the man at the end of the lever; my influence now is just in proportion to the distance that I am from the United States.⁶

In this context, David Walker's assertions sixteen years earlier are even more striking. On the face of it, they seem markedly premature. He wrote three years before Parliament voted to end imperial slavery, before British Canada welcomed thousands of black refugees, before Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Martin Delany, Charles and Sarah Remond, Ellen and William Craft, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, William Wells Brown, and other African Americans became the toasts of London, Edinburgh, and Dublin. What did Walker know that enabled his sweeping claim of British friendship, even in 1830?

A brief review of events will explain why, at the nadir of American abolitionism, after the Missouri Compromises of 1820–1821 removed slavery from national politics and before the rise of Garrisonian abolitionism, Walker made his extraordinary claim about a people that still held slaves in vast numbers, and a government that put down servile insurrections with exemplary savagery.⁷ He gave no explanation, yet there are certain things that we can presume.⁸ He must have shared the popular understanding that since the 1772 *Somerset v. Stewart* decision, there were no slaves

⁶ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York, 1855), 409, 417.

⁷ Following the 1823 Demerara revolt in Guyana, about 250 rebel slaves were executed, as Walker apparently knew; see Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988), 428–430. A footnote in the *Appeal*'s third edition passionately denounces the injustice of white rule in Jamaica. See *David Walker's Appeal*, ed. Hinks, 66.

⁸ The *Appeal*'s first edition in mid-1829 did not include this emphatic praise of England. Walker's sudden avowal was likely spurred by the welcome offered by British authorities to free blacks facing expulsion from Cincinnati, since abolitionist newspapers had reported on those negotiations in July, August, and September 1829. See William H. Pease and Jane Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison, Wis., 1963), 172 nn. 1 and 2, and also p. 52 of the *Appeal*'s third edition, where Walker refers to slaves escaping to Canada ("Among the English, our real friends and

in England or Canada.⁹ Although, like all American abolitionists, he was publicly silent on the topic, he would have known of Britain's having freed and armed large numbers of American slaves not once but twice.¹⁰ He belonged to the Prince Hall Lodge, the major black Masonic organization in the post-Revolutionary North, founded when British troops inducted fifteen black Bostonians in 1775, after the American lodges refused to do so.¹¹ He would have heard of those permanent exiles, the Black Loyalists who fought for Britain during the Revolution, and the *Appeal* refers to fugitive slaves' finding asylum in Canada. Finally, we know from an 1828 speech that much of Walker's admiration stemmed from the efficacy of British abolitionism. The "friends" he had in mind were figures such as Granville Sharp and William Wilberforce.¹² Since the 1780s, they had built a cross-class movement to push Parliament to ban the slave trade.¹³ When that commerce was finally outlawed in 1808, Britain enforced the ban against other maritime powers for half a century, while the toothless U.S. prohibition was publicly flouted, and Americans became the Atlantic's main slave traders. In each case, what mattered to Walker and other black people was Britain's *relative* humanitarianism. Given its leading role in the slave trade over two centuries, this may seem a peculiar perspective, but it was well-informed.

Somerset v. Stewart was the common-law precedent for all subsequent emancipations in the northern states, yet it remains a footnote in American history.¹⁴ James Somerset, a Virginia slave brought to England by his owner, Charles Stewart, in 1769, sued to prevent his being taken to the West Indies. Reluctantly, the Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, William Mansfield, invoked habeas corpus to prevent

benefactors"), and p. 58 ("If any of us see fit to go away, go to those who have been for many years, and are now our greatest earthly friends and benefactors—the English").

⁹ Slavery remained technically legal in Britain and most of Canada until the 1833 Emancipation Act. For a summary of de facto abolition in the four Canadian provinces, see William Renwick Riddell, Justice of the Supreme Court of Ontario, "General Observations," *Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 3 (July 1920): 376–377. Riddell represents Canada's blend of racial liberalism and national pride; between 1919 and 1932, he published fourteen articles in the *Journal of Negro History* documenting the history of slavery in Canada.

¹⁰ The reasons for this silence are obvious: any mention of black men fighting for Britain validated the notion of a slavish fifth column. Walker was born in Wilmington, North Carolina, where the British had landed during the Revolution, freeing numerous slaves.

¹¹ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700–1860* (New York, 1997), 125–126.

¹² See *David Walker's Appeal*, ed. Hinks, 87–88, for a speech to the Massachusetts General Colored Association, printed in *Freedom's Journal* on December 19, 1828: "That we have very good friends yea, very good, among that body [referring to "our white brethren and friends"], perhaps none but a few of those who have, ever read at all will deny; and that many of them have gone, and will go, all lengths for our good, is evident, from the very works of the great, the good, and the godlike Granville Sharpe [sic], Wilberforce, Lundy, and the truly patriotic and lamented Mr. Ashmun, late Colonial Agent of Liberia." Walker here mentions both Englishmen and Americans, including Benjamin Lundy, editor of *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*.

¹³ See J. R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilization of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787–1807* (Manchester, 1995).

¹⁴ See chap. 10, "Antislavery and the Conflict of Laws," in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1975), 469–522; also William M. Wiecek, *The Sources of Antislavery Constitutionalism in America, 1760–1848* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), 42–44, on the connection between *Somerset* and the famous Massachusetts cases ending slavery in the 1780s. Rogers M. Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven, Conn., 1997), 63–65, stresses Mansfield's finding that without the positive law pioneered by Virginia's 1661 codification of Negro slavery, involuntary lifetime servitude could not exist in England proper.

Stewart from sending Somerset out of England, setting the slave free on narrow grounds, despite his lawyers' best efforts to prove that there was no legal basis for slavery. But Mansfield's decision was immediately interpreted by other judges as invalidating slavery in England. In 1778, Lord Chief Justice Alvanley ruled that a slave brought to England became "as free as any one of us."¹⁵ Several thousand British slaves walked away from their masters, and no slave-owning American could bring his "peculiar species of property" onto British soil. Given the American republic's demands of comity, none of the new states ever reached that standard *de jure*, but the antebellum era saw the spread of "personal liberty" legislation and judicial decisions invoking *Somerset*.

The *Somerset* decision suggested a basic divergence in racial politics between center and periphery. In tandem with other British policies, including the 1774 grant of civil rights to French Canadian Catholics, that is how *Somerset* was read by many Americans. As David Waldstreicher shows, it forced the colonies' London agent, Benjamin Franklin, to dissemble, since he could not simultaneously advocate colonial liberty—freedom to maintain slavery—and welcome *Somerset*'s extension of the liberty of the British subject.¹⁶ Subsequently, this decision, so notable in English history, largely vanished from the narrative of American history. As "an ideological prop to imperial rule," its timing threatened fundamentally Whiggish premises about democratizing colonies versus a repressive metropole.¹⁷ More than two centuries later, it is hard to imagine England guaranteeing liberty while the new United States denied it, but in this case it was undeniable that "it was the royal, rather than the republican, road that seemed to offer a surer chance of liberty."¹⁸ Indeed, the most salient fact about Walker's *Appeal* is that, other than scornful invocations of the Declaration of Independence, he ignores the American Revolution, as if he considered it irrelevant to black people.¹⁹

A judicial decision with no force in British North America could be disregarded, but the November 1775 proclamation by Lord Dunmore, Virginia's royal governor, was harder to ignore. By then, word of *Somerset* had reached some slaves, presumably via black mariners crisscrossing the Atlantic littoral, and from Georgia to Massachusetts slaves took advantage of the brewing uncertainty, offering aid to crown officials such as Massachusetts governor Thomas Hutchinson and his successor, General Thomas Gage.²⁰ In April 1775, just before fighting broke out in Massachusetts, a delegation of Virginia slaves met with Dunmore, proposing to back the crown.²¹ In November, after retreating to a ship on the James River, he promised immediate

¹⁵ Wiecek, *The Sources of Antislavery Constitutionalism in America*, 39, 34–35.

¹⁶ See David Waldstreicher, *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution* (New York, 2004), 198–202.

¹⁷ Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006), 101.

¹⁸ Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 17–18.

¹⁹ Walker did pay attention to Thomas Jefferson, but focused his anger on the spurious scientific racialism of *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

²⁰ Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 21–22, notes that Hutchinson and Gage received five different petitions in 1773–1774, and cites a 1775 Georgia advertisement for a runaway slave that says he had tried "to board a vessel for Great Britain from the knowledge he has of the late determination of the Somerset case" (25).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

freedom to any slave who fled a rebellious master.²² The effect in the southern colonies was electric. Over the next six years, slaves of all descriptions sought out British forces, vastly widening the gulf between colonies and metropole, as demonstrated by Thomas Jefferson's charge in the draft of the Declaration of Independence that George III had "excited domestic Insurrections amongst us." Both Sir Henry Clinton and then Sir William Howe, successive British commanders in chief, tried the same gambit.²³ The possibilities were clearly understood by the revolutionaries. As George Washington observed upon hearing of the British offer, "Success will depend on which side can arm the Negroes faster," but his 1780 plan to protect South Carolina and Georgia by enlisting three thousand slaves was frustrated by those states' veto.²⁴

The British willingness to emancipate American slaves has generally been ascribed to a brutal opportunism.²⁵ Just as Jefferson's enormously inflated claims that Virginia lost 30,000 slaves and the colonies 100,000 acquired legitimacy through repetition, it was long asserted that the British were never liberators except by accident, and many fugitives were sold into West Indian slavery by British commanders. Recent scholarship by Cassandra Pybus, examining what actually happened to the perhaps 20,000 liberated slaves, and Christopher L. Brown, assaying the larger shift in British self-understanding forced by the American Revolution, suggests a more complex narrative.²⁶ First, the Black Loyalists were recognized as vital workers for the imperial war effort in places such as New York, as well as valuable "Pioneers" attached to the regular army.²⁷ Second, this recognition produced war's most elemental effect—bonds of loyalty between officers and men.²⁸ Third, most British officers treated the former slaves as well as can be expected, given that thousands were struck down by epidemic diseases, while the colonists often exacted a bloody revenge.²⁹ Fourth, "Contrary to received opinion, the British did not renege on their promises of freedom; they emancipated those survivors to whom they believed they were obligated."³⁰ Finally, British politicians and generals found considerable solace

²² See chap. 5, "Free Virginians versus Slaves and Governor Dunmore," in Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999), 143, for how "rising aspirations among blacks and mounting fears among whites" set the South on the road to independence.

²³ Clinton's 1779 proclamation promised "to every Negro who shall desert the Rebel Standard full security to follow within the Lines any occupation which he may think proper"; see Arnett G. Lindsay, "Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Great Britain Bearing on the Return of Negro Slaves, 1783–1828," *Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 4 (October 1920): 393 n. 6, for the full text.

²⁴ Washington is quoted in Blackburn, *Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, 113–114.

²⁵ See Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), although she does concede that "For the vast majority of slaves who actively participated in the Revolution, the arrival of the British army was a liberating moment" (118).

²⁶ Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, 2007); Pybus, "Jefferson's Faulty Math: The Question of Slave Defections in the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (April 2005): 243–264; Brown, *Moral Capital*.

²⁷ See Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 28–29, on the enormous demand for black labor in wartime New York City.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 58–59, 66, 77–78, 148, for instances where British generals recognized the claims of reciprocal loyalty, even long after the war was over.

²⁹ Pybus, "Jefferson's Faulty Math," offers the most careful accounting of the fate of the liberated slaves. Through careful extrapolation, she arrives at the figure of 20,000 fugitives reaching British lines, and further estimates that 8,000 to 10,000 of the 12,000 survivors departed at the war's end for Canada, Britain itself, and the Caribbean colonies.

³⁰ Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 38. Pybus asserts that "Their evacuation of America would have

in claiming the ethical high ground through keeping their promises to the former slaves.³¹

Certainly British policymakers were motivated by self-interest. Arming American slaves was a classic piece of statecraft to undercut restive colonials. But British recruitment had its own momentum, generating "moral purpose from an entirely amoral set of decisions," so that over time, "[e]xpeditients determined practice" and "[p]ractice determined policy," which "drifted toward becoming a matter of principle."³² Dunmore did not turn his black recruits into ditch-diggers, but created an "Aethiopian Battalion." Later, when black troops massed in New York at war's end, observers noted the friendly relations among black and white. Their commander, Sir Guy Carleton, dragged out his discussions with Washington over repatriating ex-slaves, as mandated in the Treaty of Paris, insisting that he would exclude those who accepted British offers through November 1782, as "no Interpretation could be put on the Articles inconsistent with *prior Engagements binding the National Honour which must be kept with all colours*." As he put it in a letter to Washington, "I had no right to deprive them of that liberty I found them possessed of."³³ Meanwhile, lower-ranking British officers freely distributed blank certificates stipulating that "said Negro has hereby his Excellency Sir Guy Carleton's Permission to go to Nova-Scotia, or wherever else [to be filled in "he" or "she"] may think proper."³⁴ The Americans watched in frustration as thousands of their slaves left.

Britain's postwar conduct also cannot be explained by a calculus of expediency. The British maintained a grudging commitment to the Black Loyalists, first bringing 3,500 to Nova Scotia, and then sending 1,200 on to Sierra Leone in 1792, to establish an expatriate colony. While their treatment by local whites and officials in Canada was highly discriminatory, it could have been considerably worse. These were people of no power, stateless orphans, who might have been sold back into slavery, left to wander, or "transported" en masse to Australia like the indigent Irish and Scots. Instead they were able to eke out a precarious living and make use of crown courts to defend their rights against attempts at re-enslavement or forced indenture.³⁵ All of this Walker would have known, as he would have known of the second wave of emancipation in 1812–1814, when Vice Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane offered all slaves in the Chesapeake "their choice of either entering into his Majesty's sea or land forces, or of being sent as FREE settlers to the British possessions in North

to be the most significant act of emancipation in early American history." Similarly, Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), 23, describes the response to British military emancipation as "the greatest slave rebellion in North American history."

³¹ Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, 104–105, on how both Lord Cornwallis after Yorktown and William Pitt in the 1790s, when negotiating with Americans, bestowed this redemption on themselves. Brown, *Moral Capital*, 298, vividly captures the "pleasure" felt by these men in "posturing as liberators."

³² *Ibid.*, 312.

³³ Quoted in Schama, *Rough Crossings*, 146 n. 17, 148.

³⁴ One of the "Birch passes," so-called because they were signed by Brigadier General Birch, is reproduced as an illustration in Graham Hodges, ed., *The Black Loyalist Directory: African Americans in Exile after the American Revolution* (New York, 1996).

³⁵ See W. Bryan Rommel-Ruiz, "Atlantic Revolutions: Slavery and Freedom in Newport, Rhode Island, and Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the Era of the American Revolution" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1999), 354–355, where he describes how a Nova Scotia jury in 1791 sentenced a white American to jail because it found that he had tried to sell a black woman and her children who were "free persons and subjects of King George."

America or the West Indies."³⁶ Finally, like any politically literate American, he must have been aware of how the crown's refusal to offer compensation for these freed-people dragged on for decades. Only in 1827, after years of negotiations, did Britain finally pay \$1,204,960, to be divided among the 1,100 American claimants from the two wars.³⁷

For Walker, these instances would have been preludes to the fundamental divergence after the simultaneous slave-trade abolitions by England and the United States on January 1, 1808. From then until 1861, the U.S. law against trading in slaves was typically a "dead letter," in W. E. B. Du Bois's words, whereas Britain systematically organized its repression, involving almost every European and American nation.³⁸ The British government signed treaties with Spain, Portugal, France, Prussia, Austria, and Russia, as well as with Sardinia, the German city-states, Naples, the Republic of Texas, and many African states, giving the British navy a right of search.³⁹ In 1815, pressured by a campaign organized by Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, Britain raised slave trade abolition at the Congress of Vienna.⁴⁰ In the starkest contrast, as late as 1860, the British government observed that "the practice is for vessels to sail under an American flag," and tried to draw the United States into a diplomatic conference to discuss enforcement.⁴¹ U.S. policy was to insist on the absolute legal immunity of American-flagged ships. Even after British naval parties boarded ships self-evidently built as slavers, the State Department insisted on their inviolability. It was rare for U.S. courts to convict anyone for engaging in the traffic, and every president from Jefferson to Jackson pardoned slave-traders.⁴²

What lesson would David Walker have drawn from these facts? First, that Britain was capable of aiding African people in good faith; second, that British law could be relied upon; and third, that Britain had tangible global power. None of these claims could have been made for the U.S. government. Yet everything that Walker observed was a prologue to the efflorescence of imperial solidarity from the 1830s on, when American Negrophobia met its mirror image, an emphatic embrace of blackness, leading Frederick Douglass to observe sardonically on his first visit to Britain that it was "an advantage to be a nigger here," even if he was "hardly black enough for British taste."⁴³

³⁶ See Frank A. Cassell, "Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and the War of 1812," *Journal of Negro History* 57, no. 2 (April 1972): 144-155, which demonstrates that memories of earlier English emancipations remained strong. As the British navy raided the Eastern Shore, slaves organized parties to aid them as "spies, guides, messengers and laborers," and eventually uniformed soldiers (144).

³⁷ Lindsay, "Diplomatic Relations between the United States and Great Britain," 418-419.

³⁸ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (1954; repr., Millwood, N.Y., 1973), 109.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 144, for a chart listing this vast diplomatic effort.

⁴⁰ See Jerome Reich, "The Slave Trade at the Congress of Vienna: A Study in English Public Opinion," *Journal of Negro History* 53, no. 2 (April 1968): 129-143, documenting how British abolitionists lobbied the tsar and the king of Prussia seeking immediate abolition of the slave trade by France.

⁴¹ Du Bois, *Suppression of the African Slave-Trade*, 134-135, 149.

⁴² See Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*, ed. Ward M. McAfee (New York, 2001), on official America's blind eye toward massive participation in the trade.

⁴³ R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, La., 1983), 107.

IN THE DECADES LEADING TO THE CIVIL WAR, black Americans were connected to the British Empire in myriad ways—reading in a newspaper about an anti-slavery appeal by British citizens, or the crowds that greeted Douglass in Birmingham or Glasgow; imagining themselves in emancipated Jamaica, where propertied men of color voted and were elected to office; for a tiny number, enjoying the friendship of British divines, nobles, and merchant-princes. For most, however, the site for concrete solidarity was Canada, which emerged in the 1830s as a sanctuary for escaping slaves. Although slave-catchers crossed the border, it was they who faced arrest.

The Canadian safe harbor developed for several reasons: de facto emancipation in both Britain and Canada following *Somerset*, an unpoliced border stretching from Maine to Minnesota, and the emergence of Canadian identity from a quiet but deep anti-Americanism among the tens of thousands of Empire Loyalists forced out during the Revolution. Historically, Canadians have exaggerated the number of black exiles they succored, claiming 60,000, and their willingness to grant civil equality to ex-slaves has contributed to an enduring mythos of Canada as exceptionally civilized.⁴⁴ Yet there was a hard core of truth to this legend: Douglass stated in 1852 that “in Canada, the black and the white man stand upon a common level before the law,” and two years later, Martin Delany, while advocating that blacks emigrate to Central America, declared that in extremis they should go to Canada (as he himself did in 1856), where they would be “politically equal to the whites.”⁴⁵ From early on, African Americans in Canada voted, sat on juries, testified in courts, and fought in their own militia units under their own officers. Abroad, black Canadians were recognized as British subjects, with the privileges attached to that status. Nowhere in the United States could a black person reach this level of citizenship, since few black Americans voted, none served as jurors, federal law excluded blacks from militia service, and they were rarely granted passports. It is easy to see why in 1856 a former slave told William Still, the Philadelphia conductor of the Underground Railroad, that Canada “is the best poor man’s country that I know of.”⁴⁶

As a consequence, Afro-Canadians became at least as Anglophone as their white neighbors. In Nova Scotia, the Black Refugees of the War of 1812 developed a distinctive “African British North American” identity, which “rested on struggles for freedom, political inclusion, shared experience, and location within the British Empire.”⁴⁷ Across Canada, the expatriates were known for what Harriet Martineau called “the extravagance of their loyalty” to the crown. Almost one thousand volunteered to help suppress the 1837–1838 Mackenzie-Papineau Rebellion, forming

⁴⁴ See Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (New Haven, Conn., 1971), 233 for the derivation of the figure of 60,000 and the actual census figures, and 240 for his estimate that “by 1860 the black population of Canada West alone may have reached forty thousand, three-quarters of whom had been or were fugitive slaves or their children.”

⁴⁵ *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, September 3, 1852; Martin Delany, “Political Destiny of the Colored Race, on the American Continent,” in *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, August 24, 1854* (Pittsburgh, 1854), quoted in Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Philip Lapsansky, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860* (New York, 2001), 239.

⁴⁶ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 247.

⁴⁷ Harvey Amani Whitfield, “The Development of Black Refugee Identity in Nova Scotia, 1813–1850,” *Left History* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 21, documenting how they were integrated into local politics and ostentatiously celebrated their Britishness.

a Colored Corps long used for policing purposes.⁴⁸ By the 1850s, they had developed a strong political identity as Tories and upholders of British rule, versus the threat of absorption into what William Wells Brown disparaged as "the Republican Egypt" to the south.⁴⁹ Any reader of the *Provincial Freeman*, the newspaper edited by the expatriate Mary Ann Shadd Cary, was consistently instructed that the party which was "the firmest encourager and supporter of British Institutions should receive the undivided support of the colored people; on the other hand, that party [the Reformers] which is found giving its support to Republican Institutions, to the exclusion of Monarchical or British, should receive their undivided opposition."⁵⁰ As H. Ford Douglass put it in March 1857, "Her Majesty's colored subjects" must "resist to the last, every innovation upon the Conservative principles of British liberty and British rule in these provinces. Colored men should become as thoroughly British as they can."⁵¹

Recently, however, some historians have argued that the refugees were "unwelcome guests."⁵² Certainly "British liberty" tolerated a strong admixture of Negrophobia. At the time, however, the mystique of the "North Star" was very powerful. Crossing the border became a transcendent experience. By 1853, evoking that "leap" to liberty was the natural peroration for the ex-slave and recent Liberty Party vice-presidential candidate the Reverend Samuel Ringgold Ward, before a respectable London audience, including the Lord Mayor:

Mr. Chairman, there is something in a man's being free (loud applause) . . . It is like a sort of resurrection . . . There is a development and a springing forth, like Minerva from the brain of Jove, armed and equipped for the battle. (Cheers.) . . . an American captain . . . [said] that the most surprising thing there was the leap of the slave to the Canadian shore. Niagara poured down its mighty cascade in vain; there was one sight sublimer still—the leap of the slave to Canada (cheers) . . . It was the transforming power of the sacred aegis of British laws that said to the man who was a chattel, "Be thou free—be a man!"⁵³

However sentimentalized, Canada's status as a free-soil bastion was based on the refusal by crown authorities to extradite fugitives. Extradition was first refused in

⁴⁸ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 149–152; also Martineau, *Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War*, 34 (from *Retrospect of Western Travel* [1838]): "they exceedingly dread the barest mention of the annexation of Canada to the United States."

⁴⁹ *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views of the Scenes in the Life of an American Slave, from His Birth in Slavery to His Death or His Escape to His First Home of Freedom on British Soil* (London, n.d. [1849]), 37.

⁵⁰ *Provincial Freeman*, May 12, 1855, an article by "A Descendant of the African Race," probably Shadd Cary, evaluating the two major parties. On September 22 of that year, she (or he) stressed that the free people of color must always favor Conservatives as "composed . . . of materials, that are incapable of a general course of procedure, that will favour cast [sic], because of complexional differences," since they are "the Constitutional party of our much envied country . . . true to the general interest, and loyal to the Crown"; on December 22, the *Freeman* endorsed Colonel John Prince, "The English Gentleman," as a candidate for the Provincial Parliament, on the grounds that he was "a true Patriot and Conservative," and was "thoroughly hated by the yankees."

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, March 28, 1857.

⁵² See Jason H. Silverman, *Unwelcome Guests: Canada West's Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800–1865* (Millwood, N.Y., 1985), which documents discrimination that "permeated all levels of black life" (viii), although generally "the black refugees benefited from proper legal proceedings wherein their rights as free men, equal with whites under Canadian law, were protected" (43).

⁵³ Speech of Samuel Ringgold Ward to the Colonial Missionary Society, May 9, 1853, in C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 1: *The British Isles, 1830–1865* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985), 336–337.

1819, in response to an appeal from Secretary of State John Quincy Adams.⁵⁴ This led to debates within British government circles, since U.S. officials regarded Canada's policy as encouraging crime. In 1837, London formalized the non-extradition policy, although in 1842 a runaway charged with theft was sent back. Finally, in 1843, the two countries ratified the Webster-Ashburton Treaty, including provisions for extradition that did not specifically exempt slaves. British and Canadian abolitionists lobbied ministers and Parliament intensively, and the prime minister, Lord Palmerston, wrote provincial officials that the treaty should not apply to black refugees.⁵⁵

It was hardly preordained that Canada would play this role. Large-scale emigration of African Americans began because of repression of free blacks in the South, rising white hostility in the North, and abolitionists' commitment to aiding runaways. When black men organized national conventions from 1830 to 1835 to challenge the American Colonization Society (ACS), they exempted Canada from their anti-emigrationism. Although six hundred American blacks had already settled at Amherstburg, Ontario, in the 1820s, the pattern of seeking land from the crown began in 1829, when several hundred blacks left Cincinnati following city authorities' threats to enforce Ohio's Black Code, which required African Americans to post a \$500 security bond as a guarantee of good behavior. Cincinnati's black community successfully petitioned Canada's lieutenant governor for land, which became the community of Wilberforce.⁵⁶ Like most such settlements, it was plagued by financial problems and infighting. But this effort succeeded in injecting a new strategy into the battle for black rights. A reported statement by the lieutenant governor was widely reprinted: "Tell the *republicans* on your side of the line, that we royalists do not know men by their color. Should you come to us, you will be entitled to all the privileges of the rest of his majesty's subjects."⁵⁷

Migration became a flood after the Compromise of 1850, with its Fugitive Slave Bill that abolished habeas corpus and Fourth Amendment protections for free blacks. Both flight and resistance intensified, exemplified by three famous 1851 episodes hinging on the combination of physical force in the United States and the Canadian escape hatch: the February rescue of former slave Shadrach Minkins from Boston's federal courthouse and his removal to Montreal; the September battle in

⁵⁴ See Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 102, on how the British chargé in Washington told Adams that the fugitives "by their residence in Canada, become free, whatever may have been their former condition in this country, and should any attempt be made to infringe upon this right of freedom," they could go before judges and expect full satisfaction.

⁵⁵ Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 168–173. In two cases where local officials complied with American requests, they were sanctioned.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 155–157.

⁵⁷ As Winks has pointed out, this comment appeared in many different forms. The earliest version is in the *Proceedings of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention, Held at Putnam, on the Twenty-Second, Twenty-Third, and Twenty-Fourth of April, 1835* ([New York], 1835), 18–19, which reproduced a "Statement in regard to Cincinnati" from the Anti-Slavery Committee of Lane Seminary. It reported that following the efforts of city authorities to expel free blacks, a delegation went to Canada seeking land, and "returned with a favorable answer. The reply of Sir James Colebrook, Governor of Upper Canada, is characteristic of a noble minded man. 'Tell the Republicans . . .'" This was repeated in William Jay, *Condition of the Free People of Color of the United States* (1838; repr., New York, 1969), 377–378. It also appeared in *The Colored American*, March 7, 1840, reprinted from *The Anti-Slavery Examiner*. In 1838, Harriet Martineau published a slightly different version in "The Martyr Age of the United States," omitting the wonderfully sardonic "royalist"; see Martineau, *Writings on Slavery and the American Civil War*, ed. Deborah Anna Logan (Dekalb, Ill., 2002), 47. All four versions misidentify the lieutenant governor as Colebrook. As with *Somerset*, what matters is how this reported comment was understood.

Christiana, Pennsylvania, between black men led by William Parker and the slave owner Edward Gorsuch's posse, with Parker and others fleeing to Ontario after killing Gorsuch; and the October "Jerry Rescue" in Syracuse, when an interracial abolitionist crowd overpowered federal marshals to spirit a fugitive to Canada.

These and other "rescues" received intense publicity. Finally, in 1858–1859, as the U.S. state's machinery of consent unraveled, Canada became a base for direct attacks on slavery. Some of these developments were famous, some less visible; Harriet Tubman, who returned to her native Eastern Shore of Maryland to free slaves eighteen times, became legendary among northern abolitionists and southern authorities, but it was little noted that she actually organized those raids from St. Catharines, Ontario. In contrast, John Brown's Canadian connection became known within days of his disastrous raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry on October 18, 1859. His captured papers included details of a convention held on May 8, 1858, in Chatham, Ontario, to organize a "provisional government" for a planned guerrilla base in Virginia's mountains. Fearing arrest, extradition to Virginia, and execution, three of the "Secret Six," prominent Bostonians who had financed Brown's insurgency, fled to Canada. So did Frederick Douglass, who was implicated in Brown's conspiracy.

Official toleration of cross-border guerrilla raids was bad enough, but something worse awaited. While escaping in 1853, a Missouri slave killed a pursuer and fled to Canada, where he lived as "John Anderson." In 1859, Missouri tried to extradite him. The case became a transatlantic sensation, since under British law anyone had the right to use mortal force against a kidnapper, while under U.S. law a slave had no rights at all.⁵⁸ At first Anderson lost, as Canada's chief justice applied a narrow interpretation of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty. The Colonial Office intervened to block immediate extradition, and the Court of Queen's Bench in London asserted jurisdiction, while the prime minister promised Parliament that Anderson would not be surrendered, and the *London Times* huffed that Englishmen were "not accustomed to act as bailiffs or as gaolers for the Slaveowners of the South."⁵⁹ Anderson was eventually freed because a Canadian court voided his extradition warrant, a move that was widely understood as a political decision. Reaching London soon after the Civil War began, he was introduced at a rally of six thousand as "Citizen Anderson," and avowed "All honour to Her Majesty the Queen, for my freedom . . . I thank God I have at last broken the yoke . . . I thought I had seven years ago, but I never did till now, and I have to thank God and Great Britain for it."⁶⁰

When this case is examined through the frameworks of diplomatic history, it seems remarkable: the world's dominant military power had endorsed the most radical doctrine of slave resistance—that slaves could kill in self-defense. Combined with the hands-off attitude toward Brown and Tubman, the Anderson case suggested that the conflict between British and American understandings of liberty had become irrepressible. Here is where the American reader must step back and enter the pastness of this particular past. Just as Canada's historic invisibility to Americans effaces its earlier role in the arc of imperial hegemony, England's recession from power since

⁵⁸ See Patrick Brode, *The Odyssey of John Anderson* (Toronto, 1989).

⁵⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 76.

⁶⁰ Speech of John Anderson in London, July 2, 1861, in Ripley, *The British Isles*, 494.

1945 obscures how its empire weighed on Americans, especially southerners, in the nineteenth century—their sense of inferiority when confronting John Bull's navy, factory complex, and vast well of investment capital, and his cultural and institutional sophistication. Anderson was not the first murderous slave to benefit from British sanctuary. In 1841, slaves seized an American ship, the *Creole*, off Richmond, killed one of its officers, and imprisoned the rest. It was taken into Nassau, and the fugitives were granted summary freedom by British authorities.⁶¹ The Anderson and *Creole* affairs were reminders that the South was in economic terms a colony of Britain—it had no navy, no merchant marine, no industry, and hardly any schools or railroads. Deprived of the military protection guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, the slave states could expect only what later theorists dubbed “dependency,” a prospect that haunted southern leaders.

HOWEVER ODIUS TO “SOUTHERN MEN” was the Canadian refuge, the English at home seemed bent on inciting “social equality.” Their courting of escaped slaves such as Douglass, who were “lionized, feted, and patronized by the British aristocracy and men of wealth,” receiving the adulation of crowds and the friendship of genteel white women, constituted the gravest possible insult.⁶² The antebellum campaign uniting sections of England's bourgeoisie and some members of the aristocracy with America's emerging black political class smacked of racial treason. It made England a visible fulcrum for African Americans to direct international obloquy against American slavery. A “well-oiled and pretty efficient propaganda machine” organized mammoth lecture tours; Douglass alone gave three hundred speeches in nineteen months, covering all of the British Isles.⁶³ Slave narratives sold in large numbers—politicized precursors of today's romantic potboilers, utilizing well-established conventions about broken families, sexual abuse, violence, privation, and hair-raising escapes. Given that the authors often toured, the personalization of oppression was intense. Millions were exposed to Ward, Douglass, Ellen and William Craft, William Wells Brown, and others by hearing them or reading a slave narrative, or via a sympathetic newspaper account. By the early 1850s, the enormous impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which sold a million copies in eight months, brought anti-slavery feeling to such a pitch that 562,448 Englishwomen led by the Duchess of Sutherland signed the “Stafford House Address,” asking their American sisters to abjure slavery as un-Christian.⁶⁴

It is one thing to assert that British people exerted power on behalf of African Americans; it is another to demonstrate that the latter exerted power *on behalf of themselves*. Yet despite the overtones of patronage, the biracial solidarity politics practiced in England, Ireland, and Scotland offer concrete evidence of African Americans' political agency, with measurable consequences inside the United States.

⁶¹ See Edward D. Jervy and C. Harold Huber, “The *Creole* Affair,” *Journal of Negro History* 65, no. 3 (Summer 1980): 196–211.

⁶² Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 204–205.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 13–15, 17, 25–26.

⁶⁴ Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Anti-Slavery Cooperation* (Urbana, Ill., 1972), 351–352.

Crucially, at every point they retained the initiative, setting in motion the relationship with British abolitionists, and steering it with discretion.⁶⁵

This transatlantic campaign sprang from urgent needs. By the early 1830s, the North's free black leadership saw the ACS as the fundamental threat. Led by prominent political figures, including Henry Clay, in the 1820s it neutered what remained of post-Revolutionary emancipationism; even the venerable Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the main "pro bono agency for escaped slaves and kidnapped free people of color" along the Mason-Dixon Line, refused to condemn colonization and included colonizationists in its leadership.⁶⁶ Then, in 1831, ACS leaders sent Philadelphian Elliot Cresson to London to draw British anti-slavery leaders into their seductive scheme of mass repatriation to Liberia. The choices were stark for black Americans. If Wilberforce, Clarkson, and their powerful circles, then pressing the final abolition of imperial slavery, backed the ACS, African Americans' only allies would be the despised radicals around William Lloyd Garrison. If the ACS were to be isolated, however, English aid could be mobilized for American emancipation. The Reverend Nathaniel Paul, a prominent black minister in Albany, New York, reached London the same year, seeking funds for Canada's Wilberforce settlement.⁶⁷ He toured the country, denouncing the ACS and citing its openly racist pronouncements. In mid-1833, Garrison arrived, and the two in tandem demolished the colonizationists' credibility. Leading British abolitionists published a "Protest" repudiating colonization, and Clarkson told Paul and Garrison that they could quote him as having been deceived.⁶⁸

Paul had established a vital precedent—that only African Americans could speak for their people, and they must be heard. Indeed, Cresson acknowledged his defeat by suggesting that the ACS find a suitable black man to rebut Paul.⁶⁹ Paul's mission was the first of many. In the 1840s, the focus shifted to bringing direct pressure within the United States via external shunning aimed at slavery's weakest link: the spiritual bondage of Christian fellowship. There was no evading the fact that Christians had to recognize the slave as a human being. This was the premise of British anti-slavery's ubiquitous emblem—Josiah Wedgwood's image of a kneeling slave imploring "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" Despite a pervasive rhetoric of American nationhood, the U.S. was very much a postcolonial nation, and its major Protestant denominations were affiliated with English parents. Black abolitionists demanded that British churches "refuse communion" with American denominations that accepted slave owners. Through their public campaigning, they stirred a constant debate, applying significant pressure on American civil society.

Enforcing this isolation was Douglass's focus during his 1845–1847 sojourn. He provoked a historic struggle within the newly founded Free Church of Scotland,

⁶⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁶ Richard H. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002), 26, 96–97.

⁶⁷ Paul drew upon earlier precedents, from the poet Phillis Wheatley's tour of London in the 1770s, during which she was escorted by Granville Sharp, to Paul Cuffe's visit in 1811. Paul's brother, the Reverend Thomas Paul, Sr., had visited England in 1815, representing the Baptist Missionary Society of Massachusetts, and was "lionized by abolitionists"; see Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York, 1982), 483.

⁶⁸ Blackett, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall*, 47–67.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 58.

which needed the financial support of America's Presbyterians. In speeches punctuated by the stirring demand to "Send back the money!," Douglass equated those taking slaveholders' dollars with selling him, a devastating charge given the evangelical moral economy, in which each soul was infinitely precious.⁷⁰ British solidarity peaked in the early 1850s after passage of the Fugitive Slave Act brought an influx of hundreds of ex-slaves, followed by Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel and her visit to England, where the U.S. Embassy lobbied intensively to block a planned audience with the queen. Following that final sensation, it had nowhere else to go short of war, and like African American Anglophilism, British outrage over American slavery gradually dissipated.

A denouement to the triangular relationship of the British and American governments and Black America came in 1860, via the black physician and emigrationist leader Martin Delany's efforts to create a British protectorate settled by African Americans in the Niger Delta. Although Delany's venture was a failure, it highlights the ideological bases of English support for a version of black liberation, suggesting how subversive this patronage could be. On the eve of the Civil War, Delany impressed Manchester industrialists anticipating the loss of cheap American cotton. After signing a treaty on December 28, 1859, with the alake (king) of Abeokuta, in July 1860 he convinced his British backers to form an African Aid Society to fund black American cotton cultivators.

The war's onset made emigration irrelevant, however, and Delany's most significant intervention came not in Africa but in London, in a confrontation with his own government that underscored British sympathies. In July 1860, he attended the International Statistical Congress hosted by the British government. The U.S. delegate was a South Carolina judge, Augustus Longstreet. The former lord chancellor and venerable abolitionist Lord Henry Brougham chaired the opening plenary.⁷¹ Brougham had introduced Prince Albert, the president of the congress, and after the latter's address was commending foreign dignitaries in the audience when he spotted Delany. Turning to the American minister, former vice-president George Mifflin Dallas, Brougham announced "that there is a negro gentleman present," producing "loud and vociferous cheering." Various personages then spoke, and eventually Delany rose and addressed Prince Albert, "to thank, his lordship, the unflinching friend of the negro, for the remarks he has made in reference to myself, and to assure your royal highness and his lordship that *I am a man*."⁷² Judge Longstreet walked out, but Dallas remained, saying nothing. What seemed to many white Americans to have been a deliberate insult produced one more diplomatic furor. Brougham's

⁷⁰ See Alasdair Pettinger, "Send Back the Money: Douglass and the Free Church of Scotland," in Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford, eds., *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Reform* (Athens, Ga., 1999), 33, for Douglass's March speech, in which he depicted his old master selling the young Frederick to raise money for the Free Church.

⁷¹ Brougham was famous for his July 1830 speech in the Lords, launching the final campaign for West Indian emancipation: "There is a law . . . the same throughout the world, the same at all times . . . written by the finger of God on the heart of man; and by that law, unchangeable and eternal, while men despise fraud and loathe rapine, and abhor blood, they will reject with indignation the wild and guilty phantasy that man can hold property in man!" Quoted in Fladeland, *Men and Brothers*, 196.

⁷² All quotations but one are from the *Manchester Weekly Advertiser*, July 21, 1860, quoted in Blackett, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall*, 33. Details, including Delany's response to Brougham, are from his account; see Frank A. Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (Boston, 1868), quoted in Robert R. Levine, *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2003), 358-361.

apologies were less than wholehearted, while his government remained mum. Secretary of State Lewis Cass wrote Dallas that he should have told the prince "that finding your Country through you exposed to insult, without any effort for your protection you would quit the meeting, and . . . followed this annunciation by an immediate departure."⁷³ This would have constituted an insult to the queen herself, so Dallas was caught in a no-win situation.⁷⁴ Diplomatic relations between nations function like a minuet, through precisely demarcated steps. Via Delany, African Americans had pushed themselves onto the world stage, shaming America. There was no question who bore the final responsibility: Britain's government, whose studied indifference spoke unmistakably.

CANADIAN REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS AND LECTURE TOURS in Great Britain hardly exhausted the empire's reach. Slaveholders were constantly alert to British interventions around North America's periphery, from the insistence that slaves who found themselves in British ports became automatically free, to offers to support an independent Texas in exchange for emancipation in the early 1840s, the later promotion of emancipation in Cuba, and an 1853–1854 campaign to block U.S. annexation of Hawaii by warning its king about American racism.⁷⁵ While the "paranoid style" of southern statesmen seems farfetched now—Congressman Henry A. Wise even alleged in 1842 that England was ready to "pour in armies of trained free blacks upon the whole South" from the West Indies—there were manifold reasons to recognize Britain's containment policy.⁷⁶

What were the results of British solidarity within the United States? Clearly, if all the British Empire provided was a respite, safe havens, and funding (such as almost \$2,500 raised by Douglass's English friends to start his newspaper *The North Star*), that aid mattered considerably. But the import of a visible Anglo-African American connection was considerably greater, in psychologically arming black Americans and discombobulating their oppressors. Given the stakes involved—an entire political-economic structure—what ultimately mattered was the balance of force, as Lincoln recognized in calling for a servile rebellion and arming 140,000 slaves in 1863–1864. It took a generation of intermittent political crises to reach that point, however, and a major factor in making the North's confrontation with the Slave Power inevitable was white southerners' mounting fear of British encirclement.

After 1830, a potent brew of southern nationalism based on fratricidal Anglo-

⁷³ Cass to Dallas, September 11, 1860, quoted in Blackett, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall*, 38.

⁷⁴ Nor was this the first humiliation of an American minister. In 1838, the Irish parliamentary leader Daniel O'Connell had publicly damned Minister Andrew Stevenson, labeling him a "slave breeder"; see Howard Temperley, "The O'Connell-Stevenson Contretemps: A Reflection of the Anglo-American Slavery Issue," *Journal of Negro History* 47, no. 4 (October 1962): 217–233.

⁷⁵ Between 1830 and 1840, 326 slaves from four American ships were freed in Bermuda or the Bahamas; see Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic*, 102–107, on the diplomatic battles over these emancipations. The British paid compensation only for those freed before 1833. On the 1842–1843 imbroglio over Texas (during which the foreign secretary avowed "the well-known policy and wish of the British Government to abolish slavery everywhere," declaring "abolition in Texas . . . very desirable"), see William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776–1854* (New York, 1990), esp. 355–417. On British efforts in Hawaii, see Merze Tate, "Slavery and Racism as Deterrents to the Annexation of Hawaii, 1854–1855," *Journal of Negro History* 47, no. 1 (January 1962): 1–18.

⁷⁶ Fladeland, *Men and Brothers*, 315.

phobia germinated.⁷⁷ It enjoyed one more spectacular airing before the war. In December 1859, after John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry, the assertion of British responsibility found a paladin in Virginia governor Henry A. Wise. Wise was the Old Dominion's premier antebellum politician. For decades he had denounced the "British Abolitionist-dissolutionist Party."⁷⁸ One of President James Buchanan's key allies, he made a bid for fame by interviewing the wounded Brown in jail and overseeing his trial. His slashing rhetoric following Brown's hanging opens a window into how Anglophobia helped forge secessionism and civil war.

On December 5, 1859, Wise told his legislature that England was to blame for Brown's raid: "this predatory war . . . has its seat in the British provinces, which furnish asylum for our fugitives, and send them and their hired outlaws upon us from depots and rendezvous in the bordering states."⁷⁹ This was a relatively measured statement, however impolitic it may have been diplomatically. In late December, however, he spoke at a tumultuous Richmond meeting to welcome two hundred medical students returning home to protest northern sympathy with Brown. He repeatedly roused the crowd with calls to war against the Massachusetts "fanatics" who had armed Brown. Then, however, Wise asserted that "The real groundwork of dissension in this country . . . is the foreign influence of Great Britain." Sensing his listeners' zest for war against the world's premier military power, Wise insisted that the fight "shall be carried north into Canada," for which he received "Tremendous applause." Finally, at the speech's climax, he put his anger against "Fred. Douglass" into lethally personal terms.

this negro has published his proclamation against Governor Wise. [Laughter and applause.] He has said that he has no idea of going back to New-York or Pennsylvania, for fear that Governor Wise, through Federal agents, will bag him. [Laughter.] I will never put my hemp in the form of a bag for him; it shall be in the shape of a rope. [Laughter.] . . . Fred. Douglass says that he is bound for England. Let him. Oh! If I had had one good, long, low, black, rakish, well-armed steamer in Hampton Roads, I would have placed her on the Newfoundland Banks with orders that if she found a British packet with that negro on board to take him. [Tremendous applause.] And by the eternal Gods he should have been taken, taken with very particular instructions not to hang him before I had the privilege of seeing him well-hung. [Laughter and applause.]

One can imagine the derision with which Douglass read this hyperbolic bloodlust, and it is clear that black people did read it, since in the weeks afterward, speakers at meetings in northern cities referred to Wise's speech with considerable glee.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ For Anglophobia as a popular phenomenon in the 1830s, see Leonard I. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (London, 1970), 62–71. The abolitionist Arthur Tappan became the "symbol of a well-planned British plot to destroy the American way of life" (65). Regarding the South, the chapter titled "From Anglophobia to New Anglophobia" in Kenneth Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore, Md., 1985), illuminates how "traditional Southern anxieties" about England "underwent a slow transformation into a fear of New England and the North" (108), becoming "perhaps the central . . . ingredient in the movement of Southern nationalism" (120).

⁷⁸ See Craig M. Simpson, *A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985). The quotation is from an 1842 congressional speech attacking Liberty Party presidential candidate James Birney.

⁷⁹ *New York Times*, December 6, 1859, a summary of Wise's address, reprinted from the *New-York Herald*.

⁸⁰ For instance, the New York activist Jeremiah Powers said at a January 1860 meeting: "Henry A.

After all, Wise was essentially accurate: the British *had* created an open border as a standing invitation for slaves to kill their masters and steal themselves. The British *had* allied with the most radical "New-Englandish" abolitionists to extol the slave's humanity against the master's depravity. They *did* shield terrorists—or, as Douglass and Tubman understood themselves, liberators. Indeed, the premise of Wise's speech was fantastic: he declared as self-evident fact the political alliance between a subhuman chattel and a power that bestrode the world. He announced his own impotence, a Negrophobia turned pathetic, reduced to fantasies of a dangling black man; no amount of phallic braggadocio about a "good, long, low, black, rakish, well-armed steamer" could conceal the fatuity of this saber-rattling. British power linked to John Brown's bloody sacrifice had forced the white South to recognize Frederick Douglass as an international political actor. Wise's speech thus underlines how white southerners agreed with David Walker: the British were the "best friends" of African Americans. With the advantage of thirty years, they accurately foresaw a state-mandated emancipation, as in the West Indies, and the indignity of their former slaves sitting in assemblies, ruling over them.⁸¹ We can dismiss Wise's theatrics, but their consequences were deadly: only sixty-four months later, Abraham Lincoln was cheered by slaves as, guarded by black troops, he walked through the smoking ruins of Wise's Richmond. Wise's opponent, the impudent Negro Fred. Douglass, played the same game of martial challenge, proclaiming that British power might settle accounts with the Slave Power. It was Douglass who had the last laugh.

IF POLITICAL DISCOURSE CAN BE USED to trace engagements, the years 1848–1855 were the apex of Anglophile politics among African Americans, when they and their white allies continually employed the trope of the British Lion sheltering the escaped slave from the talons of the American Eagle. In 1866, the black expatriate E. C. Cooper remembered "when men of my complexion used to come to Canada on a keen trot, by broad day light, when we used to love to sing of the lion's paw."⁸² This imagery had long been available. In 1841, the Reverend Amos Beman, addressing New York's Vigilance Committee, described slaves escaping "the American eagle—proud and cruel bird . . . may the poor victim escape and stand on free soil, and breathe free air by side of the British lion."⁸³ In 1844, Douglass had transfixed an audience by acting out the roles of Calhoun, Clay, and Daniel Webster in their confrontation with Britain over Texas. Years later, an admirer remembered "the bitter burlesque of the American Eagle, with the Secretary's missive tucked under his wing, pouncing down

Wise . . . when he was speaking of that great man—I mean the nigger, Frederick Douglass—I use the American term—(laughter) . . . he spoke of him as of any other man, because he knew the power of that man's argument, and his ability, and he quailed before it. He said if he had known what vessel Douglass was in he would have gone after him. It would have taken more soldiers than he had in the murder of John Brown to have induced him to have gone after Frederick Douglass. (Great applause.)" Quoted in the *Weekly Anglo-African*, January 28, 1860.

⁸¹ See Joe Bassette Wilkins, Jr., "Window on Freedom: The South's Response to the Emancipation of the Slaves in the British West Indies, 1833–1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1977), on the obsessive interest in Jamaica post-1834.

⁸² *The Christian Recorder*, May 12, 1866.

⁸³ *The Colored American*, May 22, 1841.

upon the British Lion, and screaming in his ears, 'not those words of mortal terror to the tyrant beast—all men are free and equal—so ruefully remembered . . . but—but—I want my niggers!'"⁸⁴

The eagle humbled by the lion may have been an oratorical commonplace, but after 1848, it moved into black vernacular culture via Joshua McCarter Simpson's popular ballads, such as "Away to Canada," sung to the tune of "Oh, Susannah," with its jaunty refrain

Farewell, old master!
That's enough for me—
I'm going straight to Canada,
Where colored men are free . . .⁸⁵

Finally, in 1854–1855, the celebration of "British freedom" became noticeably Hibernophobic after the pro-slavery Irish exile John Mitchel and his collaborators boasted of invading Canada. Douglass sneered that such foolery by "the Patricks and Fitzgeralds of this ridiculous movement" would "lead them into the jaws of the British Lion to be crushed without mercy . . . there are fugitive slaves enough in Canada, loyal subjects of their beloved Queen, to attend to any army that may be ordered in the neighborhood of their adopted home."⁸⁶

From 1856 on, however, African American polemicists rarely spoke of England chastening the Eagle. They had entered the endgame, with powerful potential friends at home—not a few anti-slavery Whigs, such as Senator William Seward or Representative Joshua Giddings, but the newly founded Republican Party. In this context, the British connection could easily become embarrassing. In Britain itself, solidarity also waned, as a new pseudoscientific racism came to the fore, using the endemic poverty of the West Indian freedpeople to debunk concerns for the slave.⁸⁷ As an organized force, British abolitionism was now largely spent, from the aging

⁸⁴ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 5, 1853, reprinting an article by "E." in *The National Era*. For representative uses of this trope, see Charles Lenox Remond's speech at the New England Anti-Slavery Convention, *The North Star*, June 23, 1848; also letter in *ibid.*, August 11, 1848, describing black fugitives in Mercer County, Ohio ("a cheering onward to repose 'under the Mane of the British Lion,' attends"); *ibid.*, May 11, 1849, on Madison Washington in Canada, "nestled in the mane of the British Lion"; *ibid.*, September 28, 1849, on an "Indignation Meeting" of white abolitionists referring to "the jaws and paws of the British Lion"; *ibid.*, April 10, 1851, a letter ("God bless that lion! May her neck grow thick with mane for the slave to settle in"); *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 24, 1851, a letter from England ("The American Eagle . . . dares not attempt to seize them beneath the protection of the British Lion"); *ibid.*, October 2, 1851, another letter ("the British Lion still promises protection to those unfortunates"); *ibid.*, February 12, 1852, an angry letter to the *New York Herald*, on "why the colored people go to Canada . . . [they] feel themselves secure in life, liberty, and the pursuits of happiness under the 'British Lion'"; *ibid.*, September 3, 1852, Douglass in Ontario ("We wished to see the men who . . . found protection in the mane of the British Lion"); *ibid.*, October 22, 1852, Douglass at the Massachusetts Free Democratic Convention ("Our citizens are compelled to fly from a Republic to a Monarchy for liberty . . . to the paw of the British Lion"); *ibid.*, March 11, 1853, Douglass's *roman à clef* about Madison Washington of *The Creole*, "The Heroic Slave, Part II" ("I nestle in the mane of the British lion, protected by his mighty paw"); *ibid.*, April 27, 1855, a letter from Australia ("a goodly number of our suffering brethren . . . [have] taken shelter under the lion's paw").

⁸⁵ Simpson was a well-known black poet who lived in Zanesville, Ohio, where he taught, preached, and ran a store. Vicki L. Eaklor, *American Antislavery Songs: A Collection and Analysis* (New York, 1988), 367–376, 384–388, 396–397, lists numerous songs about the Canadian refuge, including ten by Simpson, such as "Queen Victoria Conversing with Her Slave Children."

⁸⁶ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, December 14, 1855. Earlier, he baited Mitchel as a "monkey compared to a lion . . . too confident of his power to recognize his inferiority"; *ibid.*, April 21, 1854.

⁸⁷ Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-*

of its cadre and the muting of those class differences that propelled unifying reform efforts.⁸⁸ In addition, the British government sought a normalization of relations with the United States over longstanding conflicts, conceding an American sphere of influence in Central America, which resolved the most pressing diplomatic conflict.

At home, African Americans became less ready to listen to claims about the virtues of Canadian emigration as a permanent solution. At the Convention of the Colored Citizens of Massachusetts in August 1858, "Father" Josiah Henson, known as the real-life model for Stowe's Uncle Tom, was publicly chastised when he "thanked God he ever put foot on British soil" and suggested that others should join him. Charles Lenox Remond called such men "cowards, and time-servers, and apologists," while the lawyer Robert Morris, close to the state's Republican leaders, insisted that the time had come to stay and fight, as slavery "will be abolished by the strong arm."⁸⁹ It was not that African Americans repudiated their English friends. As late as the Prince of Wales's October 1860 visit to Boston, that city's "colored citizens" presented him with an address expressing their "profound and grateful attachment and respect for the Throne which you represent here, under whose shelter so many thousands of their race . . . find safety and rest."⁹⁰ But the importance of that asylum was fast receding. Douglass went to England only briefly after Harper's Ferry, and came back again.

On April 12, 1861, the newly organized armed forces of the Confederacy attacked the U.S. naval base at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, beginning the American Civil War. The tensions over Britain's pressing on America's borders were now anachronistic. Rather than Queen Victoria, African Americans evoked the body of John Brown, "mouldering in his grave." The Canadian refugees returned by the thousands to fight and enjoy their freedom. Few abolitionists bothered to cross the Atlantic; instead they began crisscrossing the northern states to recruit black troops once Lincoln opened that door in late 1862. An era had suddenly closed, as England itself divided over which side to support.⁹¹

WHAT MOTIVES CAN BE DIVINED for the Anglo-African American partnership? On one level, black Americans sought British public and governmental backing for obvious reasons; they shared the logic of all revolutionary movements, which seek external aid (a border, a source of funds, a diplomatic backer) merely to survive. However, the motives for British solidarity are not so evident. Why did a succession of Whig

Nineteenth Century (London, 1978), offers the most complete explanation for the waning of abolition and the philanthropic impulse.

⁸⁸ See R. J. M. Blackett, "Cracks in the Antislavery Wall: Frederick Douglass's Second Visit to England (1859-1860) and the Coming of the Civil War," in Rice and Crawford, *Liberating Sojourn*, 188-189, on the "disturbing signs of a loss of interest."

⁸⁹ *Liberator*, August 13, 1858.

⁹⁰ "Address of Colored Citizens of Boston to the Prince of Wales, October 18, 1860," quoted in Annie Heloise Abel and Frank J. Klingberg, eds., *A Side-Light on Anglo-American Relations, 1839-1858* (Washington, D.C., 1927), 1 n. 1.

⁹¹ See R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, La., 2001), on how the anti-slavery consensus fell apart in the face of claims for southern self-determination.

and Tory ministries encourage a proliferation of black settlements in Canada, and an open border for runaways? Why did they shelter Douglass, Brown, and Tubman? Was their stated willingness to sustain a free-soil republic in Texas "sheerly ideological . . . sheerly moralistic," a diplomatic *divertissement*, in William Freehling's words?⁹²

Why British civil society developed first an abolitionist (seeking to end the slave trade) and then an emancipationist (seeking to end imperial slavery) consensus has long been debated.⁹³ But those arguments do not explain why the British government and public extended their emancipationist mission to the United States even before ending imperial slavery. Consider their options. The British could have freed their own slaves in the 1770s and, sixty years later, the vast numbers in their sugar colonies, but for reasons of state they still could have agreed to return American slaves who reached Canada. They could have discouraged the presence of American abolitionists, black and white, in Britain by refusing them entry, deporting them, banning their lectures, or publicly shunning them. There is no obvious reason why they worked for decades to prevent the Americans, Brazilians, and Cubans from obtaining as many slaves as they wanted. Turning a blind eye while proclaiming moral superiority has been common behavior in the history of the Great Powers. Indeed, this was the posture adopted by the British toward their white-supremacist settler colonies during colonialism's Indian summer in Africa after World War I, and toward Anglo-Protestant settlers in Ireland over many centuries. The latter's quasi-racial domination over indigenous Catholics underscores the selectivity of British humanitarianism. At the height of the British people's sympathy for the slave, this same public was indifferent to the starvation of the neighboring Irish. The Irish peasantry died or emigrated, and most English people regarded their departures as "providential."⁹⁴

While noting Britain's ethical selectivity, we must avoid the urge to debunk, as such a comparison was the standard retort of those who justified slavery. No historian has explained why the world's hegemon cast its eye upon the oppression of black Americans, yet there is little doubt that Walker, Douglass, and their associates accepted the British explanation at face value: they valued human liberty more than the "American Republicans" and had finally come to realize that slavery was singularly "inhumane and unjust," in the language of British diplomats. The theme of redemption was always present. As the historian of British abolition John Seeley wrote in 1883, "we published our own guilt, repented of it, and did at last renounce it."⁹⁵ Seeley's declaration paralleled that of Samuel R. Ward in his 1855 *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*. After many pages describing the marvelous condescension of Lords Argyll and Elgin, the Marquis of Cholmondeley, and "the noble Earl of Shaftesbury," Ward trumpeted how "British hands had become red with the innocent

⁹² Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 399.

⁹³ See Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolition as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992), with essays by David Brion Davis, Thomas L. Haskell, and John Ashworth; also Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977), and Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York, 1987).

⁹⁴ Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (Harlow, 2000), 95: "large segments of British public, journalistic and government opinion regarded the famine as a heaven-sent opportunity to stamp out Irish laziness, ingratitude, violence and ignorance."

⁹⁵ John R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, quoted in Brown, *Moral Capital*, 8.

blood of millions of slaves . . . oh, these darkest, most guilty pages of British history, are not easily to be forgotten!" He insisted that West Indian emancipation was hardly "fruits meet for repentance," and the English must seek "to counteract the effects of their own evil example, by something more than meekly emancipating their own slaves." After this bracing exhortation, however, Ward concluded on a note evoking Walker's *Appeal*: "They have sinned, and they have repented . . . The Negro in America looks to the Englishman as his friend. It is with his especial consent that the Englishman speaks in his behalf."⁹⁶ Hardly foolish enough to disparage powerful allies, Ward recognized that what ultimately matters in politics is facts, not intentions. He might question the obtuse character of British sympathies, but no one lost sight of its decisive effects.

Like the empire itself, however, such an effort hardly resulted from a fit of absentmindedness. Britain's conscious internationalization of abolition had two points of origin. It began with Britain's fortuitous self-discovery as a liberator of slaves during the American Revolution, which forged an informal coalition of politicians, agitators, colonial administrators, Black Loyalist leaders, and men such as Clarkson, Sharp, and Wilberforce. As Christopher L. Brown has explained, British elites learned from this crisis that potent stocks of "moral capital" could be salvaged from defeat, enabling a state and people to claim a psychological advantage, and perhaps future allies, since moral capital functions best as a promissory note. From that point on, the new United States' inability to repudiate slavery, signaled by the Constitution's pregnant silence on the subject, represented a moral deficit visibly counterposed to England's windfall.⁹⁷

In the post-Napoleonic era, when England's power reached its zenith, the British became skilled at replenishing this particular form of capital.⁹⁸ After 1815, and especially after 1833, British policies toward African Americans in Canada, on the high seas, and in England itself were an opportunity to demonstrate how their authority operated in all spheres—cultural, economic, military, diplomatic, even spiritual. Rather than simply providing a fund of moral capital, the British state and nation had the opportunity to do much good not merely *while*, but *through*, extending its dominance over the Atlantic world. Building on Britain's political-ethical investments, they turned the whole Atlantic into a British-run moral economy paralleling the extension of their political economy. In 1896, when Britain was still a world power, Du Bois caught the larger rationale of slave trade abolition: "the maritime supremacy of England, so successfully asserted during the Napoleonic wars, would, in case a Right of Search were granted, virtually make England the policeman of the seas."⁹⁹ Succoring African Americans was an ideal means to demonstrate the benevolent modernity of the imperial project, while reminding other nations that the empire's writ ran to their water's edge. British anti-slavery was thus a legitimating

⁹⁶ Samuel Ringgold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro: His Antislavery Labours in the United States, Canada & England* (1855; repr., New York, 1968), 251, 291, 295, 300.

⁹⁷ Brown, *Moral Capital*.

⁹⁸ Matthew Mason, "The Battle of the Slaveholding Liberators: Great Britain, the United States, and Slavery in the Early Nineteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (July 2002): 665–696, demonstrates how battlefield emancipations in 1812–1814 exacerbated the competition to be "standard bearers of human liberation" (666), leading to angry diplomatic exchanges and a pamphlet war over whether England freed slaves at all.

⁹⁹ Du Bois, *Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, 136.

process, similar to post-imperial Mexico's friendship with the Cuban Revolution and patronage of Central American insurgents in the late twentieth century, or the Soviet Union's underwriting of anticolonial struggles from the 1920s to the 1980s, and the welcome extended to Cold War dissidents from the U.S., such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Robeson, and Angela Davis.

Explaining this version of British philanthropy also requires taking into account the deep sympathy for African Americans felt by millions of English people. The pressure applied to government by an aroused humanitarian public was key to the entire trajectory of liberal imperialism in the nineteenth century. As Andrew Porter shows, "questions about the ethics of economic exchange, the politics of equal rights or racial differences, and the purpose of Imperial power" were at the center of British politics. Abolitionists relied upon "a symbiotic relationship with Empire . . . [as] the sphere within which benevolent government action was most readily conceivable."¹⁰⁰ African Americans sought the same symbiosis, and their embrace of Britain's ideological imperatives from inside the belly of its rival was subversive at home while necessarily reinforcing the empire's claims. Given the disparity between a global state apparatus and a stateless, beleaguered political community, it could hardly have been otherwise. Indeed, it is remarkable that black American activists got as much as they did while maintaining their dignity.

A final verdict on how African Americans viewed this relationship was given by the Reverend William Newby at a black state convention in California in 1856. Newby spoke out strongly against a pro forma resolution affirming the delegates' willingness to defend the United States in wartime, pointing out its illogic, given the likely enemy:

England has done her duty towards us; she has abolished slavery in her colonies, and is doing what she can to destroy the system from the earth . . . her example, her influence is on the side of freedom. Would we, could we do battle against England? There is in men an innate sense of justice—we feel it; let us not stultify ourselves. I trust the resolution will not be adopted.¹⁰¹

This formulation, redolent of Admiral Nelson's foredeck at Trafalgar—"England has done her duty towards us"—articulates a modern understanding of the correct posture for white colonizing nations toward those of African descent. It suggests the terms of a mutually satisfactory bargain between peoples materially unequal but politically sovereign. The British were defined not as patrons but simply as one side of a partnership, as "friends" in the archaic sense that Walker meant. By the time Newby spoke, that bargain had run its course, and it had paid off for both partners. It provided a platform for an emerging black political class as the Union collapsed, part of a larger revolutionary dynamic within which African-descended people were always actors as much as they were acted upon, a fact made evident by the British Lion's welcoming embrace.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Porter, "Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism," in Porter, ed., *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 3: *The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 198, 204.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 4: *The United States, 1847–1858* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991), 357.

THERE ARE LARGER HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS to this narrative mixing national and racial self-interest, personal and political opportunism, and spectacles of high-minded vindication, on both sides of the Atlantic. The relationship between African American abolitionists and the British Empire suggests a deep continuity in the politics of the United States since its, or their, founding. If we understand the republic's formation between 1790 and 1860 as fundamentally postcolonial, it becomes impossible to tell a strictly "national" story of American politics, any more than one could of Ireland or India. Yet over several generations, the historiography of the early republic has traced a self-contained, ever-expanding continental polity upon which wars briefly intruded, treating "the nation as hermetically sealed, territorially self-contained, or internally undifferentiated."¹⁰² Focused on the rise of the world's first mass democracy, it has minimized how the American state was embedded in larger processes, including the Canadian staging ground for black refugees and revolutionaries; how black abolitionists were embraced in the British Isles, so at odds with how they were mobbed in the American North; and how policymaking and partisan contestation were fueled by popular *ressentiment* of the former imperial master, including memories of Britain's military emancipations in two wars. Including these subjects will require that we finally give up the mythos of an organic state-nation fully formed in 1789, especially given that, until the Union victory in 1865, the U.S. was more a confederation of semi-sovereign statelets, each jealously regulating its own "State citizenship," than a genuine *national* state in the modern sense.¹⁰³

As men such as David Walker clearly understood, from the 1790s on, American domestic politics were driven largely by the currents of the larger Atlantic world. Americans were emphatically "Atlanticist" when the vagaries of Europe's wars and the Haitians' defeat of a French expeditionary army in 1802–1804 brought Jefferson the windfall of the Louisiana Purchase; they were even more so when Jefferson's futile trade embargo of 1806–1808 demonstrated that any market-based economy along the U.S. seaboard was reliant on European ships, shippers, and buyers. But the largest reason why the United States could never isolate itself was that its vaunted revolution had stalled at the outset. As Gary Nash has argued in *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution*, creole republicans in the U.S. had the opportunity to rid themselves of slavery circa 1787–1794, as the Revolution institutionalized itself. In an overdetermined loss of nerve, they failed, primarily because the southern states demonstrated their willingness to block any national functioning if their peculiar political economy was threatened. The possibility of a truly egalitarian republic disappeared in that moment, as it was plantation slavery on a vast scale, filling the new southwestern territories with a million chattels in a Second

¹⁰² Bender, "Historians, the Nation, and the Plenitude of Narratives," 3.

¹⁰³ One notes that before the Civil War, the word "state" itself was always capitalized when referring to a specific polity. Smith, *Civic Ideals*, powerfully historicizes the contested character of citizenship and thus state formation in the early republic, as an antidote to the continuing influence of nationalist histories. See also Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson, eds., *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York, 1982), 163, for the argument that the largest consequence of Reconstruction, "the substance of its historic task," was "asserting the supremacy of the national state" in "an enterprise of national unification."

Middle Passage, that led the United States' development after 1800.¹⁰⁴ That failure meant that black Americans, enslaved and free, would occupy a central place in U.S. politics despite all efforts to deny their existence. Their physical presence, whether as millions of slaves or as a free people of color that grew from sixty thousand in 1790 to almost half a million by 1860, constituted a permanent "entering wedge" of national vulnerability. The British Empire twice demonstrated its willingness to arm slaves so as to intimidate their masters, and there was no reason to think that it would not do so again. Indeed, the lethal combination of British power and black troops was a part of every American's political imaginary. In early 1840, Calhoun pushed a resolution through the Senate threatening Britain for its refusal to pay compensation for slaves freed from American ships. Disgusted, Judge William Jay, an eminent abolitionist and the son of John Jay, scoffed in a letter to James G. Birney, the Liberty Party's presidential candidate, that Calhoun "knows as well as you and I, that we are not going to war in their support. He and every slaveholder, bluster as they may, dread a war with G. Britain, for they cannot forget the black regiments of Canada and the West Indies."¹⁰⁵

Instead of war, however, Great Britain authorized, fostered, or tolerated multiple pressure points aimed at this fault line in the U.S. polity. Solidarity with African Americans became an effective, safe way to remind the fractious Americans of British power. Further, it suggested that the Revolution was no revolution at all, but merely a misguided colonial secession. During the seventy years prior to the Civil War, from the perspective of African Americans and their British allies, that was a reasonable argument; historians of the United States will have to recognize its force, to acknowledge the deeply contingent character of the American Revolution, indeed of all American democratic development.

¹⁰⁴ See Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), for an especially acute analysis of this fundamental shift in the direction of slavery hard on the heels of the Revolution.

¹⁰⁵ Jay to Birney, April 20, 1840, in Dwight L. Dumond, ed., *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831–1857*, 2 vols. (New York, 1966), 1: 559.

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