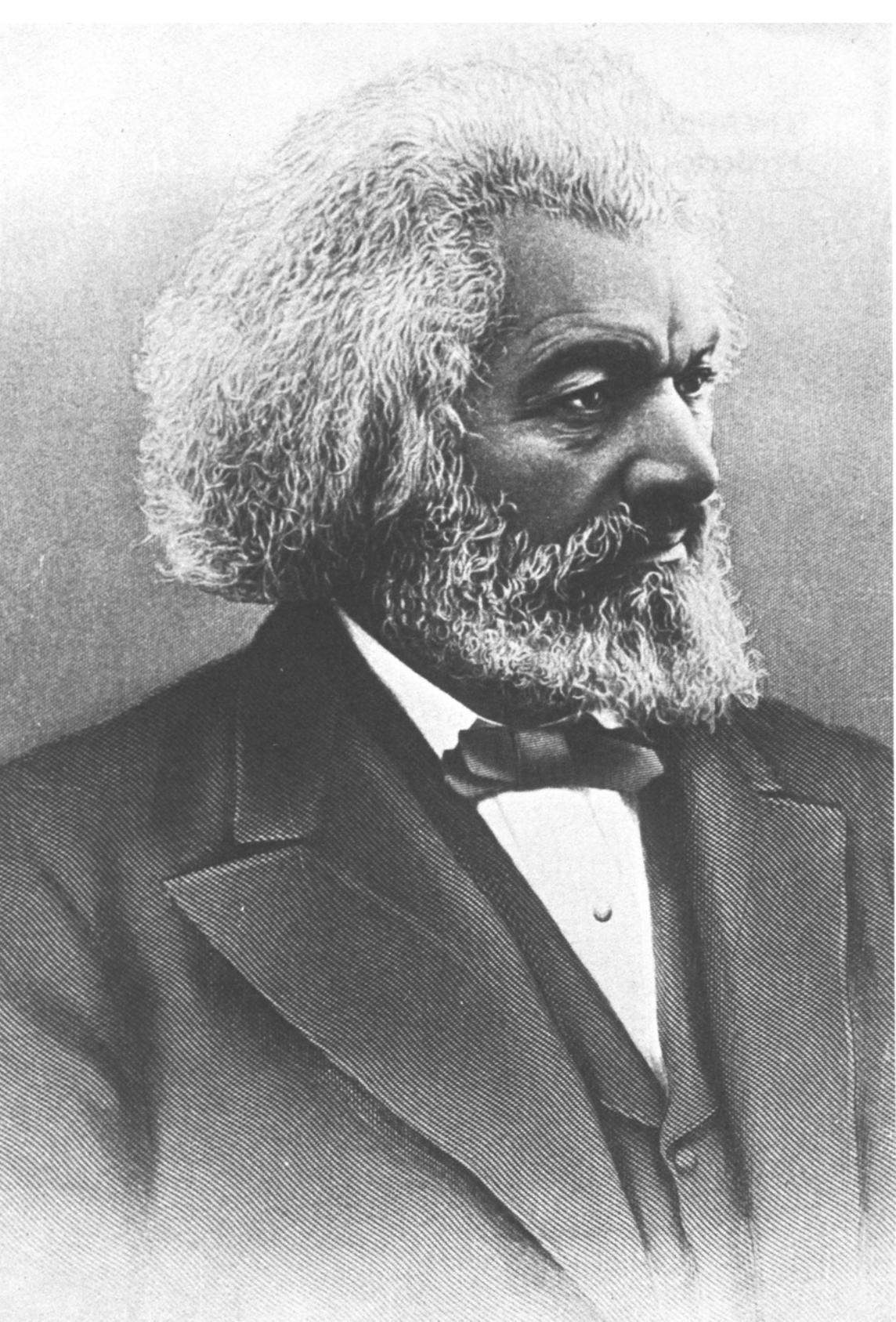


**THE MIND OF
FREDERICK
DOUGLASS**

WALDO E. MARTIN, JR.

**The Mind of
Frederick Douglass**



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FREDERICK
DOUGLASS**

W A L D O E . M A R T I N , J R .

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FOR MY PARENTS:

Nettie Foxx Martin and Waldo E. Martin, Sr.

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Preface

This is an intellectual biography of Frederick Douglass, unquestionably the foremost Negro American of the nineteenth century. The extraordinary life of this former slave turned abolitionist orator, newspaper editor, social reformer, race leader, and Republican party advocate has inspired numerous biographies over the years. Douglass himself wrote three autobiographies. This, however, is the first full-scale study of the origins, contours, development, and significance of his thought. Brilliant and to a large degree self-taught, Douglass personified intellectual activism: a sincere concern for the uses and consequences of ideas. Both his people's liberation struggle and his individual experiences, which he envisioned as symbolizing that struggle, provided the basis and structure for his intellectual maturation.

Douglass's life and thought represent a significant feature of nineteenth-century American and Afro-American social and intellectual history. As a representative American, he internalized and, thus, reflected major currents in the contemporary American mind. As a representative Afro-American, his thought revealed the deep-seated influence of race on Euro-American, Afro-American, or, broadly conceived, American consciousness. His importance as a thinker, in fact, derives in part from his insight into and embodiment of both the intrinsic interrelationship between the Afro-American and Euro-American minds and the pervasive impact of race on American life and thought. The central thrust of his thinking, consequently, was to resolve the dynamic tension between his identities as a Negro and as an American. The primary problem of this study, then, is to assess not only how he endeavored to resolve this enduring conflict, but the extent of his success.

The guiding assumption unifying Douglass's thought was an inveterate belief in a universal and egalitarian brand of humanism. His seemingly innate commitment to the inviolability of freedom and the human spirit best exemplified this overarching assumption. This grand organizing principle reflected his intellectual roots in the three major traditions of mid-nineteenth-century American thought: Protestant Christianity, the Enlightenment, and romanticism. Together, these influences buttressed his characteristic optimism and his beliefs in a moral, meaningful, and comprehensible universe and meliorism. The postwar materialist and Social Darwinian trends impinged upon his thinking without altering his basic assumptions. More important, largely from Protestant Christianity, he gained a religious rationale for his deep-rooted moral sensibility. As a child of the Enlightenment, he inherited critical ideo-

logical support for his rational sensibility. His fundamental Americanism showed his attachment to the dominant romantic conceptions of democracy and nationalism.

Although nineteenth-century Afro-American intellectual history derived its central premises and outlook from concurrent American intellectual history, the former offered a searching critique of the latter and its ramifications. The dilemma confronting Afro-American thinkers, like Douglass, was how to square America's rhetoric of freedom, equality, and justice with the reality of slavery, inequality, and injustice. Although racial and ethnic consciousness informed Euro-American as well as Afro-American thought, white privilege and dominance fed a racism that suffused Euro-American and American thought in general. Afro-American consciousness necessitated a thoroughgoing analysis of and vigilant struggle against racism in its myriad forms, including the intellectual. The black liberation struggle, then, typically preoccupied black intellectuals; black thought illustrated that preoccupation.

Nevertheless, whites and blacks alike shared a commitment to basic American values, beliefs, and attitudes, or an American culture. Black ideas about individual and collective, or racial, elevation not surprisingly drew upon that ethos. Douglass espoused a representative Afro-American version of the dominant middle-class uplift ideology. For whites and blacks, the American dream of success and respectability required morality, frugality, knowledge, and property. It similarly demanded racial (ethnic) solidarity, self-reliance, economic and political development, agitation, integration, and assimilation. In particular, Douglass advocated and came to symbolize the integrationist-assimilationist and protest traditions in black uplift ideology.

Insightfulness and complexity, rather than originality, characterized Douglass's mind. In their historical context, therefore, his ideas were more often representative than novel. The whole of his thought, notwithstanding its intricacies, revealed more continuity than change. His intellectual maturation, therefore, constituted principally a continuing process of intensive analysis, elaboration, and reworking of fundamental concepts. Although crucial changes transpired, they were clearly subordinate to his basic philosophy of life and action. The book's structure, as a result, is not only thematic but also chronological. An interpretive overview of his life provides the context for the discussion of the key elements of his thought.

Douglass's mind must be understood in its historical milieu. His thought can be divided into four interrelated categories. First, as a black man, Douglass presented a black, as well as humanist, perspective on America and its enduring racial quagmire. Second, his thought and life showed him constantly grappling with practical ways to alleviate the Negro's degradation. Third, as a

social reformer, he explored avenues to eradicate injustice and to humanize institutions and social relations. Fourth, his introspective nature as well as his keen awareness of his own historical importance forced him to explore the larger significance of his life, notably his public personality. Douglass's ability to illuminate major contemporary social and intellectual currents through the prism of his own experience characterized his intellectual odyssey. As a result, his mind spoke profoundly to the dilemma of being black in nineteenth-century America.

During the process of researching, writing, and revising which the various transformations of my study demanded, I have accumulated numerous debts which I gratefully acknowledge. Leon F. Litwack, Lawrence W. Levine, and Albert J. Raboteau read the dissertation and offered a host of helpful criticisms. Richard A. Lima helped me to refine certain ideas at a critical early juncture. Litwack, Levine, William H. Harbaugh, Dorothy R. Ross, Robert D. Cross, Raymond F. Gavins, and Edward L. Ayers all read versions of the revised manuscript and provided many useful suggestions. Cindy S. Aron and Bettina Aptheker furnished constructive comments on my discussion of Douglass's feminism.

Both a research travel grant (summer of 1977) and a Dissertation-Year Fellowship (1977–1978) from the Ford Foundation's National Fellowship Fund for Black Americans, a Chancellor's Minority Postdoctoral Fellowship from the University of California at Berkeley (1980–1981), a research grant from the University of Virginia's Carter G. Woodson Institute for Afro-American and African Studies (1981–1982), and a Faculty Summer Research Grant from the University of Virginia (1982) facilitated my work. I must also acknowledge the kind reception and gracious assistance extended to me by the staffs at *The Frederick Douglass Papers* project, Yale University; the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library; the Boston Public Library; the Library of Congress; the Moorland Foundation Library, Howard University; the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College; and the Women's History Archives at Smith College. Throughout the initial years of research, the staff at Berkeley's Doe Library proved extremely helpful.

John W. Blassingame, editor of *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, shared with me ideas and materials—notably notebooks of Xeroxed newspaper articles—which aided my work. Similarly, Litwack shared with me his own notes and observations on the *Christian Recorder* relevant to my own work. Essie Lawrence, head of the staff at Cedar Hill—Douglass's last home and a national monument in his memory—gave me a copy of the list of the books in

Douglass's private library. Lottie M. McCauley, Mary F. Rose, and, especially, Kathleen C. Miller typed various drafts of the manuscript with skill and dispatch. Ellen M. Litwicki and Lee Rankin provided invaluable assistance with the proofreading and the preparation of the notes and bibliography. At the University of North Carolina Press, Ellie Ferguson, copy editor, Gwen Duffey, managing editor, and Lewis Bateman, executive editor, helped to make the production of this book a positive experience for me.

More than a decade ago, Gavins introduced me—then an undergraduate at Duke University—to the serious study of Afro-American history. Since then, he has continued to be a vital and friendly source of support and intellectual stimulation. As a graduate student, I profited greatly from my work with Henry F. May who activated my latent interest in intellectual history. Litwack encouraged me to pursue my interest in Afro-American history, and his rigorous substantive and stylistic scrutiny of my work has consistently helped me to hone my ideas and my prose. My chief intellectual debts are to Litwack and Levine, both of whose fine scholarship and constructive assessments, not to mention unfailing support, have encouraged me to expand and deepen my own critical judgments.

Catherine Lynn Macklin, my wife, gave the entire work an incisive appraisal from which I richly benefited. She has lived through the various stages of this study and helped me to think through numerous problems. Her intellectual and emotional support—as well as the happy spirit and patience of Jetta, our infant daughter—have proven indispensable.

Of course, I, alone, assume responsibility for the imperfections that persist.

Waldo E. Martin, Jr.
Berkeley, California
June 1984

Part One

The Shape of a Life

In the great struggle now progressing for the freedom and elevation of our people, we should be found at work with all our might, resolved that no man, or set of men shall be more abundant in labors, according to the measure of our ability, than ourselves.

— Douglass, “West India Emancipation,”
4 August 1857

I do now and always have attached more importance to manhood than to mere kinship or identity with one variety of the human family. Race, in the popular sense, is narrow; humanity is broad. The one is special, the other is universal. The one is transient, the other permanent.

— Douglass, Speech at dedication of Manassas
(Virginia) Industrial School, 3 September 1894

I have seen dark hours in my life, and I have seen the darkness gradually disappearing, and the light gradually increasing. One by one, I have seen obstacles removed, errors corrected, prejudices softened, proscriptions relinquished, and my people advancing in all the elements that make up the sum of general welfare. I remember that God reigns in eternity, and that, whatever delays, disappointments and discouragements may come, truth, justice, liberty and humanity will prevail.

— Douglass, 7 December 1890

I. The Formative Years and Beyond

Frederick Douglass's racial identity, especially its roots and development, was central to his life and thought. His family, extended family, religious beliefs, and "education" as a slave and free man helped to shape his aspirations as well as his search for identity. As a Negro and a mulatto, in a white racist society, his responses to the omnipresent issue of race were complex and revealing. These responses revealed deep-seated attitudes that reflected not only how he felt about blacks and whites, but also, most important, how he felt about himself. Indeed, it is impossible to understand Douglass without understanding his intricate racial world view. An undercurrent of racial ambivalence, symbolized by his mulatto identity, complicated this racial teleology. Douglass's expanding racial awareness demonstrated an increasingly sophisticated perception of self-identity, collective identity, and their mutual dependence. Clearly, the essential aim of his life was to resolve the problem of race.

Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey was born in February 1818 on an unknown day. The process of racial self-discovery began early. As an inquisitive and intelligent young slave in a society where blacks were primarily slaves and whites were free, he soon sensed the oppressive reality of racial proscription. Quite early, for instance, he perceived that most slaves, unlike whites, did not know their birthdays. This haunted him personally throughout his life. He wrote in 1845 that it "was a source of unhappiness to me even during childhood. The white children could tell their ages. I could not tell why I ought to be deprived of the same privilege." He concluded that "it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant." Similarly, as his master deemed the question of a slave's birthday, like most inquiries by slaves, "improper . . . impertinent, and evidence of a restless spirit," young Frederick certainly could not discover his birthday by asking his master.¹

Frederick's subsequent discovery that Aaron Anthony, his master, was probably his father complicated his developing sense of identity. Harriet Bailey, his mother, was, like Frederick and the rest of his family, a slave in Tuckahoe, Maryland. They belonged to Aaron Anthony, who served as general plantation superintendent for Colonel Edward Lloyd, the largest slaveholder and landowner as well as the wealthiest man in the area. Frederick's relationship with his father-master was virtually nil, yet psychologically significant. "Slavery," he would later observe, "does away with fathers, as it does

away with families.” While Anthony typically ignored him, Frederick remembered having been occasionally whipped but never mistreated by him. He also recalled instances where Anthony patted him on his head and called him his “little Indian boy.” Notwithstanding these passing paternal touches, the primary images of Anthony in Frederick’s mind painted him as very troubled, sadistic, and sexually and physically abusive toward his female slaves, notably Frederick’s Aunt Hester, whom he desired but who herself was in love with a fellow slave. Their love infuriated Anthony who, unable to stop their furtive meetings, persisted in his vicious beatings of her. A sensitive young lad, Frederick, who witnessed several of these beatings, clearly could not identify with the perpetrator of such brutality.²

The “penalty for having a white father,” he recalled, was very heavy. “A man who will enslave his own blood,” he observed, “may not be safely relied on for magnanimity.” The mulatto slave child represented “a standing accusation against him who is master and father to the child.” For the master-father, that child signified a sin which he preferred to ignore.³ For the child, the results of this paternal rejection were often painful. In Frederick’s case, his nonrelationship with his white master-father reinforced both his Negro identity and his sense of racial ambivalence as a mulatto. It also heightened his ambivalence toward whites in general and white paternal figures such as William Lloyd Garrison, his major abolitionist mentor, in particular.

Although the young Frederick saw his mother only a few times at night before her death, he still retained vivid impressions of her throughout his life. Because she had been hired out as a field slave on a neighboring plantation some twelve miles away, just to see her son required a long night journey by foot. As she invariably had to return to work the next day, the physical and emotional strain was incalculable. Frederick later maintained that “the pains she took, and the toil she endured, to see me, tells me that a true mother’s heart was hers, and that slavery had difficulty in paralyzing it with unmotherly indifference.” Once, when Aunt Katy, the cook, as usual refused to feed young Frederick as punishment for some alleged offense, his mother happened to visit. She scolded Aunt Katy, “the sable virago,” and threatened to report to the master Aunt Katy’s abuse of her son. Frederick remembered: “That night I learned the fact, that I was not only a child, but somebody’s child. . . . I was victorious, and well off for the moment; prouder, on my mother’s knee, than a King upon his throne.”⁴

Whereas Frederick experienced difficulty identifying with his white ancestry, principally his father, he intimately identified with his Negro ancestry and mother. While his father always remained a shadowy figure, he later observed:

My knowledge of my mother is very scanty, but very distinct. Her personal appearance and bearing are ineffaceably stamped upon my memory. She was tall, and finely proportioned; of deep black, glossy complexion; had regular features, and, among the other slaves, was remarkably sedate in her manners. There is in Prichard's *Natural History of Man*, the head of a figure—on page 157—the features of which so resemble those of my mother, that I often recur to it with something of the feeling which I suppose others experience when looking upon the pictures of dear departed ones.

Ironically, the picture in Prichard's authoritative ethnological text was of an Egyptian prince characterized as Indian, Hindu and light skinned rather than dark skinned. Perhaps because Frederick later identified so closely with Egypt, he fancied his mother as akin to Egyptian royalty. The selection of this picture may have been significant in other ways as well. It could have suggested, on one level, the subconscious power of his racial ambivalence. On another, that the figure was actually masculine, though ambiguously so, might have reflected the genderless dimension of his catholic vision of a common humanity transcending sex as well as race.⁵

Frederick's mother became ill and soon died shortly after the dispute between her and Aunt Katy over his care. Notwithstanding his subsequently graphic though slender memory of his mother, at the time of her death he felt "no strong emotions of sorrow for her, and . . . very little regret for myself on account of her loss." For him, their separation dulled the trauma of her death. "I had to learn the value of my mother," he lamented, "long after her death . . . by witnessing the devotion of other mothers to their children." He would later acknowledge that "it has been a life-long, standing grief to me, that I knew so little of my mother; and that I was so early separated from her."⁶ Like his lost patrimony, the loss of his mother had crucial ramifications for his psyche and racial outlook. An orphaned mulatto, he was psychologically poised between two worlds; a Negro slave, he had no choice but to live in his mother's world.

Frederick would later learn that his mother had been the only slave in Tuckahoe who could read. To him, the news came as a revelation and he rejoiced. Besides ascribing to her "an earnest love of knowledge," he claimed to have inherited his own "love of letters" from her instead of his white father.⁷ Of necessity, this compensatory argument for the inheritance of intelligence from his Negro mother, by extension an argument for black equality, had to exclude his lost white patrimony.

Slavery, Frederick often emphasized, had deprived him as a child of a traditional familial environment. He declared that "there is not, beneath the sky, an enemy to filial affection so destructive as slavery. It had made my

brothers and sisters strangers to me; it converted the mother that bore me, into a myth; it shrouded my father in mystery, and left me without an intelligible beginning in the world.” Fortunately for the young Frederick, however, he found a surrogate family with Isaac and Betsey Bailey, his maternal grandparents, “the greatest people in the world to me.” Of grandfather Bailey, Frederick merely mentioned that he was free. But of grandmother Bailey, he recalled that “her gentle hand and kind deportment” had engaged his “infantile understanding.” Her “love stood in place of my mother’s.” Although old and gray, she remained “a woman of power and spirit. She was remarkably straight in figure, and elastic and muscular in movement.”⁸

Young Frederick lived with his grandparents in their hut, where his grandmother took care of her various daughters’ children while her daughters worked as hired hands on neighboring plantations. Unaware at first of his enslavement, he led a carefree childhood. He recalled the joys of exploring the hut, watching squirrels, drawing water from the well, observing the “mill and the turning of its ponderous wheel,” and fishing “with my pin-hook and threadline” in the mill-pond where “I could get amusing nibbles if I could catch no fish.”⁹ The comfort and tranquility of life with his grandparents were soon shattered, however, by his removal to Colonel Lloyd’s plantation. In accordance with tradition, grandmother Betsey brought him, like her other grandchildren, to the “Big House” when he was around six years old. The shock of the separation proved severe. “I had never been deceived before and something of resentment mingled with my grief at parting with my grandmother.” He stressed subsequently that while the incident might seem trivial to others he could not “withhold a circumstance which at the time affected me so deeply, and which I still remember so vividly. Besides, this was my first introduction to the realities of the slave system.”¹⁰

The trauma of Frederick’s separation from his grandmother was pivotal to his comprehension of his enslavement, his increasing desire to be free, and his eventual decision to run to freedom. His maturation enhanced, yet eventually eased, the burden of both his emotional loss and the perception of his grandmother’s related powerlessness and degradation. Similarly, he eventually gained a deeper awareness of both the deeply buried, though inescapable, emotional loss which his mother’s death entailed for him and her own related powerlessness and degradation. Frederick’s commitment to feminism, therefore, might have represented in part his lifelong attempt to grapple with his stunted maternal tie. It might also have represented to a degree his attempts to grapple with the relationship between sexism and racism. The deep-seated emotional influence of the separations from his mother and grandmother thus probably contributed to his dedication to racial and feminist liberation specifically and social reform generally.

When Frederick was eight years old, he was sent to live in Baltimore with Hugh Auld (the brother of Aaron Anthony's son-in-law, Thomas Auld), Sophia, his wife, and Thomas, their son. Approximately the same age as young Thomas, Frederick was to be his playmate and guardian. In this setting, several key events transpired. At first, Frederick again experienced something of a sense of family, notably in his relationships with Sophia, his mistress, and little Tommy. Sophia "was naturally of an excellent disposition—kind, gentle, and cheerful." Never having owned any slaves herself, she lacked the "supercilious contempt for the rights and feelings of others, and the petulance and bad humor which generally characterized slaveholding ladies." Consequently, he "soon came to regard her as something more akin to a mother than a slaveholding mistress." She made him feel like Tommy's half-brother. He sensed that "though motherless, he was not friendless."¹¹

The kindness of Sophia toward young Frederick showed him that whites could express a common humanity. As a child, he was always struck by demonstrations of kindness toward him by whites. Even at Colonel Lloyd's plantation, where he early witnessed and experienced some of the worst horrors of slavery, he also experienced touching acts of kindness at the hands of whites. He remembered Miss Lucretia, Colonel Lloyd's daughter, giving him bread for singing outside her window. This simple benevolence, he claimed, was "the first kindness I ever experienced from one of a complexion different from my own." That "Mas' Daniel," Colonel Lloyd's son, often protected him from the big boys likewise deeply impressed the young Frederick. These "sunbeams of humane treatment," he maintained, "seem all the brighter from the general darkness into which they penetrate."¹² Such incidents contributed to Frederick's burgeoning awareness of human oneness and the inhumanity of oppression. As a result, these instances of kindness fueled his disdain for slavery.

Hearing Mistress Sophia, a pious Christian, read the Bible aloud sparked Frederick's desire to learn how to read. When he asked her to teach him how to read, she gladly assented. Thrilled by his rapid progress, she shared her joy with her husband. Appalled, Master Hugh demanded that she desist at once from her unlawful efforts to teach Frederick how to read. "If you give a nigger an inch," he further explained to his wife, "he will take an ell. Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. If he learns to read the Bible it will forever unfit him to be a slave. He should know nothing but the will of his master, and learn to obey it. . . . If you teach him how to read, he'll want to know how to write, and this accomplished, he'll be running away with himself." Frederick recollected that Master Hugh's "discourse was the first decidedly anti-slavery lecture to which it had been my lot to listen."¹³

The abrupt about-face in Sophia's attitude toward teaching Frederick how to

read distinctly evidenced the blight of slavery on human character. She soon became more adamantly opposed to his learning how to read than her husband. Much later, as a former slave turned abolitionist and ethnologist, Frederick often referred to the baneful influence of slavery on persons like Sophia Auld as cogent proof of the argument that environment constituted a primary determinant of human personality and action. "Nature never intended that men and women should be either slaves or slaveholders," he argued, "and nothing but rigid training long persisted in, can perfect the character of the one or the other." Speaking of Sophia, he concluded: "Nature made us friends, but slavery made us enemies."¹⁴

Having been whetted, Frederick's appetite for knowledge accelerated. Master Hugh had been right: "Teaching me the alphabet had been the 'inch' given. I was now waiting only for the opportunity to 'take the ell.'" To further his reading and writing instruction, the resourceful young Frederick employed several tactics. He would carry a *Webster's Spelling-Book* while running errands or playing and would prevail upon his white playmates to share their spelling skills with him. As many of these children were poor and often hungry, he carried along some bread as an enticement. Later, he learned how to write by observing carpenters initial shipbuilding timber to designate where it would be used. Mastering those letters, he engaged his playmates in games to see if they could best his writing skills. Another device he used was to copy from *Webster's Spelling-Book* until he could make the letters without looking at the book. In the same vein, he sneaked Master Tommy's old copy books and, writing between the spaces, endeavored to replicate Tommy's handwriting. He also used other books he came across, including the Bible and the Methodist Hymnbook, to copy from as a means to improve his writing skills.¹⁵

The more Frederick learned, the more resentful he became of his enslavement. Reflecting upon Master Hugh's argument that "knowledge unfits a child to be a slave," young Frederick agreed. "From that moment," he recalled, "I understood the direct pathway from slavery to freedom." Only enforced ignorance, he came to see, could darken the human spirit to the point where it willingly accommodated its enslavement. In *The Columbian Orator*, Frederick, at around age thirteen, read a dialogue between a runaway slave and his master in which the former's eloquent self-defense convinced the latter to emancipate him and to wish him well. Frederick later wrote that having read the dialogue "when every nerve of my being was in revolt at my own condition as a slave, affected me most powerfully." Perhaps he, too, might persuade his master to free him. The entire book, "so redolent of the principles of liberty," further fired his determination to be free. In fact, a major reason why he wanted to learn how to write was to be able to write his own freedom pass.¹⁶

The book also enhanced his burgeoning awareness of the power of the spoken and written word to foment progressive change and ultimately influenced his decision to become an orator.

The libertarian and egalitarian message of *The Columbian Orator* jibed with the young Frederick's incipient comprehension of liberty and equality as fundamental human rights. The basic justice of that message appealed to his deep-seated ethical sensibility. The message itself invigorated his essential quest for manhood and his keen sense of self-respect and human dignity. *The Columbian Orator* was certainly "a rich treasure." By compelling him to focus his energies toward the immediate goal of personal freedom, it helped to give him hope and his life greater coherence. On the other hand, it aggravated an acute depression resulting from the seemingly unending bleakness of his plight as a slave. "I almost envied my fellow slaves their stupid indifference. . . . I wished myself a beast, a bird, anything rather than a slave."¹⁷

The depth of Frederick's emotional turmoil over his enslavement drove him, at around age thirteen, to a serious religious awakening. "In my loneliness and destitution," he reminisced, "I longed for some one to whom I could go, as to a father and protector." Consequently, Reverend Hanson, a white Methodist minister, and Charles Johnson, a black lay preacher, soon converted the adolescent Frederick to Christianity. As a result, Frederick came to understand more fully man's seemingly inexorable need to identify with a supreme force at once both beyond and inextricably bound with him. Through religion, he would later write, "I finally found my burden lightened, and my heart relieved. I loved all mankind, slaveholders not excepted, though I abhorred slavery more than ever." He experienced a spiritual rebirth. "I saw the world in a new light, and my great concern was to have everybody converted." His desire to know the Bible's secrets intensified his general longing to learn. He retrieved from gutters miscellaneous pages of the Bible which he cleaned, dried, and studied.¹⁸

Uncle Charles Lawson, "a good old colored man" who led a "life of prayer" and constantly spoke of "a better world," became the adolescent Frederick's spiritual mentor. Given his mentor's limited reading ability, Frederick assisted him with the "letter" of Christianity while he assisted Frederick with its "spirit." Uncle Lawson also strongly encouraged Frederick's efforts to improve his reading and writing skills. Their mutual love and admiration grew, and in spite of Master Hugh's opposition to their relationship, they spent much time together exploring the mysteries and joys of Christianity.¹⁹

Frederick's "good father Lawson" convinced him that the Lord had chosen him to do a "great work." Toward that end, Frederick had to spread the Lord's

gospel. This prophetic advice fired Frederick's ambition and greatly expanded his vision of his personal identity. "Thus assured and cheered on under the inspiration of hope, I worked and prayed with a light heart, believing that my life was under the guidance of a wisdom higher than my own." In line with his growing maturity, he saw ever more clearly that it was up to himself to assume the initiative and strike for his own freedom, even within God's plan. Thus when Irish dockworkers suggested to him that he run North to freedom, he viewed the suggestion as a harbinger and thus redoubled his efforts to make it a reality. As he so often reminded his people once he became a race leader, "God helped those who helped themselves." Human will and initiative, therefore, were intrinsic to divine providence and human accomplishment. This perception deeply influenced his life and thought.²⁰

Frederick's adolescent relationship with "Father Lawson" not only gave him a much-needed father figure and role model, it also bolstered his impressionable adolescent ego at a crucial juncture. Besides functioning as a "spiritual father" for Frederick, Uncle Lawson also functioned as a surrogate physical father. He was someone with whom the adolescent Frederick could identify.²¹ By projecting a positive image of black manhood, Uncle Lawson aided the development of Frederick's own racial and masculine identities. The youthful Frederick, with a more secure ego, was consequently better able to contend for self-liberation and, eventually, for the liberation of his people.

The religious hypocrisy of slaveholders furthered his growing alienation from whites. He noted, for example, that Thomas Auld, one of his several masters, treated his slaves after his religious conversion with the same "cruelty and meanness" that he had previously exhibited. This was especially evident in his mistreatment of Frederick's cousin Henny. Frederick remembered seeing him "tie up this lame and maimed woman and whip her in a manner most shocking, and then with blood-chilling blasphemy he would quote the passage of scripture, 'That servant which knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.'" ²² Such sadistic brutality, made worse by the guise of Christian justification, incensed Frederick. It represented an unconscionable affront to his Christianity.

Along with the bankruptcy of slaveholding religion, the typical "vicissitudes of slave life" confirmed Frederick's basic belief that slavery was illegitimate. "Those who are under the yoke," he would argue as an abolitionist, "find themselves constantly in a state of rebellion against the will and wishes of their masters. It cannot be otherwise." The inevitable conflict between slave and master—liberty and oppression—affirmed the imperative of the struggle for freedom. "God, having given to every man a love of freedom, having

planted in the bosom of every man a hatred of slavery, He has also placed within us a disposition and elasticity of mind that prompts us to rebel against the slightest infraction of our rights." To Frederick, then, it was clear that "freedom is a fundamental condition of accountability and the foundation of all manly virtue."²³ As the human personality was ultimately inviolable, so was the slave's right to liberty.

As young Frederick's familial relationship with his white overlords, notably the Aulds, soured, he increasingly involved himself in the extended family of the black community. In spite of vigilant white opposition, he helped to establish and lead at least two black Sabbath-schools. Given the context, these efforts were quite radical. The first he organized with Wilson, a devout white man. After a delightful initial session, the school's second meeting was abruptly halted by a mob that included leading religious figures in the white community, among them Frederick's master, Thomas Auld. One member of the mob accused Frederick of consciously emulating Nat Turner and cautioned him that he, too, would be killed like Turner, if he did not change. This raid by "professedly holy men" enhanced Frederick's maturing awareness of the close ties between organized religion and proslavery ideology. It likewise exacerbated a burgeoning understanding of the inconsistency between Christian belief and practice.²⁴

Several years after the ill-fated initial attempt, Frederick, alone, did the teaching in his second attempt to establish a Sabbath-school for his slave brethren. He was now being hired out to William Freeland, who, though irreligious, Frederick alleged "was the best master I ever had until I became my own master." The school was an immediate success with as many as thirty young slave men sometimes in attendance. They bravely disregarded their masters' staunch opposition to their learning how to read and write. In addition to his Sabbath-school, Frederick held evening classes during the winter. He thoroughly enjoyed teaching his fellow slaves. He also found "delight in circumventing the tyrants." His dedication to the education of his fellow slaves clearly presaged his conviction that education was basic to his people's emancipation and uplift. It similarly contributed to his growing feeling that Father Lawson's prophecy of his providential calling to spread the Lord's word was true. That word, he increasingly came to see, was that their liberation, provided blacks struggled diligently, was imminent.²⁵

Frederick once observed of himself: "I was born insolent, and have always been insolent. To be black and insolent in the South means presence of anything like manhood and consciousness of one's humanity." That indomitable spirit caused Frederick, at age sixteen, to be hired out as a field hand to Edward Covey, "the Negro Breaker," who "was notorious for his fierce and

savage disposition.” It was the first time Frederick, an erstwhile house and urban slave, had ever been a field hand, and the transition was extremely tough. For the first time in his life, he was regularly whipped. He received his first beating from Covey within three days of his arrival. “Under his heavy blows blood flowed freely, and wales were left on my back as large as my little finger. The sores from this flogging continued for weeks, for they were kept open by the rough and coarse cloth which I wore for shirting.”²⁶

Covey’s “proficiency in the art of Negro-breaking” encompassed wily and relentless surveillance of his slave laborers, overworking them to the point of near exhaustion, and physical assaults on them. For six hellish months, Frederick drank through coercion “the bitterest dregs of slavery.” After only a few months, however, he was broken. He recalled: “My natural elasticity was crushed; my intellect languished; the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye, died out.”²⁷

Though broken, Frederick hung on to his reveries of freedom. These musings helped him to endure his nightmarish existence. He grievously compared his enslavement with the abandon of the many ships in the nearby Chesapeake Bay. “Those beautiful vessels, robed in white, and so delightful to the eyes of free-men, were to me so many shrouded ghosts, to terrify and torment me with thoughts of my wretched condition.”²⁸

The brutalization Frederick endured at Covey’s hands increased his skepticism toward religion, causing him to question the efficacy of prayer. The inhumanity of the religion of Christian slaveholders, like Covey and Captain Auld, became even more obvious to Frederick as he observed Covey’s attempts at slave breeding. “No better illustration of the unchaste, demoralizing, and debasing character of slavery can be found,” he argued.²⁹

Once, after an especially cruel flogging by Covey, Frederick struggled back to Thomas Auld, his master. Evading Covey, who vigilantly pursued him, he protested to his master against Covey’s mistreatment of him. His master’s contention that Covey had probably been justified in viciously abusing him incensed Frederick and obliterated any qualms he may have had about resisting future ill treatment.³⁰ When his master forced him to return to Covey, a confrontation loomed.

In an attempt to avoid a sure beating, Frederick contemplated using a root that Sandy, the conjurer, alleged would prevent it. Notwithstanding the contradiction between his rational religious beliefs and this “ridiculous, if not positively sinful,” superstitious practice, Sandy’s pleas convinced him to try it. Frederick professed “a positive aversion to all pretenders to ‘divination.’” Yet, just as the local slaves, including Sandy, respected Douglass for his “book-learning,” particularly given that he was the only slave in the area able to read

and write, they respected Sandy for his skills as a conjurer. Frederick decided to use the root not only because of Sandy's expertise, but also because Sandy and his wife had fed and comforted him while he hid from Covey upon his return from his master's place. On Sunday, apparently Covey's reverence for the Sabbath, rather than the power of the root, allowed Frederick to return without the anticipated beating.³¹

That Monday when Covey finally attacked him, he stood firm in his resolution to defend himself. The battle royal was long and tough, but eventually Frederick prevailed. The tyrant had been defeated. Frederick later observed that the fight with Covey signified "the turning-point in my 'life as a slave.' It rekindled in my breast the smouldering embers of liberty. It . . . revived a sense of my own manhood. . . . It recalled to life my crushed self-respect, and my self-confidence, and inspired me with a renewed determination to be a free man." He was ready to die, if necessary, to achieve his freedom.³² The apocalyptic battle between Frederick and Covey, then, was the most important event in Frederick's journey from thralldom to liberty. It graphically heralded his lifelong dedication to resistance against oppression.

After the pivotal Covey episode, Frederick's life as a slave seemed to improve. Yet while hired out to the comparatively kind Freeland, he increasingly came to see that given "a bad master," a slave "aspires to a good master; give him a good master, and he wishes to become his own master. Such is human nature." Soon, he began to give serious thought to an escape plan. Later, he claimed that he had first contemplated escaping to freedom when he was around seven years old, after hearing of the successful flight to freedom of Aunt Jennie and Uncle Noah. Now, at age eighteen, his scheme was set. He decided to include his closest and most trustworthy pupils: Henry Harris, John Harris, Sandy Jenkins, Charles Roberts, and Henry Bailey.³³

Although the youngest, Frederick assumed leadership of the group because of his persuasive personality as well as his superior knowledge of geography and "letters." The plan called for them to escape on the Saturday night prior to the Easter holidays—a period that would hopefully afford extra getaway time—via a canoe to be taken from William Hamilton, a wealthy local slaveholder. They were to paddle to the head of the Chesapeake Bay and, then, head toward the "North Star" until they reached a free state. Frederick was to provide them with passes stating that they had their masters' permission to go to Baltimore for the Easter holiday.³⁴

Their anxieties intensified as the departure date drew closer. Sandy, "the root man," withdrew from the scheme, apparently after having bad dreams. One Friday night, he dreamed that he saw Frederick "in the claws of a huge bird, surrounded by a large number of birds of all colors and sizes." Frederick

sensed that the dream “boded no good.” In fact, on the day of the planned escape, he sensed that they had been betrayed. He was right. As he and his cohorts got rid of their passes and refused to admit guilt, their masters, in the absence of concrete evidence, subsequently had everyone except Frederick released from jail “without the infliction of a single blow.” He remained in jail another week, and upon his release, Master Thomas again sent him to live with his brother Hugh in Baltimore where he was to learn a trade. In addition, Master Thomas promised him that if he behaved himself, he would be freed at age twenty-five.³⁵

While hired out to William Gardner and Walter Price, Frederick perfected his skills as a caulker. Still, he remained extremely dissatisfied. Because Master Thomas could change his mind, the offer to free Frederick in a few years merely intensified his longing for freedom. That his master pocketed virtually all of his earnings as a hired slave further augmented his desire for freedom.³⁶ Indeed, he could no longer be a slave. Now, more than ever before, he understood that:

To make a contented slave, you must make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate his power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery. The man who takes his earnings must be able to convince him that he has a perfect right to do so. It must not depend upon mere force—the slave must know no higher law than his master’s will. The whole relationship must not only demonstrate to his mind its necessity, but its absolute rightfulness. If there be one crevice through which a single drop can fall, it will certainly rust off the slave’s chain.³⁷

Frederick’s overwhelming desire to be free destroyed his chain.

On 3 September 1838, Frederick escaped from slavery in Baltimore to freedom in the North. His decision to escape came after a heated confrontation between Master Hugh and him concerning his staying with friends through Sunday at a camp meeting several miles outside of Baltimore. As a result, he had missed his regular time for giving his master his weekly wages. When Frederick balked at finding work the following week, Auld threatened not only to whip him, but to see to it that he got plenty of work in the future. Exactly what the latter threat meant troubled Frederick, who saw a break for freedom as his only alternative.³⁸

Many factors kept slaves, like Frederick, from running away to freedom: the fear of the unknown, the dread of separation from loved ones, the likelihood of recapture and harsh punishment—perhaps being sold even farther South—and

the increased surveillance those who remained often suffered. Frederick overcame these and other doubts with the help of Anna Murray, a free black and the woman he had fallen in love with and planned to marry. He had met her at a social gathering of the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society, a secret debating club of free blacks, where he, although a slave, also honed his communication skills. Besides encouragement, Anna helped to defray the costs for the runaway scheme by borrowing from her savings and by selling one of her feather beds.³⁹

The plan was deceptively simple. Dressed as a sailor and carrying the “seaman’s protection” papers of Stanley, a retired black merchant sailor darker than himself, he eluded discovery and capture as he took the train from Baltimore to the Susquehanna River. There, he crossed by ferry to Wilmington, Delaware, where he took a steamboat to Philadelphia. Early in the morning of 4 September, he reached New York City by train. Eleven days later, Reverend J. W. C. Pennington, a well known black Presbyterian minister, married Anna and Frederick.⁴⁰

Shortly thereafter, they settled in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where Frederick hoped to work as a caulker, before the opposition of white caulkers forced him to become a common laborer. He had first encountered the prejudiced, sometimes violent, opposition of white caulkers as a slave caulker in Baltimore. While in general the quality of life he observed in New Bedford and the North was far better than that he had observed in the South, the omnipresence of racial prejudice was sobering. Nevertheless, life as a “free” man in the North was incomparably superior to life as a slave in the South.⁴¹

Once free, it was imperative that Frederick Bailey assume a name reflective of his novel status. Long ago as a slave in Maryland, he had dropped his middle names—Augustus Washington. Nathan Johnson, one of his initial benefactors in New Bedford, had been reading Sir Walter Scott’s *The Lady of the Lake* during Frederick and Anna’s stay with him and his wife. The “great character” of Douglass, the book’s hero, so impressed Johnson that he pressed Frederick to take it as a surname symbolic of his reascent identity. In Scott’s brave and transcendent hero in search of a lost patrimony, Frederick himself soon found “some peculiar fascination and destiny.”⁴²

In the fall of 1841, Douglass’s family moved to Lynn, Massachusetts. They moved in late 1847 to Rochester, New York, and after a suspicious fire destroyed their Rochester home in 1872, he and Anna moved to Washington, D.C. They had five children: Rosetta (born 24 June 1839); Lewis Henry (born 9 October 1840); Frederick, Jr. (born 3 March 1842); Charles Remond (born 21 October 1844); and Annie (born 22 March 1849). The Douglass family was close-knit and enjoyed a traditional domestic life. The Douglass children

received good educations and parental guidance. Their parents, notably Frederick, advised and assisted them, especially in financial matters, even after they became adults. None, however, ever achieved the fame of their father.

Anna and Frederick apparently enjoyed a warm and loving relationship. Frederick, not surprisingly, was the dominant mate. Rosetta, their eldest daughter, would later write that her mother's "courage, her sympathy at the start was the mainspring" that propelled her father's career. "As is the condition of most wives," she added, her mother's identity "became merged into that of her husband." After a four-week bout with a debilitating paralysis, Anna, who had suffered from rheumatism for many years, died in August 1882. She and Frederick had been married for almost forty-four years. A year and a half later, Frederick married Helen Pitts, his former secretary and a white. Notwithstanding the notoriety this celebrated interracial union attracted, they, too, apparently enjoyed a warm and loving relationship. Frederick, again, dominated. They were together until his death, and afterward she worked hard to have Cedar Hill, the Douglass home, recognized as a shrine to his memory.⁴³

Against this domestic backdrop, the saga of the public Douglass unfolded. Indeed, the joy and comfort of his family life seemed to help sustain him through the rigors of public life. Douglass first emerged as an important public personality largely as a result of his decision in 1841 to cast his fate as a lecturer with the Garrisonian abolitionists. As a Garrisonian and subsequently as a political abolitionist, Douglass became the most important spokesman for blacks, slave and free, in the United States. He would function in that role until his death in 1895, the same year Booker T. Washington gave his famous conciliatory address at the Atlanta Exposition and assumed the mantle as the major black spokesman.⁴⁴

There were several significant phases in Douglass's public career. Between 1841 and 1860, he labored primarily as an abolitionist orator and newspaper editor. During the Civil War (1861–1865), he continued this work and also functioned as the chief black propagandist arguing that the conflict should be made an emancipation war. Similarly, he argued for the enlistment and proper treatment of black troops in the Union army. Between 1865 and 1895, he was the preeminent race leader as politician, combining the roles of elder race statesman and major black Republican party stalwart. He also served as U.S. marshal of the District of Columbia (1877–1881), recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia (1881–1886), and *chargé d'affaires* for Santo Domingo and minister to Haiti (1889–1891).

Douglass's public career from 1841 to 1895 reveals a fascinating intellectual journey. The years from 1841 to 1865 were especially critical for his maturation.

tion as a thinker and an activist. During these years, his involvement in the widespread intellectual and reform ferment among blacks and whites, as well as his development as both an abolitionist and a race leader, constituted major interrelated influences. By 1865, the parameters and substance of his thinking were essentially established. Intellectually, most of what followed represented either a reiteration or an elaboration of ideas he initially grappled with during that fertile pre-1865 period. Regardless, a critical look at Douglass's mind sheds light not only on himself and the mind and society of nineteenth-century black America, but also on the mind and society of nineteenth-century America.

2. Abolitionism: The Travail of a “Great Life’s Work”

Douglass’s commitment to abolitionism, black elevation, and women’s rights outstripped his commitment to other social reforms. His major social reform passions—black liberation and women’s liberation—underscored his egalitarian humanism. The logic and motivation for his social reform odyssey derived essentially from his quest for morality, order, and progress. Even though his interrelated social reform enthusiasms were integral to his vision of a moral, orderly, and progressive civilization, he nonetheless evinced a keen sense of the need for priorities among them. He pledged in the first edition of *The North Star* that “while our paper shall be mainly Anti-Slavery, its columns shall be freely opened to the candid and decorous discussion of all measures and topics of a moral and humane character, which may serve to enlighten, improve, and elevate mankind.” As “associated effort” gave unity and direction to “individual effort” and “political action,” a sense of priorities gave unity and direction both to a broad social reform ethos and to the competing demands for primacy among various social reform causes.¹

For Douglass, there was no dispute; the monstrous evil of slavery was the first order of business. “The object of the *North Star*,” he explained in the newspaper’s prospectus, “will be to attack slavery in all its forms and aspects; advocate Universal Emancipation; exalt the standard of Public Morality; promote the Moral and Intellectual Improvement of the Colored People; and hasten the day of freedom to three million of our Enslaved Fellow Countrymen.” Furthermore, a voluntary association dedicated exclusively to the propagation of abolitionism was imperative. “The philosophy of reform, and my own experience clearly teach,” he asserted in mid-1852, “that the great moral and primary work to which we are invited, can be much more easily, economically, and successfully prosecuted by a Society exclusively devoted to this one great mission, and with which all the friends of the slave can cordially cooperate, be they voters or non-voters.”² Singularity as well as unity of immediate purpose, therefore, were essential to the reformation of a specific social evil, such as slavery, but not sufficient given the relatedness and ubiquity of social evils. The realization and safeguarding of the slave’s emancipation thus necessitated a wide-ranging social movement capable of stirring the national heart and compelling the nation to rid itself of this cancerous scourge. Likewise, the cause of emancipation demanded staunch leaders, like Douglass.

Douglass's personal liberation transformed him from a slave to a free man. His lifelong commitment to liberty, notably for his own people, similarly transformed his life, from narrow individual concern to broad racial and social concern. Douglass's predisposition to abolitionism predated by about a dozen years his escape North to freedom. He later claimed that "when he was only seven years of age he was satisfied that it was wrong to hold him in slavery." He believed his claim to freedom was equal to that of Tommy, his little white playmate. Shortly after reaching age thirteen, he became aware of the existence of abolitionists through snatches of conversation that he heard among his master and his master's friends. But exactly who the abolitionists were was initially unclear to him. Interestingly enough, however, he observed "that whoever or whatever they might be, they were most cordially hated and abused by slaveholders of every grade." Equally intriguing to the young Douglass was his observation that "slavery was, in some sort, under consideration whenever the abolitionists were alluded to." He noticed that successful slave attempts to run to freedom as well as any slave violence or crime against the master or his property were seen as "the legitimate fruits of the abolition movement." The inquisitive young Douglass reasoned that the abolitionists merited further investigation, for they seemed friendly to the slave and unfriendly to the master.³

The dictionary definition of abolition, "the act of abolishing," left Douglass as perplexed as ever about the identity and aim of the abolitionists. Subsequently, while perusing a copy of the *Baltimore American*, he discovered that Congress had received a huge number of memorials and petitions asking for the abolition of both slavery in the District of Columbia and the domestic slave trade. He later wrote, "the vindictive bitterness, the marked caution, the studied reserve, and the ambiguity practiced by our white folks when alluding to this subject, was now fully explained." Knowledge of the abolitionists and their designs enhanced his desire for freedom. The possibility that the abolitionists might succeed in getting rid of slavery was exhilarating and enlightening. That there were many influential persons and groups concerned enough about the slaves to press for their freedom was the sort of news Douglass enjoyed telling those fellow slaves who he felt would share his hope and joy. Abolitionism, then, had an instinctive as well as rational appeal for the young slave. Although he learned more of the philosophy of abolitionism over time, from the beginning he eagerly embraced its basic concept: the annihilation of slavery.⁴

In his final autobiography, Douglass begins the chapter entitled, "Religious Nature Awakened" with a descriptive analysis of his youthful discovery of abolitionism. His introduction to Christianity around age thirteen had already whetted his religious appetite. His introduction to abolitionism soon thereafter

whetted it further. Indeed, for Douglass, abolitionism quickly assumed the status of a religion, drawing upon the best Christian ideals: love, morality, and justice. He later supplemented this Christian philosophy with the congruent natural rights philosophy of the sanctity of life, liberty, and happiness. Undergirding the Christian and natural rights elements of his abolitionist religion was an instinctive belief in the inviolability of human freedom. Abolitionism, therefore, stood for more than the mere emancipation of his enslaved people; it also stood for the true religion. It was rational, or enlightened, as well as intuitive, or romantic. It exemplified the basically consistent Enlightenment and romantic notions of man's innate goodness.

As a free man, Douglass availed himself of opportunities to expand his knowledge of the religion of abolitionism. Sometime around February 1839, he purchased his first copy of William Lloyd Garrison's radical abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*. He was thus "brought into contact with the mind of Mr. Garrison, and his paper," which he later admitted, "took a place in my heart second only to the Bible." The fiery, immediate, and unconditional abolitionism preached by Garrison in the *Liberator* struck a resonant chord with Douglass. He subsequently wrote: "I loved this paper and its editor. He seemed to me an all-sufficient match to every opponent, whether they spoke in the name of the law or the gospel. His words were full of holy fire, and straight to the point."⁵

Douglass read the *Liberator* religiously, and he heartily accepted its philosophy of abolitionism. He not only thought deeply about the tenets of Garrisonian abolitionism, but he also began to attend nearby antislavery meetings among Negroes. These included fortnightly meetings at the home of John Baily, black friend and abolitionist colleague, to discuss antislavery principles and activities, and larger, more formal gatherings. On 12 March 1839 at a Negro antislavery meeting in the Christian Church of New Bedford, Douglass supported the resolutions blasting slavery and African colonization and praising Garrison. By 30 June 1841, he had assumed a position of leadership among New Bedford Negroes. On that day, he chaired their meeting that censured the Maryland Colonization Society for its proposal to evict forcefully Maryland's free Negroes. The meeting also counseled their Maryland brethren to denounce and resist this unjust proposal. The gathering also condemned the segregation policy of steamboats going between New Bedford and Nantucket as well as the recent assault on David Ruggles, their black cohort, who had resisted the indignity.⁶

While participating in the proceedings of the annual meeting of the Bristol Anti-Slavery Society on 9 August 1841, Douglass heard Garrison speak for the first time. He never forgot that electrifying experience.

His Bible was his textbook—held sacred as the very word of the Eternal Father. He believed in sinless perfection, complete submission to insults and injuries, and literal obedience to the injunction if smitten “on one cheek to turn the other also.” Not only was Sunday a Sabbath, but all days were Sabbath, and to be kept holy. All sectarianism was false and mischievous—the regenerated throughout the world being members of one body, and the head Christ Jesus. Prejudice against color was rebellion against God. Of all men beneath the sky, the slaves, because they were most neglected and despised, were nearest and dearest to His great heart. Those ministers who defended slavery from the Bible were of the “father the devil,” and those churches which fellowshiped slaveholders as Christians, were synagogues of Satan, and our nation was a nation of liars. He was never loud and noisy, but calm and serene as a summer sky, and as pure. “You are the man—the Moses raised up by God, to deliver His modern Israel from bondage,” was the spontaneous feeling of my heart.⁷

Still emotionally high from this experience, Douglass decided to take his first vacation as a free man in order to attend an antislavery convention during the next few days at nearby Nantucket, where Garrison was again scheduled to speak. When the steamboat skipper refused to embark unless the Negroes, including Douglass, accepted segregated seating, a compromise was reached permitting all delegates to the Nantucket convention use of the upper deck. En route, Douglass joined the Garrisonians, numbering about forty, in an enthusiastic meeting to protest the steamboat’s policy of racial segregation.

On the morning of 12 August, New Bedford abolitionist William C. Coffin, who had previously heard Douglass speak to his people in a small Negro schoolhouse, encouraged him to address the convention. Notwithstanding his uneasiness, he accepted the invitation. He remembered that “it was with the utmost difficulty that I could stand erect, or that I could command and articulate two words without hesitation and stammering. I trembled in every limb. I am not sure that my embarrassment was not the most effective part of my speech, if speech it could be called.” Those present apparently thought it was a moving account of Douglass’s life as a slave. Garrison himself was so stirred by Douglass’s brief, autobiographical, antislavery message that he used it as his text.⁸

Later that evening, Douglass again addressed the convention. A correspondent for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* made special mention of Douglass’s speeches. He reported that Douglass “spoke with great power. Flinty hearts were pierced, and cold ones melted by his eloquence.” These speeches

sealed his abolitionist destiny. He had found his niche: the “great work” of his life. Upon the meeting’s closing, John A. Collins, general agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, asked Douglass to join them as an agent. In spite of anxiety about his fitness for the task, Douglass, after much soul-searching, finally agreed to work for the organization for three months.⁹ He labored in the Garrisonian camp for almost ten years.

Douglass’s formal conversion to Garrisonian abolitionism, like his fateful victory over Covey, the “Negro Breaker,” represented both an educational experience and a spiritual rebirth. He recalled that it “was literally the opening upon me of a new heaven and a new earth—the whole world had for me a new face and life itself a new meaning. I saw myself a new man, and a new and happy future for my downtrodden and enslaved fellow countrymen.” His tenure with the Garrisonians, then, was a major formative experience. Although basically a self-educated man, he credited the Garrisonians with providing him his “formal” education. In a speech before Boston’s Wendell Phillips Club on a Saturday evening, 11 September 1886, he stated: “I have often been asked where I got my education. I have answered, from the Massachusetts Abolition University, Mr. Garrison, President.”¹⁰

The lifelong impact of Garrisonian abolitionism on Douglass was profound. This lasting influence extended beyond the perception of abolitionism as a kind of religion and a means of self-education. It was the primary source for his moral and religious philosophy of social reform. It helped Douglass to crystallize and to expand his beliefs in man’s basic goodness, human perfectionism, and human progress. It enhanced his understanding of the value of protest and resistance as social reform tactics. More important, Douglass learned from the Garrisonians the strategic value of moral suasion and the importance of altering public consciousness. He fully adopted the Garrisonian doctrine of immediate and unconditional emancipation of the slaves as a moral and Christian duty. The beacon of knowledge, he agreed with his mentors, would illuminate the road to emancipation. He recalled: “All that the American people needed, I thought, was light. Could they know slavery as I knew it, they would hasten to the work of its extinction.” Even his universal reformism largely reflected that of the Garrisonians.¹¹

Douglass’s first abolitionist speeches were moving and popular attacks drawing, not surprisingly, to a large extent upon his personal experiences. Colleagues, and audiences alike, saw him, he subsequently observed, as a showpiece, “‘a bran [*sic*] new fact,’” a “prize exhibit.” In effect, his exposition of his slave experience functioned initially as the springboard for the major abolitionist lecture. “‘Give us the facts,’” directed Collins, “‘we will take care of the philosophy.’” Soon, however, Douglass grew restive under

these guidelines. As he gained knowledge and confidence, his desire to discuss as well as to recount the horror of slavery led him inexorably to expand the focus and content of his speeches. He increasingly spoke on larger issues, including abolitionism's progress, the efficacy of moral suasion, disunionism, and the drawbacks of political action.¹²

His mentors sought to arrest his growing tendency to speak more broadly and analytically. Their ostensible concern was that if he continued to do more than narrate and denounce the evil of slavery, his authenticity as a former-slave-turned-abolitionist would be undermined and eventually destroyed. Stephen Foster, his Garrisonian colleague, informed him: "People won't believe you ever were a slave, Frederick, if you keep on this way." Collins agreed. "Be yourself," he told Douglass, "and tell your story." He also advised him: "Better to have a little of the plantation speech than not; it is not best that you seem too learned." Douglass later professed that his colleagues had acted out of "the best of motives" and had been right that audiences would eventually question his ever having been a slave. At the moment, however, he could not stifle his intensifying desire to elaborate upon the philosophy of abolitionism in addition to the reality of the slave's wretched existence.¹³

His growing independence of mind, his increasing compulsion to express himself, and his sharpening awareness of the complexity of abolitionism, all foreshadowed and promoted a collision with the rigid confines of the abolitionist role that his Garrisonian mentors envisioned for him. Besides their arrogance and paternalism, this stifling role for Douglass also betrayed their race prejudice. Beneath their justifiable and ostensible concern for Douglass's public reception lurked a blind refusal to accept him as his own man and their equal. This was the most important factor leading to his eventual break with the Garrisonians—ironically, the most egalitarian of the white abolitionists in their attitudes toward and treatment of the Negro. Indeed, the Garrisonians were in the vanguard of efforts to alleviate the social barriers of racial caste. Nevertheless, their inescapable paternalism and race prejudice contributed to Douglass's increasing tendency to question their motives and actions and those of white abolitionists in general.

During Douglass's years as a Garrisonian, his colleagues could hardly have accused him alone of doctrinal heresy, because many Garrisonians at one time or another strayed from some aspect of the orthodoxy. Yet even as he strayed beyond the stock description of his slave experiences, Douglass generally adhered to Garrisonian principles. Those he most fully endorsed and thus emphasized were: the superiority of moral suasion to political action; the integral relationship between slavery and anti-Negro prejudice; the proslavery interpretation of the United States Constitution; the injunction to "come-out"

of the proslavery church; the injunction to “come-out” of the proslavery national union or compact (disunionism); and antisabbatarianism—the notion that each day should be treated as the Sabbath. He apparently could not embrace and thus deemphasized the Garrisonian doctrine of nonresistance: the belief that all force and coercion, even human government, was violent and sinful. Douglass was too committed to individual and collective black defense, resistance to oppression, the Enlightenment concept of an orderly world, and the efficacy of human government, to accept the Garrisonian concept of nonresistance.¹⁴ Douglass, like many Garrisonian abolitionists, found Garrisonian nonresistance lofty and impractical. Having been compelled to resort to violence in self-defense and to assess the viability of violence as a strategy for slave emancipation and black liberation, on a personal as well as ideological level, Douglass understood and personified resistance.

Clearly the chief contribution Douglass offered the Garrisonian camp, from their viewpoint, was an extremely popular drawing card. People flocked to hear him and were impressed, notably newspaper correspondents. In late 1841, N. P. Rogers, a local newspaperman, came away overwhelmed from a Douglass speech in Concord, New Hampshire. He described Douglass as “a commanding person—over six feet . . . in height, and of most manly proportions.” Most impressive, though, was his oratory. “As a speaker,” Rogers noted “he has few equals. . . . He has wit, argument, sarcasm, and pathos. . . . His voice is highly melodious and rich, and his enunciation quite elegant.” He also noted that Douglass had shown striking improvement since he had last heard him several months earlier.¹⁵

During the winter of 1844, Douglass returned to Concord and spoke again. On this occasion, the local reporter gushed even more fulsomely. Douglass’s speech, he wrote,

was not what you could describe as oratory or eloquence. It was sterner, darker, deeper than these. It was the volcanic outbreak of human nature, long pent up in slavery and at last bursting its imprisonment. It was the storm of insurrection. . . . He reminded me of Toussaint among the plantations of Haiti. . . . He was not up as a speaker, performing. He was an insurgent slave, taking hold on the right of speech, and charging on his tyrants the bondage of his race. One of our editors ventured to cross his path by a rash remark. He better to have run upon a lion. It was fearful, but magnificent, to see how magnanimously and lion-like the royal fellow tore him to pieces, and left his fragments scattered around him.¹⁶

It is no wonder, then, that public suspicion about Douglass ever having been a slave was growing. To dispel this false impression, Douglass spent the winter of 1844–1845 writing an account of his slave experiences for publication.

The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* appeared in May 1845. William Lloyd Garrison wrote the preface; Wendell Phillips wrote an introductory letter. Douglass's stark rendering of his torturous slave experiences, however, was the smash. By 1848, eleven thousand copies had been published in the United States; French and German translations had appeared; and in England, it had already experienced nine editions. Ecstatic praise for Douglass's eloquent and touching narrative was widespread. "The book, as a whole, judged as a mere work of art, would widen the fame of Bunyan or Defoe," wrote the *Lynn Pioneer* reviewer. This reviewer added: "It is the most thrilling work which the American press has ever issued—and the most important. If it does not open the eyes of this people, they must be petrified into eternal sleep." A British reviewer marveled at Douglass, "a fugitive slave, as but yesterday, escaped from a bondage that doomed him to ignorance and degradation, [who] now stands up and rebukes oppression with a dignity and a fervor scarcely less glowing than that which Paul addressed to Agrippa."¹⁷

Douglass's slave narrative was part of an important black literary tradition that flourished between 1840 and 1860 and reached at least as far back as 1789, with the London publication of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*. Among the plethora of slave narratives published between 1840 and 1860 was not only Douglass's first autobiography, but his second: *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855). These and the many other highly popular and evocative black autobiographies were trenchant abolitionist polemics. As abolitionist propaganda, they were unparalleled. Douglass's narratives, arguably the best, exemplified not only the highly political nature of these autobiographies, but also the traditions from which they sprang: black abolitionism, black activism, and social reform.¹⁸

Whites became abolitionists out of choice; blacks were abolitionists out of necessity. This sense of exigency was part of the signal contribution of black abolitionists to the abolitionist struggle: a gripping analysis of slavery and its ramifications from an experiential perspective. They and their people had been and still were slaves and, as a result, plainly perceived the imperative of emancipation. Those like Douglass, whose experience and perception exceeded the merely personal, could and did offer analysis as well as description.

Douglass's abolitionism skillfully combined the subjective and objective dimensions of description and analysis. He cast his searching net as widely as he possibly could and endeavored to catch the significance and compulsion of abolitionism in their myriad complexity. Besides stressing the immutable bond between slave and free blacks, he also emphasized the often implicit psychological and emotional identification of the black slave with the abolitionist, white and black. Perhaps only a former-slave-turned-abolitionist could truly invoke the spiritual and ideal level on which slaves and abolitionists communed. He thus remarked that among the slaves, the existence and activities of the abolitionists were

known throughout the South, and cherished with gratitude. It has increased the slave's hope for liberty. Without it his heart would faint within him; his patience would be exhausted. On the agitation of this subject he has built his highest hopes. My friends, let it not be quieted, for upon you the slaves look for help. There will be no outbreaks, no insurrections, whilst you continue this excitement: let it cease, and the crimes that would follow cannot be told.¹⁹

Much more than propaganda, rhetorical exaggeration, and wishful thinking, this idea expressed a metaphysical reality to which Douglass was particularly sensitive.

White and black abolitionists alike theoretically agreed on two basic principles: "First, the freedom of the blacks in this country, and, second, the elevation of them." The American Anti-Slavery Society's original Declaration of Sentiments, adopted in December 1833, enshrined these twin goals. The dedication of white abolitionists to emancipation and improved race relations graphically set them apart from the vast majority of whites. Nonetheless, white abolitionists were clearly less committed to racial equality than black abolitionists, who possessed a personal and thus more profound perception of the need to reform the racist character of American society. Douglass maintained that the truest test of a white abolitionist's commitment to black liberation and racial equality was to observe how he treated his northern black neighbor. Those who viewed abolitionism as applying ideally, actually, or both only to enslaved southern blacks and neglected the elevation of their free northern black neighbors were, according to Douglass, "sham abolitionists." The abolition of slavery alone would be a necessary though insufficient victory. The full abolitionist victory demanded the abolition of racism. Consequently, Douglass and most black abolitionists agreed that the most viable and gratifying antislavery tactic in northern communities was to promote the numbers of "the intelligent and upright free men of color." Otherwise stated, "the

most telling, the most killing refutation of slavery is the presentation of an industrious, enterprising, thrifty and intelligent free black population.”²⁰

The tandem battles against racism and slavery signified, on one hand, Negro alienation from the disillusioning reality of America and, on the other, Negro attraction to its engaging ideal. Racism and slavery obviously violated the American ideals of freedom, justice, and equality that Negroes, slave and free, believed in and built their faith in and optimism for America upon. Nonetheless, the depth of the Negro’s idealism outspanned the depth of his alienation. Black abolitionists, notably Douglass, personified this pivotal conflict. On the one hand, Douglass could condemn America for its slavery, especially from “the slave’s point of view.” He could righteously declare, from that perspective: “whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.”²¹

In the same speech, he could also insist that he did not despair because “there are forces in operation which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery.” In addition to his belief in a moral universe ruled by God, he drew hope from “‘the Declaration of Independence,’ the great principles it contains, and the genius of American institutions.” His “spirit” was cheered, too, “by the obvious tendencies of the age”: ever-growing civilization, progress, and internationalism.²² The intensifying contradiction of the increasing worldwide trend toward enlightenment as against the barbaric relic of slavery plainly ensured slavery’s demise. Progressive idealism as a mechanism for constructive social change and reform buttressed Douglass’s lifelong dedication to the eradication of slavery and racism. His representative black critique of America’s hypocritical idealism constituted an indispensable perspective toward America.

White abolitionists were obviously less racist than most of their white contemporaries. Nevertheless, they still tended to see and to treat blacks as less than equal. For example, very few blacks ever rose to prominent positions in the two major, national, white-dominated antislavery organizations: the Garrisonian American Anti-Slavery Society and the political abolitionist American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. This exclusion helped to fuel separate black organizations. When Douglass declared his ideological independence from his Garrisonian mentors, their vituperative opposition revealed not only deep disappointment and regret, but an unwillingness to allow Douglass, a black man, to speak his own mind. At bottom, the issue in Douglass’s case was less his ideological purity and disloyalty than his race and his importance as the representative Negro.²³

Douglass incurred the displeasure of his Garrisonian colleagues on numerous occasions. During the summer of 1843, he, Charles L. Remond, a black Garrisonian, and John Collins, a white Garrisonian, were set apparently to conduct an antislavery meeting in Syracuse, New York. When Collins endeavored to introduce the “communistic ideas” (Fourier communitarianism) he had just recently adopted, Douglass and Remond protested. Douglass thought that Collins “was imposing an additional burden of unpopularity on our cause, and [committing] an act of bad faith with” his employers, not to mention the cause. Oddly enough, however, while the Garrisonians tolerated Collins’s foray into an anti-private property discussion, they reprimanded Douglass and Remond for creating an issue that might be exploited by outsiders as a fissure among Garrisonians. Orthodox Garrisonian Maria W. Chapman, head of Boston’s Female Anti-Slavery Society, sympathized with Collins, whom she felt had been criticized unjustly by Douglass and Remond. “Poor dear Collins!” she exclaimed. Douglass and Remond had regrettably been “provoked by the enemy’s taunts into assaulting him at one of his property meetings.” They were to be patronized and forgiven, though, for they realized that “they may rely on their friends in Boston to put the most friendly construction on hasty acts, and to forget and forgive them as [far] as ‘Divine Justice’ . . . will permit.”²⁴

Douglass subsequently interpreted this particular incident as his “first offense against our anti-slavery Israel.” Although upset by Chapman’s reprimand, he persisted in the belief that he had acted properly. The conflict foreshadowed further problems between Douglass and his Garrisonian colleagues. Douglass himself suggested that Chapman’s “sharp reprimand” of him for “insubordination to my superiors” did not augur well for future relations between him and orthodox Garrisonians. His fervent abolitionism required that he challenge what he saw as Collins’s apostasy. He strongly disagreed with Collins’s arguments that: “1st. The anti-slavery cause is a mere dabbling with effects. 2d. If they abolish slavery, it will only be in form, it will remain in fact. 3d. To recognize property in soil is worse than to enslave men. 4th. This universal reform movement will do more for the slave than the antislavery movement.” The reprimand by their white cohorts of Douglass and Remond for criticizing a white “superior” betrayed a growing distance between Douglass and his white colleagues. It also revealed a different and more indulgent response among white Garrisonians toward their racial cohorts than toward Douglass and other black cohorts.²⁵

Douglass’s speaking tour of the British Isles between 1845 and 1847 occasioned another conflict illustrating the inability of Garrisonians to tolerate a self-styled Douglass. Wendell Phillips had warned Douglass prior to his departure that the London Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery

Society might try to seduce him to their beliefs. In particular, they favored political action and opposed the right of women to participate equally with men in antislavery organizations and proceedings. Chapman, though, went behind Douglass's back and expressed a fear to Richard G. Webb, an English associate, that Douglass "might be bought up by the London committee." She asked Webb to advise Douglass to shy away from their potentially baneful influence. Soon thereafter, moreover, Webb and his wife confided to Chapman that they felt Douglass's overwhelming success in Britain was already spoiling him. Sales of his narrative were bringing in large amounts of money, and he was leading a lavish and corrupting life-style, they alleged. Worst of all in their minds, Douglass's notorious conduct jibed with their racist preconceptions of the Negro. According to them, Douglass possessed "a strong dash of the blood of the children of the burning sun in his veins"; he was "a sort of reclaimed wild beast—and . . . it don't do to judge him by our civilized rules."²⁶

Although apparently unaware of the extent of the Webbs' racism, especially toward him, Douglass was well aware that Chapman had asked Webb to look after him, and to try to keep him out of trouble: that is, away from the blandishments of the London committee. Webb, in fact, had shown Douglass Chapman's letter. Such conduct reeked of spying on him. He was deeply upset and let her know. "You betray a want of confidence in me as a man, and an abolitionist, utterly inconsistent with all the facts in the history of my connection with the anti-slavery enterprise." He resented her statement that because James Buffum, his traveling companion, was rich and he was poor, that he rather than Buffum would most likely fall prey to the financial temptations of the London committee. He rejected her ethical guardianship as misguided. "If I am to be watched over for evil rather than for good by my professed friends," he bitterly chided her, "I can say with propriety, save me from my friends, and I will take care of my enemies." He threw off the oppressive bridle of her patronizing efforts at discipline. "If you wish to drive me from the Anti-Slavery Society, put me under overlordship and the work is done. Set someone to watch over me for evil and let them be so simpleminded as to inform me of their office, and the last blow is struck."²⁷ Chapman had questioned not only Douglass's integrity and good sense, but she had also questioned his manhood. He would not tolerate these affronts under any circumstances.

From the perspective of his Garrisonian colleagues, Douglass committed a grievous mistake when he decided to publish his own antislavery newspaper. To them, this decision represented more unimpeachable evidence of his growing independence and apostasy. Initially, his Garrisonian cohorts had convinced him that such a paper was unnecessary and would fail. They had also convinced him that he had been called to be a lecturer rather than a newspaper

editor and publisher. Yet, his English backers prevailed upon him to change his mind. Their insistence, in concert with his deep desire to express more fully his burgeoning intellectual independence, forced him to reconsider and apparently decide, during his 1847 western abolitionist tour with Garrison, to publish the newspaper.

His Garrisonian friends revolted. Samuel J. May remarked: "I think he mistakes his vocation and will regret his course." Wendell Phillips stated that Douglass was spreading himself thin. Phillips noted: "Douglass ought to speak to his race through our columns, and use his mighty voice to get circulation for the National organization." Because Douglass had not written directly to Garrison to inquire about an illness he had contracted during his western tour with Douglass, who had continued without him, Garrison was even angrier over Douglass's decision to go ahead with the publication of his newspaper. He wrote to Helen, his wife, that Douglass had "never opened his lips on the subject, nor asked my advice in any particular whatever. Such conduct grieves me to the heart." He saw Douglass's change of mind as "impulsive, inconsiderate, and highly inconsistent with his decision in Boston." That May had written Garrison of Douglass's deep concern for his health and that Douglass claimed to have told Garrison of his decision beforehand to publish a newspaper did not alter Garrison's opposition. Garrison charged that Samuel Brooks, editor of the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* and friend of him and Douglass, was behind Douglass's decision because he foresaw the end of his newspaper lest it merge with Douglass's proposed newspaper.²⁸

The primary motivation behind Douglass's decision was to demonstrate that blacks could and should be in the forefront of the journalistic campaign against slavery. By emphasizing the need for blacks to assume leadership roles in all areas of the abolitionist campaign, he did not mean to deprecate or undermine the motivations and efforts of their white allies. It was clear, he thought, that his decision to publish his own antislavery newspaper did not reflect any "unworthy distrust or ungrateful want of appreciation of the zeal, integrity, or ability of the noble band of white laborers." Rather, the critical issue was the necessity for blacks to speak out independently, yet in concert with their white allies. "It is evident," he asserted, "we must be our own representatives and advocates, not exclusively, but peculiarly—not distinct from, but in connection with our white friends."²⁹

Douglass's self-reliant posture failed to convince his increasingly hostile Garrisonian colleagues, who believed he was ignoring their perception of his proper role in the abolitionist crusade—subordinate. Douglass lamented that his Boston friends viewed his decision as a demonstration of "a reckless disregard of their opinion and advice," but he stuck to his decision. He later

admitted that perhaps he had been too dependent on his Garrisonian mentors. "I am not sure," he recalled, "that I was not under the influence of something of a slavish adoration of these good people, and I labored hard to convince them that my way of thinking about the matter was the right one, but without success."³⁰

Douglass was separated physically and, to an extent, emotionally from his estranged Garrisonian colleagues centered in Boston once he moved to Rochester where he published his newspaper. Here, he began to rethink Garrisonian doctrine, especially its view of the Constitution as a proslavery document and its opposition to political action as an abolitionist tactic. Previously, as a good Garrisonian, he had firmly believed in not voting under and thus endorsing a proslavery government; disunionism; and most important, a proslavery interpretation of the United States Constitution. Rochester, like western New York generally, though, was a hotbed of political abolitionism. In this milieu, Douglass's Garrisonian beliefs met the intense criticism of a different set of abolitionist colleagues. Gerrit Smith, William Goodell, Samuel Sewall, and Lysander Spooner—all political abolitionists—exerted the greatest influence on Douglass's rethinking of whether the Constitution was a proslavery or an anti-slavery document. His fateful decision that it was an antislavery document signaled both a crucial philosophical and tactical about-face and his crowning apostasy from the Garrisonian point of view. The estrangement between Douglass and the Garrisonians cut deeply and led to mutual vituperation.

Douglass adopted early the Garrisonian opposition to political action as a social reform and abolitionist tactic. Having initially adhered to this concept without the knowledge or analytical tools to question it, Douglass swallowed it whole, except for its anarchistic ramifications. Afterward, as he remembered that juncture, he contended that his "first opinions were naturally derived and honestly entertained." He had adopted at that point the Garrisonian view of "the Constitution as a slaveholding instrument" because it was "supported by the united and entire history of every department of the government." He thus acknowledged: "I was bound, not only by their superior knowledge, to take their opinions in respect to this subject, as the true ones, but also because I had no means of showing the unsoundness of these opinions."³¹

Wendell Phillips had devised the Garrisonian constitutional argument that the intentions of the Constitution's chief architects, like governmental interpretation and practice under the Constitution, were unquestionably proslavery. Five specific constitutional clauses comprised the core of the argument: the three-fifths compromise encompassing "those bound to serve for a term of years, . . . excluding Indians" (Article 1, Section 2); the broad power given

Congress “to suppress insurrections” (Article 1, Section 8); the congressional toleration of “the migration or importation of such persons as any of the States now existing, shall think proper to admit” prior to 1808 (Article 1, Section 9); the duty to return escaped laborers to “the party to whom such . . . labor may be due” (Article 4, Section 2); and the responsibility of the federal government to heed the request of a state government to suppress “domestic violence” (Article 4, Section 4). Phillips argued that the proslavery nature of these compromises was clear.

The first of these clauses, relating to representation, confers on a slaveholding community additional political power for every slave held among them, and thus tempts them to continue to uphold the system: the second and the last, relating to insurrection and domestic violence, perfectly innocent in themselves—yet being made with the fact directly in view that slavery exists among us, do deliberately pledge the whole national force against the unhappy slave if he imitate our fathers and resist oppression—thus making us partners in the guilt of sustaining slavery: the third, relating to the slave trade, disgraces the nation by a pledge not to abolish that traffic till after twenty years, without obliging Congress to do so even then, and thus the slave trade may be legalized tomorrow if Congress chooses: the fourth is a promise on the part of the whole Nation to return fugitive slaves to their masters, a deed which God’s law expressly condemns and which every noble feeling of our nature repudiates with loathing and contempt.³²

Although Douglass was “disposed to admire some of the beautiful truths” in the Constitution, he also perceived “its pro-slavery features,” and therefore was “ready to form a republic in which there shall be neither tyrant nor slave.” Phillips had written that “the unanimous, concurrent, unbroken, practice of every department of the Government, judicial, legislative, and executive, and the acquiescence of the whole people for fifty years” settled the question of constitutional ambiguity regarding slavery. Douglass concurred. Speaking at Market Hall in Syracuse on 24 September 1847, he echoed the standard Garrisonian constitutional and political position. “The language of the Constitution,” he emphasized, “is you shall be a slave or die.” Consequently, he refused to vote under the Constitution.³³

There was, however, a vital difference between Douglass’s constitutional and political views and those of orthodox Garrisonians. This difference foreshadowed his impending break with them. Unlike orthodox Garrisonians, Douglass did not embrace the corollary Garrisonian position that all action which might be construed as supporting a proslavery constitution must be

rejected. Notwithstanding declarations of his ideological opposition to political action, he began to examine seriously its prospects. In August 1843, the Liberty party or Radical Abolitionist party—a third party committed to antislavery political action—received the formal endorsement of the Buffalo Convention of Colored Citizens. Douglass and Remond cast the only two opposing votes. On 29 March 1846, Douglass wrote to Chapman that he remained a steadfast Garrisonian and had gone over to neither the Liberty party nor to those dissatisfied with the major abolitionist organizations.³⁴

Yet, he attended his first national political convention on 14 and 15 June 1848, when the National Liberty party held its presidential election-year conclave in Buffalo. He found the proceedings quite impressive, especially Gerrit Smith's reading of "An Address to the Colored People of the Northern States," asking them "to prove their superiority to the whites in industry, economy, temperance and education in order to disprove the frequently repeated charge that Negroes were only fit for slavery." The convention support for a broad range of social reforms, including woman's suffrage and the ten-hour workday, also favorably impressed Douglass. Still, he held fast to his Garrisonian belief in opposition to political action as a social reform and abolitionist tactic. A month later, his attendance at the initial organizational meeting of the Free Soil party, a third party dedicated to the containment of slavery where it already existed and to the opposition of the extension of slavery into the territories, likewise failed to change his mind.³⁵

Interestingly enough, however, Douglass's increasing involvement with political abolitionists and in their activities, all the while vowing his firm commitment to Garrisonian political and constitutional principles, disclosed his growing awareness that political means might just assist abolitionism. Beneath his contradictory pronouncements favoring and opposing the Free Soil party ran an idea he found increasingly attractive: that whatever strategy or action promoted abolitionism should be supported by all abolitionists. Expediency and pragmatism had begun to confront principle in his philosophy of social reform. In a related development, a growing ambivalence toward the sufficiency of moral suasion as an abolitionist strategy led him into several revealing flirtations with political action. For example, when Samuel R. Ward, a black political abolitionist, asked Douglass if black voters in New York should support the Free Soil party and Martin Van Buren, its presidential nominee in 1848, he responded with a resounding "no!" Yet if they planned to vote, Douglass advised them to vote for Gerrit Smith, the Liberty party presidential candidate, who stood unequivocally for equal rights. A week later, Douglass reiterated that "it would be a violation of our anti-slavery principles for us to vote."³⁶ This paradoxical advice exposed Douglass's tortur-

ous personal reassessment of the comparative efficacy of moral suasion and political action as abolitionist strategies. It was impossible for him to give solidly consistent advice because he was no longer of a single mind regarding the issue.

One reason Douglass began to reassess the viability of political action was his belief that the Wilmot Proviso indicated “the presence of a great principle in the national heart, which by patient cultivation will one day abolish forever our system of human bondage.” Put forth in 1846 by David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania congressman, as an amendment to a bill requesting money to gain new territory shortly after the Mexican-American War had begun, it passed twice in the House of Representatives, but failed both times in the Senate. The Wilmot Proviso, stipulating that the territories to be purchased as a consequence of the war had to disallow slavery, first broached nationally the subject of opposition to the extension of slavery into the territories, a major principle of the Free Soil party. Douglass perceived the measure as an insufficient posture, but an important antislavery breakthrough still. He wrote that “it serves to keep the subject before the people—to deepen their hatred of the system—and to break up the harmony between the Northern white people and the Southern slaveholders, which has so long been the safeguard against an uprising of slaves against their cruel masters.”³⁷

Notwithstanding its inherent limitations as an antislavery doctrine, the principle of opposition to the extension of slavery into the territories expressed a measure of national disapproval of slavery. “Should the North gain in this contest,” Douglass contended, “it will be the first victory gained since the formation of the Government.” In August 1848, he expressed support for the Free Soil party. In early September, he withdrew that support, but by 10 September, he renewed it. By 25 March 1849, well after the election of Zachary Taylor, the Whig candidate, Douglass had concluded regretfully, that the Free Soil party had “promised much and has performed little.” He expressed special disgust for its sluggish and retarding impact on abolitionism.³⁸

Throughout the 1850s, Douglass followed a pattern in which at first he would align himself primarily with the Liberty party or Radical Abolitionists in principle. Come election time, however, he would opt for expediency and support the presidential candidate he deemed the most pragmatic compromise between his radical abolitionism and his growing political activism. In 1852, he supported the Free Soil candidates: John P. Hale for president and George W. Julian for vice-president. By 1856, he endorsed the Republican party’s standard-bearers: John C. Fremont for president and William L. Dayton for vice-president. The endorsement had come, naturally enough, after some faint praise for, but mostly repeated condemnations of, the Republican party. The

adherence of, first, the Free Soil party and, second, the Republican party to the Wilmot Proviso was not radical enough for Douglass. Whereas it was good that the Republican party helped to politicize the issues of slavery and abolitionism, Douglass maintained that the party stood for a “halfway doctrine.” He refused to join the Republican party, moreover, because “they do not give a full recognition to the humanity of the Negro.”³⁹

By election time, however, Douglass was singing the tune of political expediency. Those who desired to bring about social change through political action could only influence mass political consciousness, he insisted, if they did not ostensibly run too far ahead of the crowd. They had to stay in contact with and be perceived as a viable alternative by the electorate. In September 1856, moreover, he editorialized that one should always vote to promote “the highest interests of society.” It is not surprising, then, that in the pivotal 1860 election, at first Douglass supported Gerrit Smith, the Radical Abolitionist presidential candidate, and shortly before the election, switched his support to Abraham Lincoln, the eventual winner. By then, after all, electoral victory had become an important abolitionist tool for Douglass. His pattern of supporting the radical abolitionist underdog until shortly before the election when he would switch to a more pragmatic choice revealed an intriguing strategy. This pattern enabled him to communicate uncompromisingly his radical abolitionist principles in the hope that these principles might shift the antislavery politics of the other parties to a more solidly abolitionist position.⁴⁰

As early as 1849, however, Douglass had clearly conceded that political action, though less effective than moral suasion, had some, albeit limited, effectiveness as an abolitionist and social reform tactic. Over time, his judgment of the effectiveness of political action grew. In his editorial of 25 March 1849 spelling out his disillusionment with the Free Soil party, he tempered his severe criticism of the party with the admission that he “would not be understood to deny that it has done some good. Such a conclusion would be very unjust and wholly unnecessary.” Furthermore, he did not “find fault with political action, in a party form against slavery.” He explained “that the anti-slavery movement will always be followed at a greater or lesser distance by a political party of some sort.” This recognition of the viability of political action plainly contradicted Garrisonian dogma. Douglass had begun to exacerbate the worries of his Garrisonian colleagues who had seen his independence and his willingness to countenance political action, both of which were increasing, as evidence of his growing philosophical and personal estrangement from them. In early 1844, Edmund Quincy had remarked that “we may yet see him fighting against us openly.” That same year, Abby Kelley had prophesied that “all he will do will be gathered by a third party.”⁴¹

Douglass's developing receptivity toward political action coincided with his close scrutiny of whether the Constitution was proslavery or antislavery. In the 9 February 1849 issue of *The North Star*, he told a Rochester citizen who desired to debate with him—"Resolved, That the Constitution of the United States, if strictly construed according to its reading, is anti-slavery in all of its provisions"—that a debate was unnecessary, for ideally they agreed. Nevertheless, a critical difference separated their actual understandings of the Constitution. Douglass still held "that the original intent and meaning of the constitution (the one given to it by the men who framed it, those who adopted [it], and the one given to it by the Supreme Court of the United States) make it a pro-slavery instrument—such . . . as I cannot bring myself to vote under, or swear to support." By this point, then, Douglass had moved from an orthodox Garrisonian reading of the Constitution as unequivocally proslavery to a paradoxical view. This interpretation both embraced the orthodox Garrisonian view and expanded upon it by not only labeling it a factual or realistic interpretation, but admitting, too, that an antislavery reading of the Constitution was theoretically valid.⁴²

Douglass's new position engendered the plaudits of the political abolitionists and furthered the anxieties of the Garrisonians. Exactly what he meant by "strictly construed according to its reading," he admitted, was open to different interpretations. To rectify this ambiguity, he reiterated in an editorial on 16 March 1849 that the Constitution "standing alone, and construed only in the light of the letter, without reference to the opinions of the men who framed and adopted it, or to the uniform, universal and undeviating practice of the nation under it, from the time of its adoption until now, is not a pro-slavery instrument." Douglass emphasized, though, that his mind was open on the issue. Still, he told Gerrit Smith that if Smith could convince him that the Constitution was a viable antislavery instrument, he would "readily, gladly, and zealously" adopt it in his abolitionist philosophy.⁴³

Douglass's more complicated and newfound interpretation demonstrated a clear willingness to scrutinize severely his views and, if required, to change them. To the political abolitionists who applauded what they saw as a shift toward them, as well as his Garrisonian cohorts who criticized what they saw as a heretical shift away from them, Douglass stated that he would follow his own mind. "The only truly consistent man," he reasoned, "is he who will, for the sake of being right today, contradict what he said wrong yesterday." He surmised that "true stability consists not in being of the same opinion now as formerly, but in a fixed principle of honesty, even urging us to the adoption or rejection of that which may seem to us true or false at the ever-present now."⁴⁴

By 1851, Douglass had completed his about-face and announced that he

now viewed the Constitution as an antislavery document and, in turn, that political action under it to abolish slavery was justified and viable. After having analyzed political abolitionism and discussed it with many of its major supporters and opponents, Douglass finally adopted it himself.⁴⁵ Smith, especially, shared his views with Douglass and contributed liberally to the financing of Douglass's newspaper. The more important factor behind Douglass's shift apparently was Smith's persuasiveness as an advocate of political abolitionism. Douglass no longer sought to get at the intentions of the Constitution's chief architects and to dwell upon actual practice under the Constitution, both of which undergirded the Garrisonian proslavery viewpoint. Now, he was "only in reason and in conscience bound to learn the intentions of those who framed the Constitution in the Constitution itself." Slavery, according to this perspective, was "a system of lawless violence" at odds with the Constitution; thus, abolitionism was consistent with a true reading of the Constitution. As a convert to political abolitionism, he relied on a strictly legal interpretation of the Constitution, notably its preamble. In his autobiography, he outlined how he came to his new position. Being both outside of the Garrisonian fold and among political abolitionists on a regular basis for the first time was critical. "My new circumstances," he wrote, "compelled me to rethink the whole subject, and to study with some care not only the just and proper rules of legal interpretation, but the origin, design, nature, rights, powers, and duties of civil governments, and the relations which human beings sustain to it." As a result, he surmised that not a word in the Constitution authorized slavery. Indeed, "if the declared purposes of an instrument are to govern the meaning of all its points and details, as they clearly should, the Constitution of our country is our warrant for the abolition of slavery in every state of the Union."⁴⁶

As a political abolitionist, Douglass elevated constitutional principle above constitutional practice. The founding fathers had viewed slavery as an evil and had envisioned its extinction, he declared. Their intention could not have been to protect slavery in the Constitution. The very clauses used to prove that the Constitution was proslavery neither explicitly mentioned slavery, nor were they explicitly designed to protect it, he further noted. This literal interpretation enabled Douglass to follow his political abolitionist colleagues and point to allegedly antislavery constitutional clauses. These were the Fifth Amendment's declaration of "the right of the people to be secure in their persons"; the prohibitions in Article 1, Section 9 against both the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in peacetime and Bills of Attainder; in Article 4, Section 4, "the guarantee to every state in this Union a Republican Form of Government." The enabling clause—Article 1, Section 8—giving Congress the power "to make all laws which shall be necessary and proper" for the execution of federal

government powers, moreover, actually gave the government, according to Douglass, the power to abolish slavery.⁴⁷

Ironically, however, while Douglass and other political abolitionists interpreted these clauses as explicitly antislavery, they were at best only implicitly antislavery, and actually dealt with basic freedoms. The literal constitutional perspective of the political abolitionists, therefore, was quite loose. At least the constitutional arguments of their Garrisonian antagonists had more direct relevance, though thinly veiled, to slavery. It was still feasible for someone “in his sober senses” to interpret the Constitution as either an antislavery document, a proslavery document, or even both, notwithstanding the logic of Douglass and his political abolitionist cohorts or the Garrisonians. The ambiguity of the Constitution on this vital issue remained intact.

In addition to rejecting the Garrisonians’ doctrine of the proslavery character of the Constitution, Douglass also rejected their political doctrine of disunionism. He now viewed the idea of “no union with slaveholders” as “but negatively anti-slavery,” for if followed through to its logical conclusion, it “dissolves the Union, and leaves the slaves and their masters to fight their own battles, in their own way.” Given the superior numbers, education, military power, and organization of the slaveholding class, Douglass thought it “plainly absurd” to assume that once the North was no longer in the Union and thus no longer directly buttressed slavery, that the slaves, “without arms, without means of concert,” could free themselves. Disunionism thus amounted to “an abandonment” of emancipation. Likewise, his major objection to “the Free Soil Party, alias—the Free Democratic Party, alias—the Republican Party” was that “it leaves the slaves in . . . fetters—in the undisturbed possession of his master, and does not grapple with the question of emancipation in the States.”⁴⁸

National responsibility for slavery, however, meant that national action had to be taken to abolish it. The free states had to promote emancipation actively, if it was to be realized. Douglass concluded that “as a mere expression of abhorrence of slavery, the sentiment [of disunionism] is a good one; but it expresses no intelligible principle of action, and throws no light on the pathway of duty.” The ethics of disunionism also troubled Douglass because he believed not only that it was the nation’s moral responsibility to restore to the slave “his long-lost rights,” but also that this moral responsibility could be accomplished better from within than outside the Union.⁴⁹

Predictably, Douglass’s complete somersault on the constitutional and political action issues angered his Garrisonian colleagues. “It needs no ghost to assure me,” he wrote to Smith, “that I am to be made for a time an object of

special attack. I am not afraid of it and am not pained in view of it.” Nevertheless, the actual attacks greatly upset him. In Syracuse during the American Anti-Slavery Society’s annual meeting in May 1851, the dispute boiled over. Douglass informed his erstwhile cohorts that Garrison’s opposition to May’s proposal to endorse the *Liberty Party Paper*, an organ of political antislavery, necessitated that his own paper be withdrawn from the approved list. He explained that he, too, now endorsed political antislavery and an antislavery interpretation of the Constitution. A stunned Garrison replied that “there is roguery somewhere” and put through a motion deleting Douglass’s paper from the list. Douglass tried unsuccessfully to dismiss Garrison’s “insulting remark.” He flatly denied the charge of his former associates that he had been bought by the political abolitionists, namely Gerrit Smith.⁵⁰

The dispute reared its head again the following May at the American Anti-Slavery Society annual meeting, this time in Douglass’s hometown of Rochester. When Douglass tried to defend his position, he was forcefully criticized for what his alienated colleagues saw as apostasy: freely consorting with their “deadliest enemies” and becoming a political abolitionist. His attempt to ease their anger and to alleviate their estrangement was unsuccessful. Phillips charged that Douglass himself was responsible for the rupture between him and his former Garrisonian cohorts. Foster accused him of creating a rival antislavery organization. Even Negro Garrisonians got into the act. Robert Purvis accused Douglass of being in the pay of the colonizationists, while Remond chided his colleagues for being too soft on Douglass. Phillips told Elizabeth Pease in late 1852 that Douglass “is entirely estranged from us.” On 23 September 1853, Garrison wrote May that “with Douglass, the die seems to be cast. I lament the schism, but it is unavoidable.”⁵¹

The controversy quickly assumed a vindictive and slanderous character. In 1851, Garrison suggested that Douglass’s changing the name of his newspaper from *The North Star* to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* demonstrated uncontrollable egotism. Douglass sarcastically responded that he “may have caught a little of the spirit of our friend Garrison, whom he once heard announce himself to be ‘a Garrisonian abolitionist.’” Similarly, Douglass compared naming his newspaper after himself to Garrison’s name preceding the title of his excellent anticolonizationist book, *Thoughts on Colonization*. The venom extended to others as well. In 1853, Douglass accused Foster, Parker Pillsbury, and Theodore Wright of religious infidelity.⁵²

Purvis, Remond, and William C. Nell, important black Garrisonians, Douglass labeled “my bitterest enemies, and practical enemies of the colored people.” He excoriated Purvis for his “bloodstained riches.” Nell accused Douglass of being “‘unkind, ungenerous, and ungrateful’ to his Boston anti-slavery

friends.” Douglass retorted that Nell was “a pitiable fool,” a “hanger-on” who privately complained that his Garrisonian friends had appointed a white man instead of him to head the Boston office. In public, however, Nell caustically criticized Douglass before Boston’s colored population. Nell’s opposition to Douglass’s call for a black manual labor school exacerbated the rift between them. Nell saw Douglass’s position as an abandonment of his alleged opposition to complexional institutions. Given that Negroes needed job training immediately, Douglass viewed a black manual labor school as a temporary expedient until integrated schools were established. Upon his return from Great Britain, moreover, William Wells Brown, another black Garrisonian, accused Douglass of having written a letter to an English abolitionist in an effort to undermine Brown’s credibility abroad.⁵³

Personal jealousy and animosity, on one hand, and doctrinal orthodoxy and organizational allegiance, on the other, were the most significant influences determining the reaction of black Garrisonians to Douglass’s shift. These influences also helped to determine the reaction of white Garrisonians to Douglass’s shift. The most important influence among white Garrisonians, however, was Douglass’s race. As a self-styled black man choosing to speak his own mind in the forefront of the abolitionist crusade, Douglass violated their preconceptions of him as an underling and of the abolitionist movement as a white-dominated enterprise. Even though Garrisonians typically excoriated publicly associates exposed as apostates, their excoriation of Douglass was different. The feud between Douglass and his erstwhile Garrisonian associates exposed not only the bitter depths of the anger and resentment on both sides, but also the paternalism and race prejudice of white Garrisonians and the indirect ways in which these forces impinged upon relationships among blacks. That Douglass had developed a filial attitude toward Garrison further complicated the estrangement and deeply influenced Douglass’s maturation and growing understanding of white racism.

A most revealing episode in the breach was the so-called Griffiths affair. Douglass and Julia Griffiths, an English abolitionist, first met in her hometown of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne during his initial tour of the British Isles (1845–1847). Between 1848 and 1855, she lived in Rochester (at first in the Douglass home) and helped Douglass to produce his newspaper and to improve his writing skills. She also influenced his thinking during this critical period. For the newspaper, she handled the literary reviews and, in the summer of 1848, assumed its financial management. With her aid, Douglass improved his pecuniary situation by separating the newspaper’s finances from his personal finances. Her money-making projects for the newspaper included annual antislavery bazaars which she helped to organize; a \$10 gift campaign

to raise \$1,000 in 1853; the production that same year of *Autographs for Freedom*, a collection of antislavery literature by prominent black and white abolitionists; and, fund-raising efforts upon her return to England and subsequent marriage to H. D. Crofts, a clergyman. Although it is unclear how much impact she had on Douglass's shift to political abolitionism, she certainly discussed with him his shifting constitutional and political ideas. Her dislike and criticisms of the Garrisonians, moreover, undoubtedly influenced Douglass's eventual decision to break with them.⁵⁴

Griffiths found particularly repugnant the Garrisonians' indiscriminate and uncompromising attack on the institutional church as a bulwark of slavery. She believed in separating antislavery churches from proslavery churches and working with the former. Under her influence, Douglass softened his criticisms of the church. Not only did his hostility to ministers lessen, he also rebuked the Garrisonian doctrine of antisabbatarianism.⁵⁵ Paradoxically, though, Douglass's diminishing hostility toward the church and religion as viable antislavery institutions reflected more of a strategic shift in order to exploit the influence of church and religion on popular opinion. It did not signify a shift in his basic religious philosophy which was gradually becoming more liberal.

When he charged that the religious infidelity of Pillsbury, Wright, and Foster would harm the public image of the Garrisonians, he referred to the perception of them among orthodox Christians who supported the antislavery movement. Garrison viewed the charges differently. Even after Griffiths had returned to England, Garrison envisioned a plot hatched by her and Douglass to use the charge of infidelity against the American Anti-Slavery Society to undermine its work in England and in the United States. He wrote to Samuel May, Jr. in 1856 that:

Through the machinations of that double-and-twisted worker of iniquity, Julia Griffiths, the hue-and-cry of "infidelity" is raised afresh in England and Scotland, by various religious cliques, against the American Anti-Slavery Society, in order to prevent any further contributions being made to the National Bazaar. Douglass is impudently held up as the Christian champion who is nobly battling our "infidel" abolitionism, and every effort is made to extend the circulation of his paper on this account. He connives at all this villainy, being utterly unscrupulous in carrying out his own designs.⁵⁶

It must be borne in mind that Douglass read and wrote copiously, corresponded with many persons of varying views, and discussed publicly and privately many subjects with friends and associates. Although the influence of

Gerrit Smith, and to a lesser extent Griffiths, was vital to his ideological development as an abolitionist, it is evident that Douglass's abolitionism was influenced by many sources, especially personal experience, and that he ultimately spoke his own mind. His abolitionism certainly was not essentially derivative. Douglass's estranged Garrisonian cohorts disagreed. As with Douglass's shift to political abolitionism, any shift in his thought away from Garrisonian dogma was not, from their perspective, the result of his own reflection, but rather the result of the influence of some white colleague, such as Smith or Griffiths. They implied that he was their intellectual inferior, and that he primarily absorbed his thoughts from them and other whites. They felt that this alleged intellectual dependency made him easy prey not only for Smith's pernicious ideas and corrupting financial aid, but also, and apparently worse, for Griffiths's pernicious ideas and corrupting sexual influence.

Even though there is no evidence of impropriety in the relationship between Douglass and Griffiths, there is evidence to suggest that the relationship may have intensified and led to tensions in the Douglass home. Anna, Douglass's wife, flatly denied the rumors of marital tension due to the presence of Griffiths in their home and the close relationship between her and Douglass. Yet as a loving and devoted wife, it would seem that she must have been at least a little jealous of the work and intellectual relationships between her husband and Griffiths. Being illiterate, she lacked Griffiths's training and knowledge and certainly could not adequately satisfy her husband's appetite for intellectual stimulation. Griffiths confided to Smith in August 1851 that Douglass had "recently had a considerable increase of those home trials about which I spoke to you and dear Mrs. Smith while at Peterboro." She failed to speculate as to the causes of or to delineate "those home trials." In late 1852, though, she moved out of the Douglass home.⁵⁷

In light of Douglass's bourgeois values, especially his respect for intelligence, wealth, and refinement, in addition to his keen social conscience and humanitarianism, his affection for Smith and Griffiths was quite understandable. Griffiths's unstinting aid and loyalty to Douglass ensured their lifelong friendship and correspondence. Viewing her as a principal cause for Douglass's alleged defection from their ranks, the Garrisonians took particular offense to her relationship with Douglass. That Griffiths was an unmarried white woman represented an essential element of their vilification campaign. Actually, the mutual admiration between Douglass and white women abolitionists more than once shocked orthodox white racial sensibilities, as well as those of allegedly less prejudiced white abolitionists. Many whites were taken aback when this handsome and robust black man mingled with cultured and attractive white women to the obvious enjoyment of both parties. Women,

black and white, unquestionably found Douglass irresistibly charming. For instance, Celia Logan, a white woman who served for a time as assistant editor of the *Capital*, described in very flattering and suggestive terms her initial response to meeting Douglass. She noted that “the play of his fine features made a little thrill run through me. The dignity of his attitude, the majesty of his stature made Frederick Douglass look every inch a man.”⁵⁸

It was not unusual for Douglass to appear in public with white women. When he, Julia Griffiths, and Eliza, her visiting sister, walked arm-in-arm down the street in Rochester and New York City, they received considerable attention. On one such occasion in New York, a group of ruffians assaulted Douglass. There circulated in Boston, moreover, a vulgar woodcut depicting the Griffiths sisters as amorously vying for the affection of “Nigger Douglass.” The open consorting of a black man with white women agitated the interrelated fears of white female dissatisfaction and black male supersexuality. Where the white man had failed to satisfy the sexual needs of the white woman, the black man was more than equal to the challenge. A corollary of this assumption was the resultant fantasies characterizing white women and black men as passionately desirous of each other.⁵⁹

This syndrome informed British abolitionist John Estlin’s view of the social relationships between Douglass and white women in Britain. “I could not but tremble for his [Douglass’s] future domestic comfort when he returns to the United States,” he wrote to Samuel May, Jr. “You can hardly imagine how he is noticed,—better, I may say, by ladies: Some of them really a little exceed the bounds of propriety, or delicacy, as far as appearances are concerned.” He further noted: “my fear is that after associating so much with white women of education and refined taste and manners, he will feel a ‘craving void’ when he returns to his family.”⁶⁰

The blatant violation of the racist and sexist taboo against social intercourse between black men and white women also influenced the Garrisonian vilification of the relationship between Douglass and Griffiths. The relationship was too suspiciously close even for the liberal Garrisonians. The mutual vendetta between Douglass and the Garrisonians achieved a signal vulgarity and nadir when the Garrisonians publicized scandalous rumors about Douglass and Griffiths. In the typical scenario, Griffiths was the home-wrecking Jezebel; the Douglasses, especially Frederick, her victims. In early 1852, Douglass wrote Samuel D. Porter, a Garrisonian, denying these “scandalous reports.” Although he claimed that he would not address these aspersions until presented with actual evidence, he emphasized his staunch and unblemished familial dedication. Regardless, Garrisonians saw the wicked influence of Griffiths behind Douglass’s assertion that the religious infidelity of certain Garrisonians

would harm their effectiveness as abolitionists. Douglass's motive, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* of 24 September 1853 charged, was to draw support away from the Garrisonians to Douglass, his newspaper, and his views. "In this work," the editor contended, "he has had the aid of a Jezebel, whose capacity for making mischief between friends it would be difficult to match." Nothing was said explicitly, though, of the "Jezebel's" impact on Douglass's domestic life.⁶¹

Within a month, however, that changed. Garrison himself charged that "for several years past, he [Douglass] has had one of the worst advisors in his printing office, whose influence over him has not only caused much unhappiness in his own household, but perniciously biased his own judgment." Garrison dismissed Anna Douglass's denial of any domestic discord arising from the relationship between Douglass and Griffiths as "evasive, as our charge has reference to the past and not to the present." A month later, he swore that he "could bring a score of unimpeachable witnesses in Rochester to prove" his allegations. Abolitionists of all persuasions generally agreed with Harriet Beecher Stowe that Garrison's accusations were unwarranted, improper, and "unfortunate." Eventually, Garrison wrote a lame retraction stating that he did not mean to suggest any misconduct between Griffiths and Douglass. He now wished that he had said nothing at all about their relationship.⁶² The damage had already been done.

Douglass, moreover, was not appeased. In the 9 December 1853 issue of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, he filled six complete columns on the first page with material from Garrisonian newspapers—the *Liberator*, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, and the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*—to demonstrate the magnitude of the Garrisonian vendetta against him. In the following columns, he reciprocated. The *Pennsylvania Freeman* charged that Douglass desired to be the preeminent abolitionist, but because others of superior ability and accomplishment already superseded him, he grew jealous and vindictive. His ambition outstripped his ability. The *Pennsylvania Freeman* further contended that slavery

may have penetrated his soul: if he has escaped the bondage of others, he may continue in frightful servitude to self; his change of ownership may be but a transfer of tyrannies from without to within. He may be a representative of the evils of slavery in the most fearful sense; for he may not only represent the manhood it degrades, but the degradation also; the avarice it engenders, the love of domination, the fierce impatience of opposition, the suspicion of motives, the jealousy of superiors, the interpretation of the highest thoughts through the lowest faculties.

Similarly, Garrison observed that Douglass had become “extremely sensitive . . . to reproach.” He thus concluded that Douglass “is an altered man in his temper and spirit; the success of his paper he makes paramount to principle; and the curse of worldly ambition is evidently the secret of his alienation.”⁶³

Douglass responded that “whether ‘the curse’ of worldly ambition is on me or not, it is very evident, ‘the curse’ of William Lloyd Garrison is upon me.” He noted that had he desired praise and ambition, he would never have violated the wishes of the Garrisonians. Yet because he was man enough to own up to a change in his convictions, they persecuted him “with a bitterness ever increasing and a steadiness and violence only characteristic of malice, deep, broad, lasting, and in its worst form.” To disprove the charge of selfishness, Douglass pointed to several facts. He had decided to return home “to endure insult, abuse, and proscription” with his people, rather than remain in England “where color was no crime.” Also while in England, he had decided to use two thousand dollars given him by English friends to establish a newspaper to plead his people’s cause, instead of using it for his own benefit. Similarly, he refused a five hundred dollar donation collected in Finsbury Chapel (London) either to bring his family to England or for his personal benefit.⁶⁴

That Garrison had the unmitigated gall, Douglass thundered, “despite the sacredness of my home, [to] break through the just limits of public controversy, and has sought to blast me in the name of my family,” further embittered him. He strongly believed that one’s domestic relations should be kept private. “A man’s wife and children,” he argued, “should be spared the mortification involved in a public discussion of matters entirely private.”⁶⁵ Garrison’s decision “to invade” Douglass’s home life betrayed much more about him than the painful depths of his anger and resentment toward Douglass. It also betrayed his disrespect for Douglass and his family whose commitment to the sanctity and joy of domestic life meant as much to them as it apparently did to Garrison and his family.

The *Pennsylvania Freeman’s* accusation of “that worst-of-crime in a Negro”—insubordination to his white superiors—especially galled Douglass. Such an accusation, he observed, “sounds better on a slave plantation, or on the deck of a man of war,” than among abolitionists where egalitarianism allegedly reigned. In a similar vein, Garrison revealed a significant, albeit subordinate, aspect of his attitudes toward Negroes when he commented negatively upon their ability to understand their own freedom struggle. He submitted that abolitionism

is not based upon complexion, but upon justice; its principles are world-wide, though the victims whom it seeks to deliver are groaning in the

southern prison-house; it concerns man as man, not merely as an African, or one of African descent. Unswerving fidelity to it, in this country, requires high moral attainments, the crucifixion of all personal considerations, a paramount regard for principle, absolute faith in the right. It does not follow, therefore, that because a man is identified with a class meted out and trodden under foot, he will be the truest to the cause of human freedom. Already, that cause, both religiously and politically, has transcended the ability of the sufferers from American slavery and prejudice, as a class, to keep pace with it, or to perceive what are its demands, or to understand the philosophy of its operations.

This argument led Douglass to surmise that “the iron of slavery and prejudice” had entered the “souls” of the Garrisonians.⁶⁶

Douglass viewed Garrison’s arrogant and presumptuous remarks as extremely insulting. While he agreed that race was no assurance of true dedication to “the cause of human freedom,” he could not comprehend what was so “profound and mysterious” about the “pace,” “demands,” or “philosophy” of abolitionism that was beyond the understanding of blacks. Abolitionism, he countered, was “theoretically and abstractly” a universal concern, but “practically and peculiarly” a black concern. Consequently, he admonished his people to reject as a “stupendous” insult any effort “to lift this holy cause into a sublimity” that they could not understand.⁶⁷

Whites, Douglass believed, were obviously less committed than blacks to abolitionism, its universality notwithstanding. Thus, if abolitionism was beyond the comprehension of Negroes, it was even further beyond that of whites. Douglass charged, moreover, that Garrison’s argument played into racist hands. When Garrison, “the great champion of the Negro’s rights,” branded Negroes with “a want of apprehension and moral capacity,” he conceded Negro inferiority. “The bitterest despisers of the Negro race” could only applaud this concession from such an unlikely source. Given the prejudice of one so enlightened as Garrison, Douglass reiterated that only those who actually suffered under slavery and racism could be presumed to understand their own freedom struggle. He concluded that not only was white racism the major impediment to abolitionism, but also to significant black involvement in the American Anti-Slavery Society. Indeed, by 1855, he maintained that the primary reason for the coldness of blacks toward the American Anti-Slavery Society was its racism, not its Unitarianism.⁶⁸

The extreme bitterness of the rupture between Garrison and Douglass suggests that the underlying psychology of that rupture was complex. Clearly, the break betrayed two proud and dominant personalities. As Douglass matured

and gained in confidence, he found the strictures of the Garrisonian family of reformers too stifling. But much like the adolescent rebellion of the son against the father, the ideological rebellion of Douglass, the dissident disciple, against Garrison, the unforgiving mentor, represented an important psychological declaration of independence for Douglass. His period of socialization and apprenticeship was rapidly ending. Shortly before the full fury of the controversy broke, Douglass wrote to Charles Sumner explaining that he had outgrown the Garrisonian "school of reformers" which he had discovered to be "too narrow in its philosophy and too bigoted in spirit to do justice to any who venture to differ from it." Understandably ambivalent toward both his former "school" and mentor, he admitted to Sumner that he felt uneasy about responding to their attacks against him. "I am at this moment," he lamented, "assailed with more bitterness by that school than from any other quarter." For the time being, however, he planned to remain silent "under every provocation." He added: "Especially do I wish to maintain silence under whatever Mr. Garrison may say. I stand in relation to him something like that of a child to a parent."⁶⁹

Like Douglass's pivotal victory over Covey, the slave-breaker, his nasty and painful break with Garrison and the Garrisonians signified a turning point in his life. Whereas the victory over Covey represented a triumph over physical enslavement, the break with Garrison and the Garrisonians represented a triumph over the mental enslavement of Garrisonian dogma. Even more important, both events represented benchmarks in his quest to come to grips with his black manhood. In particular, the break between Douglass and Garrison, who, like Gerrit Smith, symbolized a white father-figure, enhanced Douglass's maturation, notably the development of his own identity. The break likewise illustrated Douglass's increasing ability to deal with the fundamental question of his relationship to a white father he never knew, and consequently could not identify with.

After the break, he was more conscious than ever before of the psychological fact that reliance upon a surrogate white father necessarily stifled black masculine identity and independence. The sobering reality of Garrison's race prejudice, as mild as it may have been in comparison to that of other whites, even other abolitionists, reinforced this awareness. The relationship between Douglass and Garrison was no longer "like that of a child to a parent." Douglass's subsequently more mature relationships with white male authority figures indeed underscored his awareness of the need for and exigencies of black manly independence. Nevertheless, the complicated problem of how to achieve black manly independence in the face of the racist paternalism of his white male colleagues, on one hand, and his own psychological need to deal with his mysterious white patrimony, on the other, was never fully resolved.

The feud between Douglass and Garrison mellowed gradually. In a letter to Samuel J. May dated 28 September 1860, Garrison again characterized Douglass “as thoroughly base and selfish . . . as destitute of every principle of honor, ungrateful to the last degree, and malevolent in spirit.” Douglass, he added, “is not worthy of respect, confidence, or countenance.” Three years later in a letter to Helen, his wife, Garrison reiterated his negative feelings toward Douglass whose ability, he admitted, was still admirable. By the early 1870s, however, they were again on speaking terms. Upon Garrison’s death in 1879, Douglass eulogized him as a hero and a great man who left a lasting legacy, notably as an abolitionist. Douglass, nonetheless, candidly admitted that “I have sometimes thought him uncharitable to those who differed from him. Honest himself, he could not always see how men could differ from him and still be honest.” Yet even when Garrison erred, Douglass explained, he did so “in the interest of truth.”⁷⁰ Interestingly enough, this assessment likewise reflected Douglass’s own response to his critics and dedication to truth.

Abolitionism for Douglass signified more than the relentless campaign to emancipate immediately and unconditionally his enslaved people. It also symbolized the best in morality, humanism, religion, the American Revolutionary tradition, as well as the crux of the Civil War. “It is a thing immortal. It is the very essence of justice, liberty, and love.” In fact, largely because of the efforts of Douglass and others like him who personified “the moral sense of the civilized world,” the cause finally succeeded. Emancipation in both the West Indies and the United States had been primarily attributable to the “creation of a proper moral sentiment.” The real power of the abolitionist movement had come from “the invisible and infinite forces of the moral universe.”⁷¹

Douglass suggested that the “deeper and truer” reason for the triumph of abolitionism had been “its accordance with the best elements of human nature.” Abolitionism symbolized freedom: a fundamental “truth of human brotherhood.” In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass asserted: “I have never placed my opposition to slavery on a basis so narrow as my own enslavement, but rather upon the indestructible and unchangeable laws of human nature, every one of which is perpetually and flagrantly violated by the slave system.” Abolitionism stood for humanism. Comparing the misery of Irish peasants to that of black American slaves, Douglass concluded that “the cause of humanity is one the world over. He who really and truly feels for the American slave, cannot steel his heart to the woes of others; and he who thinks himself an abolitionist, yet cannot enter into the wrongs of others, has yet to find a true foundation for his anti-slavery faith.”⁷²

For Douglass, the moral and humanist aspects of abolitionism came to-

gether in his view of Christianity. “The anti-slaveholder’s platform,” he insisted, “is as broad as humanity, and as strong as eternal justice; all may stand upon it and work together, without violating any Christian principles.” He took his text from Matthew 7:12—“‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do you even so unto them.’” Elaborating upon that text, he demanded: “if you claim liberty for yourself, grant it to your neighbor.” He reasoned, furthermore, that “if you, yourself were a slave, and would desire the aid of your fellow-man to rescue you from the clutches of the enslaver, you surely are bound by that very desire to labor for the freedom of those whom you know to be in bonds.”⁷³ As with most abolitionists, with Douglass the abolitionist commitment constituted an integral part of his Christian duty.

Douglass condemned all proslavery manifestations, North and South, among institutions and individuals, especially religious ones. He considered the concept of a proslavery religion thoroughly irrational and indefensible. “Of what use to this sin-cursed world is a church, whose religion and gospel are the dread of the oppressed and the delight of the oppressor?” He noted in his analysis of the fall of many churches from antislavery grace that the necessity for the church to support the oppressed “is of the profoundest significance and deserves to be pondered on.” The “eternal spirit” of Christianity, its very essence, remained always with “the oppressed and enslaved everywhere.”⁷⁴

As proslavery Christian dogma was loathsome and unjustifiable, so were its attendant “forms and ceremonies.” The hypocrisy of a proslavery Christianity had to be replaced by the truth of an antislavery Christianity. Given the domestic failure of American Christianity, Douglass questioned its efficacy abroad as a missionary force. “It will not do to save souls abroad,” he argued, “and enslave souls at home.” The Christian church must either support the abolition of slavery or be destroyed by slavery. All proslavery institutions, including the government, confronted the same alternative.⁷⁵

Douglass was a democratic as well as Christian idealist. He ultimately trusted the people’s wisdom. Similarly, he was, paradoxically, a rabid partisan of democratic revolution, notwithstanding his commitment to reform as a model for change. He thus gloried in the democratic idealism and achievements of the American, French, Haitian, and 1848 European revolutions. For him, abolitionism was an integral part of this revolutionary democratic tradition. In large measure, the ideology of abolitionism grew out of a natural law and inalienable rights perspective central to the Enlightenment ideals that helped to foster Western democratic revolutions. The inalienable rights to life and liberty superseded that to property, notably slave property. Slavery and liberty were diametrically opposed; they inevitably sought to destroy each

other. Douglass reasoned, as a result, that “slavery must be abolished in the South, or it will demoralize and destroy liberty in the North.”⁷⁶

Douglass viewed the Haitian Revolution as a significant contribution to the “cause of universal human liberty.” In fact, “the danger of slavery and the value of liberty” represented the chief lesson of Haitian liberation. Haiti’s historical importance was twofold. Its successful revolution not only “startled the Christian world into a sense of the Negro’s manhood,” but it also had the enviable distinction of being “the original . . . emancipator of the nineteenth century.” Douglass, then, saw the Haitian Revolution as a key impetus behind abolitionism throughout Western culture. As British West Indian emancipation in 1833 had followed in the spirit, if not the mode, of Haitian emancipation, so would emancipation in the United States.⁷⁷

The major reason for celebrating West Indian Emancipation Day in the preemancipation United States, though, had been propagandistic and not merely commemorative. “Above all,” Douglass maintained, “our profoundest wish, our intensest desire, our chiefest aim, is to make this ever memorable day, in some small measure the means of awakening a deeper interest in the cause of the fettered millions in our own land.” But even more than the praiseworthy British example of West Indian emancipation, the illustrious example of the Haitian Revolution presaged and contributed to hopeful prospects for black emancipation in the United States. Most important, in Haiti the Negroes themselves had taken their liberty.⁷⁸

Douglass saw a continuation of the Haitian liberation spirit, especially, and the revolutionary democratic Western thrust toward liberty, generally, in the abolition of slavery in the French territories by the short-lived and democratic French government of 1848. Emancipation in the British West Indies had freed eight hundred thousand blacks; emancipation in the French territories freed three hundred thousand more. Consequently, slavery in the United States seemed doomed. For those who tried to deprecate the 1848 French emancipation decree by dwelling upon the anti-Catholic smokescreen of French infidelity, Douglass had only rebuke. He proudly defended “that infidelity, no matter how heinous it may be in the estimation of the American people, which strikes the chains from the limbs of our brethren.”⁷⁹

The French and British policies of emancipation elicited praise from American abolitionists and scorn from American slaveholders. Douglass found most revealing the slaveholders’ reaction to France’s “act of justice to our race.” Their response vividly exposed the paradox of America’s “slaveholding republic”—a land of liberty built upon slavery. Douglass observed: “We desire to rejoice with her [France] in her republicanism, but it is impossible to do so without seeming to rejoice over abolitionism.”⁸⁰ He, of course, did not have

this problem. As both a republican and an abolitionist, he heartily embraced both the republican and abolitionist aspects of France's democratic revolution.

Once a Garrisonian himself, Douglass was well aware of the contradiction besetting certain abolitionists, especially Garrisonian nonresistants and Christian pacifists, between their commitment to emancipation and their call for slaves to seek their freedom through nonviolent means. Even as a Garrisonian, he criticized these peace-loving abolitionists among an enthusiastic crowd wildly applauding the violent victory of "Republicanism over Royalty" in France for their inconsistency. "Should you not hail with equal pleasure the tidings from the South that the slaves had risen, and achieved for themselves, against the ironhearted slaveholder, what the Republicans of France achieved against the Royalists of France?" Douglass likewise harked back to the violence of the American Revolution. In an anticolonization resolution, he proposed "that if it be left optional with a slave to go to Africa or not, we advise him not to go, but rather to remain here and add to the number of those who may yet imitate the example of our fathers of 1776."⁸¹

Douglass also compared the valor of slave resistance to that of revolutionary patriotism. Both the patriot and the slave, he emphasized, fought for their liberty. The irony of the comparison was especially telling. Chafing under a "much milder" oppression than chattel slavery, the colonist "had not a thousandth part of the provocation to rebel, to kill and destroy their oppressors, that this poor Negro had." Nevertheless, colonial rebellion elicited historical praise, and slave rebellion elicited historical censure, even though both rebellions drew upon the same revolutionary heritage. As a result, in his advice to blacks to arm and protect themselves against the threat of the Fugitive Slave Law to their personal liberty, Douglass exclaimed: "Oh! that we had a little more of the manly indifference to death, which characterized the Heroes of the American Revolution."⁸²

The great contradiction of the American Revolution, Douglass suggested, was that it liberated whites while it failed to liberate black slaves. At least the French Revolution had helped to set in motion the Haitian Revolution and the Revolution of 1848, both of which freed French slaves. Even monarchical Britain demonstrated that it, too, felt the humanitarian impulse of the revolutionary democratic spirit and thus freed its slaves. The United States appeared unable and unwilling to follow the lead of Britain and France. Douglass construed this refusal as racist. Furthermore, he detected a link between this failure and the tendency among contemporary white partisans of the American Revolution to see white revolution as justifiable and praiseworthy, but Negro revolution as unjustifiable and deplorable.⁸³

This disparity was particularly evident in the negative response of most

white Americans, as opposed to the positive response of black Americans and white sympathizers, to the revolution in Haiti. Likewise, Douglass found contemptible the efforts of the United States government to seek from the British government the return of, or reparations for, the slave mutineers who in 1841 carried out aboard the *Creole* a successful insurrection. Led by the heroic Madison Washington, these former slaves eventually secured their freedom in the British territory of Nassau. Douglass again observed that what would have been honorable for oppressed whites was viewed officially as despicable for oppressed blacks.⁸⁴

The supreme affront to Douglass's democratic and republican idealism, therefore, was white America's lip service to this idealism as it affected blacks. He persistently railed against white America's ideological pretensions. He continually exposed the cancer afflicting America's democracy.

The existence of slavery in this country brands your republicanism as a sham, your humanity as a base pretense and your Christianity as a lie. It destroys your moral power abroad: it corrupts your politicians at home. It saps the foundation of religion; it makes your name a hissing and a by-word to a mocking earth. It is the antagonistic force in your government, the only thing that seriously disturbs and endangers your Union. It fetters your progress; it is the enemy of improvement; the deadly foe of education; it fosters pride; it breeds insolence, it promotes vice; it shelters crime; it is a curse to the earth that supports it; and yet you cling to it as if it were the sheet anchor of all your hopes.⁸⁵

Douglass's analysis of white America's sham democracy exploited a wealth of incontrovertible evidence. Black chattel slavery, he maintained, blatantly contradicted white America's claim of an advanced civilization. He noted that white Americans castigated foreign tyrants while aiding and abetting slaveholders, domestic tyrants. Although white Americans graciously welcomed fugitives from foreign persecution, they allowed a law to capture and return like hounds black fugitive slaves fleeing domestic persecution in the South. While white America had an endless well of sympathy for the oppressed in European countries, like Ireland, it had an endless well of contempt for the oppressed African-American slave. White Americans expounded upon their belief in the dignity of labor, but they supported a system of slavery that degraded it.⁸⁶

The climax of Douglass's examination of white America's hypocritical democracy was his eloquent response to the rhetorical question: "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?" It is

a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.⁸⁷

For the Negro slave, the Fourth of July was, in a word, meaningless. Empathizing with the slave's point of view, Douglass and those of like mind preferred to celebrate British West Indian Emancipation Day on the first of August.

Independence Day assumed true meaning for the Negro slave and less ambiguous meaning for the free Negro with the successful Union prosecution of the Civil War and the consequent emancipation of the Negro slave. Prior to the Confederate firing on Fort Sumter, 12 April 1861, Douglass had asserted in an editorial entitled "How to Save the Union," that "Slavery must be all in the Union, or it can be nothing." He agreed with those, like Lincoln, who felt that a nation divided between slavery and freedom courted disaster. However, he excoriated those, like Lincoln, who could not see that the primary purpose of the Civil War was emancipation. Black liberation, he argued, was more important than a slavery-ridden Union. Douglass expressed the sentiments of blacks and radical abolitionists alike when he asserted in May 1861 that the "inexorable logic of events" would show Americans that their Civil War was a struggle between slavery and freedom. This struggle would continue until one force completely subdued the other.⁸⁸

The recognition and employment of black troops signified a key element of that struggle. Douglass, therefore, was in the vanguard of the campaign to force the Union to recognize and to employ black troops—a black liberation army. He later recalled that "from the first I reproached the North that they fought the rebels with only the one hand, when they might strike effectively with two—that they fought with their soft white hand, while they kept their black iron hand chained and helpless behind them." Equally important, he argued, "the Union cause would never prosper till the war assumed an anti-slavery attitude, and the Negro was enlisted on the loyal side."⁸⁹ Douglass thus perceived the Union troops as an abolitionist army that of necessity had to include Negroes.

Lincoln's cautious and limited Emancipation Proclamation, which freed

Confederate slaves as a military necessity, transformed into federal policy the perception of the Civil War as a crusade for black freedom. It augured doom for slavery in the border states as well. Douglass saw this extraordinary shift in the slave's status as an intrinsic part of the expanding worldwide ethos of democratic reforms. The Emancipation Proclamation signified a "mighty event" for the nation and the world, as well as for the slave. It gave meaning to the Fourth of July for the Negro, but still superseded it in significance. Whereas the American Revolution could now be honestly celebrated by all Americans, white and black, the Emancipation Proclamation was above all else cause for black American celebration.⁹⁰

Douglass preferred to view the Emancipation Proclamation "in its relation to the cause of truth and justice throughout the world." He observed that "there are certain great national acts, which by their relation to universal principles, properly belong to the whole human family." The Emancipation Proclamation was one such act. He prophesied that "it will stand with every distinguished event which marks any advance made by mankind from the thralldom and darkness of error to the glorious liberty of truth." Much more than "a military necessity," it was "a grand moral necessity," an added reason for Douglass's belief "in the millennium—the final perfection of the race."⁹¹

3. The Politics of a Race Leader

Douglass, race propagandist and politician, represented the prototypical black leader in modern America. His ascension to the role betrayed the necessary conjunction of ability, ambition, and fortuitous circumstance. He gained his power and influence—admittedly ambiguous and vulnerable—as much, if not more so, from his ties to influential whites, as from his sway over blacks. In fact, his status among the latter depended in large measure upon his status among powerful whites and his resulting facility at orchestrating among them support for tangible black advances. Besides his position as self-styled leader and liaison between influential whites and the black community, Douglass, a self-made man, embodied the potential and achievement of his race.¹

For Douglass, the preeminent race leader, consequently, there existed no separation between his personal identity and his racial duty. He personalized and internalized the collective black struggle; he personified his people's cause. Speaking of Douglass, William S. Scarborough, black scholar and Howard University professor, wrote: "The Negro's cause was his cause, and his cause was the Negro's cause. In defending his people he was defending himself." This was evident in his response to the charge by Samuel Hanson Cox, Presbyterian clergyman and fellow American, that he had almost ruined a World's Temperance Convention in London (1846) by expounding upon abolitionism. Self-defense was imperative, Douglass replied, when to defend oneself "is to defend great and vital principles, the vindication of which is essential to the triumph of righteousness throughout the world." He considered "it neither arrogant nor presumptuous to assume to represent three millions of my brethren." He thus refused to allow his people's cause to be damaged due to "misrepresentations" of his conduct by "evil-minded men." As long as he was able "to set myself right before the public," he would.² The character and conduct of a representative black man and a race leader had to be spotless.

Douglass's leadership style combined an activist-reformist orientation with an emblematic-patriarchal gloss.³ His social reformism, especially his philosophy of agitation and vigorous resistance to oppression, informed his perception of race leadership and his actions as a race leader. He was outspoken and bold. Progressive change in the degraded status of Negro Americans demanded fiery and courageous leaders, like himself. This difficult challenge, he perceived, was just a beginning in the long and arduous process of restructuring race relations along egalitarian and just lines. The role of moral propa-

gandist and the process of the enlightened reformation of race relations, then, were interrelated.

Douglass advocated not only the bourgeois vision of success and respectability, exemplified in the Protestant–capitalist work ethic, but also the spiritual importance of elevating black humanity, and all of humanity. Agitation was indispensable to the cause. Indeed, agitation on behalf of black humanity, he firmly believed, constituted a glorious mission. It clearly built strong manhood: Douglass’s primary measure and symbol of race character. It gave life real meaning. The shame was not in being oppressed; rather, it was in truckling to oppression.⁴

The descriptive and analytic distinctions between the activist-reformist and emblematic-patriarchal features of Douglass’s leadership virtually mesh to the point of inseparability. Nevertheless, it graphically suggests the significant distinction between his more ostensibly activist-reformist preemancipation leadership, the earlier Douglass, and his more ostensibly emblematic-patriarchal postemancipation leadership, the later Douglass.⁵ Although the discrimination is imprecise, it does connote the pivotal transition in his life and in his leadership role from the race spokesman as radical abolitionist to the race spokesman as stalwart Republican politician. It captures the telling shift from youthful insurgency to “Old Man Eloquent,” “The Sage of Anacostia,” and “The Elder Statesman.” Always the race spokesman, the symbolic aspect of this role for Douglass took on added importance after emancipation and the Civil War, as he assumed more and more the status of the leading and representative black man in America.

Shortly after arriving in New Bedford in 1838, Douglass entered local black political life and began addressing himself to the Negro’s plight. After becoming a Garrisonian abolitionist in 1841, he entered national political life. Once he became a Garrisonian, however, he spent a large part of his public life among white associates and speaking to mostly white audiences. As a result, even though his primary concern remained the Negro slave’s emancipation and the free Negro’s elevation, initially his closest ties were to white Garrisonians rather than other black abolitionists. This intimate ideological and interpersonal bond with the Garrisonians tended to set him apart from the separate, though related, tradition of black abolitionism. Through his active involvement in the National Negro Convention movement and his brilliant career as a newspaper editor and journalist, though, in combination with his speeches, writings, and various activities related to race uplift, he came to personify black leadership as well as black abolitionism.

Between 1830 and 1864, there were twelve National Negro Conventions:

every year from 1830 to 1835, and subsequently in 1843, 1847, 1848, 1853, 1855, and 1864. Douglass participated in the last six. All of these conventions met to discuss ways to promote the abolition of slavery and the elevation of the Negro. In these conclaves, in addition to innumerable local, state, and regional Negro conventions, Douglass debated ideas and proposals with the black leadership elite. During the 1840s, he found his belief in moral suasion as the best means of social reform under serious attack by black believers in the primacy of political action, men such as Garnet, Charles B. Ray, and Samuel R. Ward. Although Douglass's decision to embrace political action in the early 1850s resulted from a combination of factors, encompassing his shift from a proslavery to an antislavery reading of the United States Constitution, black political abolitionists also influenced his change of heart.⁶

Similarly, Douglass's shift from opposition to support for violent slave resistance was no doubt influenced by fellow black proponents of violent slave resistance, like Garnet. It would appear, however, that the personal animosity between Douglass and Garnet, a feud that fluctuated in intensity throughout their lives, contributed to Douglass's refusal to acknowledge any possible impact Garnet's thinking on this or any other issue may have had on his own. At the 1843 National Negro Convention in Buffalo, Garnet led the vocal vanguard that favored militant slave resistance. Boldly reiterating "an old and true saying that, 'if hereditary bondmen would be free, they must themselves strike the blow,'" he thundered: "Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this, and the days of slavery are numbered." He continued: "You cannot be more oppressed than you have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die free men than live to be slaves. Remember that you are FOUR MILLIONS! . . . Let your motto be resistance! Resistance! RESISTANCE! No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance."⁷

Douglass, at this time a peace advocate and a moral suasionist, led the successful opposition to the convention's adoption of Garnet's message which failed to pass by one vote. The address, he contended, was too radical. It had "too much physical force." He preferred to press more relentlessly for a moral and peaceful means of abolishing slavery. The call for slave insurrection, he suggested, would most likely never reach the slaves, and if it did, "it might not lead the slaves to rise in insurrection for liberty." Regardless, he asserted, if, in fact, the message reached the slaves, it would also inevitably reach their masters and call forth further repressive violence on their part against the slaves. Although Douglass viewed Garnet's address as unwise and untimely, he never questioned the abstract morality and justice of slave insurrection,

violent or otherwise. Six years later, however, he had come to agree with Garnet's view of violent slave insurrections as wise and desirable, as well as just and moral. Likewise, admonishing black men to fight for their people's emancipation in the Civil War, Douglass affirmed that those "who would be free themselves must strike the blow." He added: "Better even die free, than to live slaves." His shift reflected the influence of Garnet as well as John Brown, Douglass's close friend and violent revolutionary, and Douglass's growing perception of the need for violence to defeat the violent slavocracy.⁸

The most important result of Douglass's growing involvement in the National Negro Convention movement was twofold: his increasing comprehension of the complex issues confronting his people and his deepening race consciousness. Sensing a need to institutionalize the convention movement and give it long-term effectiveness, he proposed on 10 August 1849 in a *North Star* editorial, "The Union of the Oppressed for the Sake of Freedom," a National League of Colored People. He hoped that a permanent Negro structure dedicated to their own interests would promote unity and cooperation, notably among the leaders.⁹ Douglass's proposal generated regrettably little discussion and less support.

As with his involvement in the National Negro Convention movement, Douglass's outstanding career as a journalist further deepened both his insight into the plight of his people and his race consciousness. His career in journalism encompassed serving as editor and publisher of *The North Star* (1847 to 1851), *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1851 to 1859), *Douglass' Monthly* (1859 to 1863), and the *New National Era* (1870 to 1873). James McCune Smith, speaking of his good friend Douglass, remarked in an 1848 letter to Gerrit Smith "that only since his Editorial career has he seen to become a colored man!" Smith explained: "I have read his paper very carefully and find phase after phase develop itself as regularly as in one newly born among us. The Church question, the school question, separate institutions, are questions that he enters upon and argues about as our weary but active young men thought about and argued about years ago, when we had Literary Societies." Douglass, Smith alleged, was becoming both more sensitive to and more deeply involved with the many issues confronting blacks outside of abolitionism. As a result, Douglass's thought and activity, Smith implied, showed his heightening race consciousness as well as less dependence on his white Garrisonian colleagues. Similarly, Smith insinuated, Douglass was becoming more comfortable with the black half of his mulatto identity; his white patrimony, then, was diminishing in psychological and practical significance.¹⁰ Soon, Douglass would no longer need and accept the paternal guidance of his white Garrisonian brethren.

By the 1850s, Douglass was at the forefront of Negro thought, with his

influence and renown as a Negro journalist almost matching his power and prestige as a Negro abolitionist and orator. Like his participation in the National Negro Convention movement and his abolitionist and oratorical careers, his career in journalism augmented his status as the Negro leader. Douglass saw his early editorial career, moreover, as an indispensable part of his intellectual development. This career forced him to think for himself and to improve his reading and writing skills. It also expanded his intellectual horizons. As was the case with Douglass's initial narrative of his slave experiences, published in 1845, the quality of his newspapers led many whites to believe that he did not write his own editorials.¹¹

Douglass thought his prewar editorials represented much of his best work. As a result, the loss by fire in 1872 of his own twelve complete volumes of his newspapers between 1848 and 1860 was quite traumatic. It led him to opine that "outside the years embraced in the late tremendous war, there had been no period more pregnant with great events, or better suited to call the best mental and moral energies of men, than that covered by these lost volumes." He argued that if he had said or written anything significant or memorable, it was during those antebellum years and could be found in his paper.¹²

Douglass came of age as a race spokesman during the 1850s. During that decade, he increasingly functioned as his people's voice and a propagandist for their liberation and elevation. In his newspapers and speeches, he articulated a searching Negro, as well as abolitionist, point of view on relevant issues. He thus denounced the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 that endangered the personal liberty of all Negroes, for any Negro might now be charged and consequently falsely imprisoned as a runaway slave. "In glaring violation of justice, in shameless disregard of the forms of administering law, in cunning arrangement to entrap the defenceless, and in diabolical intent," he avowed, "this Fugitive Slave Law stands alone in the annals of tyrannical legislation. . . . I take this law to be one of the grossest infringements of Christian Liberty."¹³

Douglass also excoriated the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) which repealed the Missouri Compromise (1820). To him, however, the very idea of compromise with slavery, which "has no rightful existence anywhere," was perverse. All compromises with slavery were a "covenant with death." As a result, he lambasted the Dred Scott decision that reaffirmed the legality of slave property and questioned, thereby undermining, the humanity and the citizenship status of blacks. "It is an open rebellion against God's government," he reasoned. This "hell-black" and "demoniacal" judgment, the "most shocking of all pro-slavery devices," was a misguided and impossible effort "to change the image and superscription of the everliving God into a speechless piece of merchandise."¹⁴

Given the bleak reality for blacks during the 1850s, there was perhaps

reason to despair. Douglass, the eternal optimist, found hope even then, as he did whenever conditions for blacks worsened, in America's humanitarian idealism and the enlightened and progressive tendencies of the age, howsoever elusive or illusive these forces might, in fact, be. The immutable rule of divine and moral law meant that the Negro's cause, symbolic of humanity's cause, would ultimately prevail. Of the despicable Dred Scott decision, Douglass observed: "Such a decision cannot stand. God will be true though every man be a liar. . . . All that is merciful and just, on earth and in Heaven, will execrate and despise this edict of [Chief Justice Roger] Taney."¹⁵

Douglass, naturally enough, viewed the Civil War as the stage upon which the long-awaited morality play of the Negro's emancipation and elevation would finally be acted out. It was on this very stage, moreover, where not only this drama materialized, but also Douglass reached the climax of his demanding role as race leader. America's domestic apocalypse afforded him the challenge and opportunity to play a vital part in the actual process of Negro emancipation and elevation, and he avidly seized it, without a second thought. Once the war really started, many sensed that slavery's end was imminent and that a new American era, especially for former slaves, loomed on the horizon. But few, if any, sensed it as clearly as Douglass. From the very beginning, he saw, and helped the Union to see, the war as a means toward the abolition of slavery and the elevation of the Negro.

Douglass's indefatigable efforts on behalf of the recognition, employment, and equal treatment of black soldiers, the black liberation army, epitomized his Civil War leadership. The Civil War began in earnest on 12 April 1861, with the Confederate firing on the Union arsenal at Fort Sumter, South Carolina. In an editorial, "How to End the War," in the May 1861 issue of his newspaper, he argued that "this can be done at once, by 'carrying the war into Africa.' Let the slaves and free colored people be called into service, and formed into a liberating army, to march into the South and raise the banner of Emancipation among the slaves."¹⁶ The Union government and most northerners, however, initially perceived the conflict as "a white man's war": a war for the Union rather than the slaves' emancipation.

Douglass served primarily as a propagandist during the war. He endeavored to convince the Union to mobilize and use black troops as well as to convince Negroes that eventually their services would be needed and requested. Speaking to the Union government and northern whites, he implored them to overcome their racist hostility to the Negro soldier. "What a spectacle of blind, unreasoning prejudice and pusillanimity is this!"—he exclaimed. "The national edifice is on fire." Consequently, "every man who can carry a bucket of

water, or remove a brick, is wanted; but those who have the care of the building, having a profound respect for the feeling of the national burglars who set the building on fire, are determined that the flames shall only be extinguished by Indo-Caucasian hands, and to have the building burnt rather than save it by means of any other." The rejection of the Negro soldier paralleled the official Union refusal to make the struggle a war for emancipation and graphically demonstrated America's rejection of the Negro. Douglass asked rhetorically: "Is he not a man?"¹⁷

For Douglass, blacks generally, and whites, too, the crux of the dilemma whether or not to employ black soldiers was black manhood. Whereas blacks sought to develop it, whites sought to deny and suppress it. Whereas blacks envisioned it as a symbol of their humanity, whites envisioned it as a symbol of black degradation. The black troop dilemma, therefore, exemplified the American racial impasse. Douglass told black men that although the nation presently spurned them as soldiers, they must bide their time; their opportunity to fight was imminent. Meanwhile, "we do most earnestly urge our people everywhere to drink as deeply into the martial spirit of the times as possible; organize themselves into societies and companies, purchase arms for themselves, and learn how to use them." Douglass foresaw, and hoped, that "the present war may, and in all probability will reach a complexion where a few black regiments will be absolutely necessary." Therefore, "let us not only be ready on call, but be casting about for an opportunity to strike for the freedom of the slave, and for the rights of human nature."¹⁸

Ignorant of the valor and ability black soldiers had shown in previous American wars, most whites doubted the Negro's soldierly potential. President Lincoln, whose slowness in coming to grips with the imperative of both emancipation and the use of black troops incensed Douglass, admitted in September 1862 that "if I were to arm them, I fear that in a few weeks the arms would be in the hands of the rebels." Whites also feared that black troops might distinguish themselves, thereby necessitating respect and better treatment for blacks in general. Black troops, critics of their enlistment charged, hurt the spirit of white troops, whose prejudice typically rendered loathsome the notion of serving with blacks. Additional manpower needs exacerbated by the unanticipated length of the war, nonetheless, forced Lincoln and the War Department to accept black troops. In August 1862, the War Department authorized the recruitment of the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, a slave regiment. Lincoln approved the military use of black soldiers in his official pronouncement of the Emancipation Proclamation on 1 January 1863. With the exception of a few military leadership roles, notably commissioned officer positions, blacks performed most military duties.¹⁹

Douglass held that unless the nation alleviated its prejudice against the Negro soldier and welcomed him into the Union army, the Emancipation Proclamation “good as it is, will be worthless—a hollow mockery.” He thus rejoiced at the momentous decision to employ black troops, but he was under no illusion that the lives of black soldiers would be easy. The paramount nature of their goals made the hardships pale, by comparison, to insignificance. Douglass maintained that more important than the insults and annoyances they would encounter was the success of the liberation struggle. “We shall be fighting a double battle, against slavery at the South and against prejudice and proscription at the North—and the case presents the very best assurances of success. Whoever sees fifty thousand well-drilled colored soldiers in the United States, will see slavery abolished and the union of these States secured from rebel violence.”²⁰

For Douglass, the rationale for black enlistment in the Union army was unmistakably clear. He urged his brethren to forget, for the moment, that the call to duty had been tardy. Instead, “Action! Action! not criticism, is the plain duty of this hour. Words are now useful only as they stimulate to blows.” Blacks should also embrace the opportunity to serve in the military to fulfill and protect their status as American citizens, to prevent a proslavery compromise between the Union and the Confederacy, and to be a part of the “ennobling and soul enlarging” war for black liberation. He constantly reiterated the theme of the black man’s critical responsibility to labor for his race’s emancipation and uplift. “Liberty won by white men,” he asserted, “would lose half its luster.”²¹

Touching upon the importance of gun ownership, a vital element of military service, Douglass claimed: “There is something ennobling in the possession of arms, and we of all other people in the world stand in need of their ennobling influence.” By owning and learning to use properly a gun, an evocative symbol of manhood, the Negro man, Douglass suggested, gained a firmer sense of his humanity. Consequently, he emphasized the necessity to develop one’s manhood through military service. He deduced that “if color should not be a criterion of rights, neither should it be a standard of duty,” for “the whole duty of a man, belongs alike to white and black.” Military service, fortunately, taught the use of arms: “the means of securing, protecting, and defending your own liberty.” He averred: “The only way open to any race to make their rights respected is to learn how to defend them. When it is seen that black men no more than white men can be enslaved with impunity, men will be less inclined to enslave and oppress them.” Also, military service would alleviate the stigma of “a lack of manly courage” owing to the Negro’s “submission to Slavery and insult.” It would promote dignity and self-respect. “You will stand more erect,

walk more assured, feel more at ease, and be less liable to insult than you ever were before." Furthermore, Douglass stressed that "he who fights the battles of America may claim America as his country—and have that claim respected. Thus in defending your country against rebels and traitors you are defending your own liberty, honor, manhood and self-respect."²²

Douglass's key role in the propaganda campaign to encourage black men to enlist for war duty forced him to criticize the prejudiced and unequal treatment they encountered in the military and the often brutal treatment black Union prisoners of war suffered. In particular, he accentuated the injustice of racial discrimination in enlistment bounties and pay. He criticized and demanded rectification of these inequalities, in addition to the ill-preparation of many black troops, the lack of both black commissioned officers and competent white leadership for black soldiers, and the common practices of using black troops in petty, demoralizing jobs, and worst of all, as cannon fodder. These serious problems caused Douglass to suspend his recruitment of black soldiers until he received the government's assurances that they would receive equal treatment.²³

To get action on these problems, in late July 1863 Douglass obtained his first interview with President Lincoln, notwithstanding his growing disillusionment with him and his cautious prosecution of the war. Douglass emphasized the need to settle the issues of unequal pay, Confederate abuse of black prisoners of war, and the lack of official recognition and advancement for black troops. Lincoln responded diplomatically, stating that ultimately black soldiers would get equal pay. Although he agreed that black war prisoners should receive humane treatment, the President could not, he told Douglass, resort to retaliation against the Confederacy for their alleged brutality toward them because it might escalate the war's needless brutality. Finally, he promised to sign the commissions he received for black soldiers.²⁴

Douglass was only partially satisfied with Lincoln's response, but he was quite impressed with the man and believed that his assurances would lead to the alleviation of the galling injustices under which black troops labored. Regardless of qualms about Lincoln's response, he accepted the promise from Edwin M. Stanton, secretary of war, of a commission as assistant adjutant to General Lorenzo Thomas, who headed the recruitment and organization of troops in the Mississippi Valley. Douglass was slated to assist with Negro troop recruitment and organization. His euphoria over the appointment induced him to suspend publication of his newspaper while awaiting his commission. When it never came, he was understandably upset, but he refused to sulk. On the contrary, he redoubled his activities on behalf of an abolitionist peace as well as the special concerns of black soldiers and all black people.²⁵

On 25 August 1864, Douglass had his second interview with Lincoln. Among other things, they discussed how to encourage slaves to flee to the Union lines. Lincoln outlined a plan, reminiscent of John Brown's ill-fated ploy, for roving guerilla bands of black soldiers to infiltrate the South and foment a slave exodus to the Union lines. Part of Lincoln's rationale for the plan, however, upset Douglass. During their interview, Lincoln told Douglass that he wanted to get as many slaves as possible under Union authority because only those slaves behind Union lines would be free once the war was over. Douglass interpreted Lincoln's statement to mean that the Emancipation Proclamation would be both limited to former slaves under Union control and binding only during the war. The success of the Union war effort and the consequent total abolition of slavery relieved Douglass's concern that the emancipation edict might not be all-inclusive.²⁶

For Douglass and his people, the most significant result of the Union victory was the complete freeing of their fettered brethren. An important aspect of the emancipation process, moreover, had been the integral contributions of black soldiers: the black liberation army. Not only had they helped to free their own enslaved people, but they had done so heroically, often under extreme adversity and stress. "The black man, in arms to fight for the freedom of his race, and the safety and security of his country," Douglass had posited in his call for black men to enlist, "will give his countrymen a higher and better revelation of his character." The gallant yet costly assault of the fifty-fourth regiment (the first Negro regiment of the war) on Fort Wagner had unquestionably proven the mettle of Negro manhood. Douglass observed that the assault immediately came to symbolize both the indubitability of Negro equality and the justice of the Negro's freedom struggle.

In that terrible battle, under the wing of night, more cavils in respect of the quality of Negro manhood were set at rest than could have been during a century of ordinary life and observation. After that assault we heard no more of sending Negroes to garrison forts and arsenals, to fight miasma, yellow-fever, and small pox. Talk of his ability to meet the foe in the open field, and of his equal fitness with the white man to stop a bullet, then began to prevail. From this time (and the fact ought to be remembered) the colored troops were called upon to occupy positions which required the courage, steadiness, and endurance of veterans, and even their enemies were obliged to admit that they proved themselves worthy [of] the confidence reposed in them.²⁷

Douglass's unrelenting campaign to prove the already certain fact of Negro equality by pointing to exemplary black men had scored a critical victory.

Also, the larger cause of universal and egalitarian humanism had taken a giant leap forward. Prior to Union victory and total emancipation, Douglass had explained to his compatriots that “if this war, with its terrible experience of blood and death, has any lesson for the American people it is to show them the vanity and utter worthlessness of all attempts to secure peace and prosperity while disregarding and trampling upon the self-evident rights and claims of human nature.”²⁸ Emancipation and victory simply underscored Douglass’s insight.

The postbellum and postemancipation image of Douglass as racial patriarch fitted him quite well. He was forty-seven years old in 1865. In his 1881 autobiography, he recalled that “a strange and, perhaps, perverse feeling came over me” once the war had ended and slavery had finally met its demise.

My great and exceeding joy over these stupendous achievements, especially over the abolition of slavery (which had been the deepest desire and the great labor of my life), was slightly tinged with a feeling of sadness. I felt that I had reached the end of the noblest and best part of my life; my school was broken up, my church disbanded, and the beloved congregation dispersed, never to come together again. The antislavery platform had performed its work, and my voice was no longer needed. “Othello’s occupation was gone.”

This deep sense of loss forced him to ask himself what he should do with the rest of his life.²⁹

Such momentary questioning of his life’s purpose and direction signified both a career and an identity crisis. Having been so intimately involved in and identified with the abolitionist cause for almost all of his adult life, it was understandable that once “the great labor” of his life had successfully ended, he would be temporarily rudderless. Certainly, he could not return to the menial, though honest, labor of his preabolitionist days. That was behind and beneath him now. Yet, his life as an abolitionist had apparently not prepared him for “more congenial and higher employment.” He deduced that a man in his position had “not only to divest himself of the old, which is never easily done, but to adjust himself to the new, which is still more difficult.”³⁰

During this period of self-scrutiny, Douglass considered several alternatives. At one point, he contemplated retiring from public life, buying a farm, and settling down to lead a tranquil existence. Instead, he heeded the public demand and became a well-paid lecturer speaking on a wide variety of topics, from the antislavery movement to William the Silent (the founder of the Dutch Republic). This task, though, was secondary to his efforts to promote the

elevation of his people. Many friends urged him to go South and get elected to Congress where he might be more effective than in his present context as a national race statesman outside the political mainstream. However, the thought of becoming a black “carpetbagger” and politician in the Reconstruction South, he claimed in retrospect, went against his “better judgment and sense of propriety.” In light of his past career as a northern abolitionist, he felt better able to advocate his people’s cause before the North and the nation at large, without the burdens and restrictions of congressional officeholding.³¹ His people needed a national political leader capable of involving himself principally with their concerns, rather than those of electoral office. Douglass saw himself as that man.

As the chief black spokesman during Reconstruction, Douglass, along with other black leaders, abolitionists, and radical reconstructionists, argued that black suffrage constituted the first, and in many ways the most important, step toward full black freedom. The rationale and justification for black male suffrage had been strengthened by the exemplary achievements of black soldiers during the war. Moreover, “I looked upon suffrage to the Negro,” he later wrote, “as the only measure which could prevent him from being thrust back into slavery.” It was absolutely necessary for the Negro’s self-preservation and self-protection, not to mention his advancement. The theory and practice of Douglass’s political ideology coalesced around the issue of black suffrage.³²

The vote would enable blacks, freed and free, to seize control of their own destiny. The vote was intrinsic to both the individual’s stake in society and his opportunity to realize his full potential in all areas of his life. Thus, a liberal political ideology with laissez-faire underpinnings, like Douglass’s, could only work with impartial suffrage. Without political power, the vote, equal opportunity was impossible. All too often, Douglass noted, racist southern whites outdid their notorious northern counterparts in their persecution of the Negro, thus denying him equal opportunity. He pointed out that “the old master classes” were “full of bitterness and wrath” toward the freedpeople. These tumbled pillars of the Confederate cause resented the loss of their human chattel and saw their erstwhile slaves’ liberation as a hostile Union act. Because they were unable to punish “the emancipator,” they tried to punish the emancipated.³³ This deep-seated white Confederate resentment against the relatively powerless freedpeople had to be alleviated for a meaningful Reconstruction process to transpire.

From his perspective as a representative American citizen, Douglass believed that, first, the restoration of the Union and, second, the remaking of southern society in the ideal image of free northern society had to be primary goals of Reconstruction. Equally important from his perspective as race leader, moreover, the process of Reconstruction had to transform political

nonentities, powerless former slaves, into political entities, powerful citizens. Douglass's commitment to these critical transformations, notably the last, were significant features of his postwar leadership.

Douglass's conceptualization of Reconstruction, like that of his black abolitionist and Radical Republican cohorts, embraced full political, civil, and economic equality for the freedpeople. Social equality, he thought, was the inevitable consequence of these more formal kinds of equality. He was a strong advocate of the Radical Reconstructionists' policy of reorganizing southern state governments in harmony with the libertarian, civil, and political principles embodied in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, and the Supplementary Civil Rights Act of 1866. He also strongly supported the Freedman's Bureau, an institutional framework to promote these principles and to take care of the basic human needs of the freedpeople. Douglass had criticized Lincoln's lenient proposal for reconstructing southern state governments that had only required that one-tenth of the voters registered in 1860 act to establish a loyal government. He had labeled it "an entire contradiction of the constitutional idea of the Republican Government."³⁴

The active and full-fledged participation of Negroes in the southern reconstruction process, therefore, necessitated new state constitutions and governments in the South. This was a hard, yet imperative, lesson for southern whites, whose vision of government and of civil and political rights reflected their racist and states' rights perspectives. The lesson, nonetheless, was far beyond both the comprehension of most whites, North and South, and the ability of the freedpeople and their allies, like Douglass, to impress persuasively upon white southerners. Thus, after a brief, half-hearted, and ill-fated national attempt to bring order, justice, and equality to the former Confederate states, the white South dramatically reassumed dominance and intensified its violent degradation of the Negro. A growing national indifference to the Negro's plight (notably that of the freedpeople) graphically illustrated by the massive resurgence of racism and, at the same time, the growing dominance of economic self-interest, North and South, supported this counterrevolution.

The paradox of Douglass's conception of Reconstruction, as well as that of his political libertarian colleagues, was his insistence on both a political economy of *laissez-faire* individualism and the federal government's duty to assist the freedpeople in their transition to complete freedom. This paradox between self-reform and outside philanthropy at times confounded his conception of Reconstruction, thereby undermining its viability. Though quite sensitive to this dilemma, Douglass never fully resolved it. Rather, he typically advocated both self-reliant individualism and federal aid to the freedpeople as mutually consistent in the context of the legacy of slavery.

As his people's major spokesman, Douglass implored the nation, especially

the South, to “give the Negro fair play and let him alone to work out his own salvation.” As early as 1853, he had spoken of the need to alleviate the “poverty, ignorance and degradation” of free blacks in order “to put them on an equal footing with their white fellow-countrymen in the sacred right to ‘Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’” He added that “I am for no fancied or artificial elevation, but only ask fair play.” Along with fair play, Douglass stressed the Negro’s own need to develop greater self-reliance. “Slavery more than all things else,” he constantly reiterated, “robs its victims of self-reliance.”³⁵

Shortly after the Civil War and emancipation, Douglass realized that the government itself felt its duty toward the freedpeople was finished. It was now up to them to succeed or fail on their own. Unfortunately, Douglass observed, the freedman “had none of the conditions for self-preservation or self-protection. He was free from the individual master, but the slave of society.” Thus, after “two hundred and fifty years of enforced ignorance and stripes,” it was “absurd, cruel, and heartless,” even to suggest that the government had done enough for the former slaves. Regardless, the ultimate responsibility for improving this deplorable situation, for giving coherence and basic protection to the freedpeople’s liberties, resided with the freedpeople themselves. “No man can be truly free,” Douglass argued, “whose liberty is dependent upon the thought, feeling, and action of others, and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding . . . and maintaining that liberty.”³⁶

Douglass affirmed, moreover, that only the individual could be truly trusted with his own vote, his freedom ticket, given its signal importance. This was especially the case with the southern freedpeople, their poverty and ignorance notwithstanding. As newly recognized autonomous citizens, it was incumbent upon them to perform their own civic duties as well as to exercise their own civic privileges. Obviously, they could not place their vote, their welfare, or their liberty in the hands of others, especially prejudiced, embittered, white former Confederates. Likewise, they had to be wary of prejudiced northern whites, in addition to selfish and corrupt free blacks, North and South. Douglass concluded that he knew “no class of my fellow-men, however just, enlightened, and humane, which can be wisely and safely trusted absolutely with the liberties of any other class.”³⁷

Freedom without self-reliance, therefore, was impossible. He reminded the freedpeople that “a new condition has brought new duties. A character which might pass without censure as a slave cannot so pass as a freeman. We must not beg men to do for us what we ought to do for ourselves.” Servility and its worst effect, a “consciousness of inferiority,” was completely incompatible with freedom and equality. “The prostrate form, the uncovered head, the

cringing attitude, the bated breath, the suppliant, outstretched hand of beggary," he explained, "does not become an American freeman, and does not become us as a class, and we will not consent to be any longer represented in that position." The conclusion was inescapable: "No people can make more desirable progress or have permanent welfare outside of their own independent and earnest efforts."³⁸

In the highly competitive and cutthroat world of postbellum America, Douglass's notion of self-reliance sometimes tended to assume a cold and deterministic quality akin to Social Darwinism. Speaking of the self-reliant Negro, and American, he remarked: "If he lives, well. If he dies, equally well. If he cannot stand up, let him fall down." To vivify this point, he resorted to metaphor.

The apple must have strength and vitality enough in itself to hold on, or it will fall to the ground where it belongs. The strongest influence prevails and should prevail. If the vital relation of the fruit is severed, it is folly to tie the stem to the branch or the branch to the tree or to shelter the fruit from the wind. So, too, there is no wisdom in lifting from the earth a head which must only fall the more heavily when the help is withdrawn. Do right, though the heavens fall; but they will not fall.³⁹

Survival and by implication progress, this dispassionate image demonstrated, was an integral function of the natural and moral law of self-reliance. Nonetheless, Douglass still believed that individual self-dependence, especially in the case of the freedpeople, compelled "justice and fair play."

If the Negro had to be self-reliant, the nation, Douglass asserted, had to be just and fair toward the Negro. Otherwise, the freedom of neither the Negro nor the entire nation was true. In his ringing call for national "justice and fair play" toward the Negro, nevertheless, Douglass insisted that he and his people were not asking for preferential treatment. In fact, he pointed out that "we utterly repudiate all invidious distinctions, whether in our favor or against us, and only ask for a fair field and no favor."⁴⁰

In another context, though, Douglass proposed that "whenever the black man and the white man [are] equally eligible, equally available, equally qualified for an office, . . . the black man at this juncture of our affairs should be preferred." His endorsement of a preferential system of filling political jobs did not include the notion that blacks were due a certain percentage of various federal jobs based upon their proportional percentage of the population. Likewise, he argued, "equality of numbers has nothing to do with equality of attainments." For Douglass, a preferential racial quota contradicted the crucial concept of a meritocracy based upon equality of opportunity. He believed that

"natural equality is a very different thing from practical equality." In the same vein, he saw that even "though men may be potentially equal, circumstances," like the oppression of the Negro, "may for a time cause the most striking inequalities."⁴¹ Such circumstances had to be destroyed, particularly in the context of political rights and privileges where humanity, not merit, was the overriding criterion.

The concern that special governmental assistance to the freedpeople might be misguided paternalism, and in effect impede their progress toward selfreliance, was common among their advocates and sympathizers, notably abolitionists. Samuel Gridley Howe, for example, urged a government policy of strict *laissez-faire* egalitarianism. Given that "the Negro does best when let alone," Howe asserted, "we must beware of all attempts to prolong his servitude, even under the pretext of taking care of him." Reasoning from past experience, he observed that "the white man has tried taking care of the Negro, by slavery, by apprenticeship, by colonization, and has failed disastrously in all; now let the Negro try to take care of himself." Any government plan to assist the freedpeople, then, had to be consistent with political liberalism, *laissez-faire* egalitarianism, and self-reliance. Howe maintained that "it should be founded on the principle that the Negro, once emancipated, is as free as the white man; free to go or to come; free to accept or reject employment; free to work or to starve." Rather than "a prolongation of slavery or servitude disguised under the name of protection," it must be a "general system for putting the Negroes upon their own legs, and defending them against those who will strive to push them down, and keep them down."⁴²

Douglass thoroughly concurred. To the ubiquitous preemancipation query of what to do with the slaves if freed, Douglass answered: "do nothing with them; mind your business, and let them mind theirs. Your doing with them is their greatest misfortune." A zealous humanitarian, however, Douglass comprehended that merely leaving the Negro alone was neither adequate nor fair. He was not against benevolence toward the Negro. But, he added, "in the name of reason and religion, we earnestly plead for justice above all else. Benevolence with justice is harmonious and beautiful; but benevolence without justice is a mockery."⁴³

The tragic shortcoming of the pervasive shibboleth, "Give the Negro fair play and let him alone," Douglass fully knew, was that while whites never tired of letting the Negro alone, they consistently denied him an equal opportunity in the "race of life." He declared that "it is not fair play to start the Negro out in life, from nothing and with nothing, while others start with the advantage of a thousand years behind them." An accurate assessment of the Negro's progress in civilization, moreover, required that "he should be measured, not by the

heights others have obtained, but from the depths from which he has come." In light of the enormous disparity between the relative positions of whites and blacks in America, consequently, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to equalize completely their starting points in the "race of life."⁴⁴ The undeniable injustices and resulting inequalities the Negro endured in the past, he suggested, deeply impressed an inauspicious legacy on the Negro's present and future: a legacy that a truly progressive republic would not allow to persist.

The federal government, according to Douglass and his cohorts, still had to develop policies and programs in an attempt to equalize the American "race of life." These efforts had to begin by providing the freedpeople with education, jobs, and land, in addition to the vote and civil rights. In essence, the government had to lead the way in the alleviation of the racial caste barrier. The problem of retribution for the past oppression the Negro experienced, however, was ultimately unresolvable. Douglass submitted that "should the American people put a school house in every valley of the South and a church on every hillside and supply the one with teachers and the other with preachers, for a hundred years to come, they would not then have given fair play to the Negro." He concluded that "the nearest approach to justice to the Negro for the past is to do him justice in the present."⁴⁵

The freedpeople themselves frequently desired land and jobs, economic self-determination and security, besides education, which they similarly saw as an important means toward a better socioeconomic situation. Their leaders and supporters strongly sympathized with these basic desires. Like Representative Thaddeus Stevens and Senator Charles Sumner, the key congressional leaders of Radical Reconstruction, Douglass contended that the freedpeople needed their own land and that it was the federal government's duty to see that they got it. These leaders argued that justice to the Negro meant the full elaboration and implementation of a federal policy to improve and protect the Negro's socioeconomic as well as civic and political status. They suggested that an economic stake in society, property, and a political stake in society, suffrage, were interrelated; that political equality and economic opportunity reinforced one another. Douglass's overriding belief in the sanctity of private property, however, prevented him from supporting as too radical Stevens's and Sumner's different proposals for the confiscation of large tracts of formerly Confederate land and the redistribution of this land among the freedpeople.⁴⁶

Reflecting moderation and classic liberalism, most black leaders, even in the Reconstruction South, agreed with Douglass's view, notwithstanding the former slaves' crying need and fervent desire for land. Rather than the confiscation and redistribution of former Confederate lands, Douglass proposed that Congress devise a program to assist the freedpeople in purchasing land on

cheap and manageable terms. In his mind, this method was preferable because it was wholly consistent not only with the sacred right of property, but also with Negro self-dependence and federal justice to the former slaves. He thus sketched a proposal for a "National Land and Loan Company." This would be a vehicle for the government to buy large tracts of land and to provide easy loans for the freedpeople, who, in turn, would purchase plots and cultivate them. Douglass forecasted that without such a program, "thousands, I fear, will continue to live a miserable life and die a wretched death."⁴⁷

By 1880, Douglass had concluded that "our reconstruction measures were radically defective." The nation's opprobrious abandonment of the Negro and the Reconstruction process showed that "there was more care for the sublime superstructure of the Republic than for the solid foundation upon which it could alone be upheld." He deduced that the primary failure of Reconstruction had been economic. Chattel slavery had been replaced by peonage, rather than economic liberty. Economic emancipation, then, was a sham. If the nation had followed the lead of Stevens and Sumner, Douglass contended, the freed-people would have been in much better shape. They would have been neither economic captives to the "New South" nor migrants seeking a better life outside the South. Instead, they would have been independent farmers and citizens.⁴⁸

The late nineteenth century witnessed an increasingly intense wave of racist oppression of the Negro, notably in the South. Douglass interpreted this trend, in part, as evidence that in the South, the dangerous doctrine of states' rights or local white control persisted; that in a sense, both the Confederacy and black bondage lived on. In 1889, he asserted that the white South clung tenaciously to "the vicious idea that it can defy the Constitution and the laws of the United States, especially those laws which respect the enfranchisement of colored citizens." He explained that "this idea of self-government destroyed the Freedman's Bureau, drove United States soldiers out of the South, expelled Northern immigrants, excluded Negro citizens from State legislatures, and gave all the power to the Southern slavemasters." His conclusion, nonetheless, was that such a deplorable situation could not persist.⁴⁹

He maintained that the pervasive national preoccupation with the alleged "Negro Problem," actually a white and a national problem, was wrongheaded. It was a blow to the Negroes' hope of becoming, without question, full-fledged American citizens. "It shows," he contended, "that the reconstruction of our national institutions upon a basis of liberty, justice, and equality is not yet honestly accepted as a final and irrevocable settlement of the Negro's relation to the government, and of his membership in the body politic." In fact,

this popular concern over the apparent “Negro Problem” was a restatement of the query raised by the possibility and reality of emancipation: “What shall be done with the Negro?”⁵⁰ Douglass blasted the late nineteenth-century white southern response of political disfranchisement, economic reenslavement, public segregation, and violent repression as outrageous and un-American.

Douglass, however, was an inveterate optimist. He firmly believed that the righteousness of the Negro’s cause in concert with the enlightened and progressive tendencies of the day ensured that conditions would improve; that one day soon, the Negro would really be free. The ultimate rule of moral law certified Douglass’s optimism. He argued that “while revolutions may for a time seem to roll backwards; while reactionary tendencies and forces may arrest the wheels of progress, and while the colored man of the South may still have to suffer the lash and sting of a by-gone condition, there are forces and influences silently and yet powerfully working out his deliverance.” He added that “the individual Southern States are great, but the nation is greater. Justice, honor, liberty and fidelity to the Constitution and Laws may seem to sleep, but they are not dead.”⁵¹

Moreover, in light of the immense obstacles the freedpeople endured in their continuing struggle for freedom, Douglass contended that to complain of their apparent lack of progress was both unjust and uncalled for. He countered: “the wonder is, not that the freedmen have made so little progress, but, rather, that they have made so much—not that they have been standing still, but that they have been able to stand at all.”⁵²

That inherent longing for freedom sparked the mass Negro migration to Kansas, largely from 1879 to 1881. Thousands fled from the terrorism and economic oppression they confronted at the hands of unreconstructed whites in Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, to what they dreamed would be freedom in “John Brown’s” Kansas. While the disorder and suffering of the Exodusters alarmed their supporters throughout the country, most embraced the folk movement as a legitimate response to vicious southern repression. Black leaders like Garnet, Sojourner Truth, Richard T. Greener, John M. Langston, and George T. Downing endorsed the movement, leaving Douglass virtually alone in his vehement opposition to it. “In all my forty years of thought and labor to promote the freedom and welfare of my race,” he later acknowledged, “I never found myself more widely and painfully at variance with leading colored men of the country.” Nevertheless, he asserted, “I never took a position in which I felt myself better fortified by reason and necessity.”⁵³ Douglass’s opposition to the Kansas migration revealed the illusiveness of both his overweening optimism and his faith in the ultimate decline of racism among southern whites. It also showed an insensitivity to the funda-

mental concerns of the masses of impoverished and victimized southern blacks. It revealed not only his basic philosophical opposition to en masse black domestic migration and foreign emigration, but also that as he grew older, wealthier, and more patriarchal and emblematic, in crucial ways he increasingly lost touch with the ordinary Negro.

Throughout his life, Douglass remained a consistent ideological opponent of massive black colonization, emigration, or migration, in a domestic or foreign context. During the turbulent 1850s, he was the leading Negro opponent of the emigrationist sentiment epitomized by Delany's ideal of Pan-African nationalism and regeneration. By early 1861, however, conditions for blacks had deteriorated to the point where even Douglass seemed to despair. He planned, as a result, to visit Haiti in late April to survey the prospects for emigration. The outbreak of the Civil War forced him to alter his plans, and he never again seriously contemplated emigration as a possible solution to the problems confronting his people.⁵⁴

Reflecting the dominant sentiment among his people, Douglass insisted that the Afro-American's identity and destiny were bound primarily and unalterably with that of America. By all criteria, they were Americans, not Africans. The very consideration of Negro colonization outside the United States, Douglass reemphasized in 1894, "tends to throw over the Negro a mantle of despair. It leads him to doubt the possibility of his progress as an American citizen. It also encourages popular prejudice with the hope that by persecution or by persuasion the Negro can finally be dislodged and driven from his natural home."⁵⁵

Like most blacks, Douglass linked all African emigration schemes with the dreaded plan of the American Colonization Society to resolve the American racial impasse and, before emancipation, to bolster the slave South, by resettling freed slaves and free Negroes in Liberia. His lifelong opposition to any form of massive black resettlement in part grew out of the tradition of Negro opposition to colonization outside the United States. In reference to the black nation within the American nation, he affirmed: "Individuals emigrate—nations never." He insisted that "we have grown up with this republic, and I see nothing in her character, or even in the character of the American people as yet, which compels the belief that we must leave the United States." If, however, an individual Negro or a group of Negroes decided on their own to emigrate to Africa or anywhere else, Douglass stressed that they were within their rights to do so, even though he might still oppose the decision on other grounds. He reiterated as most important, nonetheless, that "we are here and here to stay. It is well for us and well for the American people to rest upon this as final."⁵⁶

Douglass viewed as natural the propensity to migrate for adventure or to improve one's life. He noted that like other Americans, Negroes were "an exceedingly restless and enterprising people." But when thousands of southern blacks apparently took it upon themselves to improve their lives by migrating to Kansas, Douglass opposed the movement as unwise and ill-timed. He conceded that whether or not the exodus was a viable solution to the serious grievances of southern Negroes was ultimately a decision that only they could make. As their self-styled and foremost leader, however, what he objected to was an en masse, ill-organized, and potentially disastrous Negro migration from oppressive southern conditions which he saw as "exceptional and transient."⁵⁷

Douglass's interpretation, though, was off the mark, as he eventually discovered in March 1888 when he went to Georgia and South Carolina and observed firsthand the plight of Negro sharecroppers. There he had "seen enough, heard enough, and learned enough . . . to make me welcome any movement which will take them out of the wretched condition in which I now know them to be." Two years earlier, he had already modified his initial position when he proposed "that means can be and ought to be adopted to assist in the emigration of such of their number [southern blacks] as may wish to change their residence to other parts of the country where their civil and political rights are better protected than at present they can be at the South." He thus outlined a policy of diffusion, as suggested by the *National Republican*, where government or philanthropic money, perhaps as much as a million dollars, would be used to help the Negro to leave areas where the labor market was glutted and resettle where labor was in demand.⁵⁸

Shortly after the initial phase of the migration had dramatically climaxed in the spring of 1879, however, Douglass was significantly less sensitive to the actual condition of southern Negroes. Then, he rationalized that "the way of an oppressed people from bondage to freedom is never smooth. . . . Suffering and hardships made the Saxon strong,—and suffering and hardships will make the Anglo-African strong." Likewise, he opined that "it may well enough be said that the Negro question is not so desperate as the advocates of this Exodus would have the public believe." In the same spirit, he sensed on the domestic front "a growing recognition of the duty and obligation of the American people to guard, protect and defend the personal and political rights of all the people of the States."⁵⁹ His contemporary perception, therefore, of both the southern Negroes' plight and the national commitment to the protection of their civil and political rights represented much more than an excessive optimism and a minor miscalculation. Rather, it was, as he soon came to realize, a delusion and a major error of fact and judgment.

Douglass argued that the South offered the Negro the best opportunity to flex his political muscle because of his numerical predominance and his vital importance as a laborer. The growth of the violent, illegal, and soon-to-be legal exclusion of the southern Negro from the political process, however, undermined this idea. In the same way, the control exercised by southern white capitalists and employers over the terms of southern black labor worked against his contention that blacks could manipulate their dominance of certain sectors of the southern labor market to their advantage. A more substantive, but far from persuasive, argument was that “no people ever did much for themselves or for the world, without the sense and inspiration of native land; of a fixed home; of familiar neighborhood, and common associations.” As a result, he insisted “that in so far as this Exodus tends to promote restlessness in the colored people of the South, to unsettle their feeling of home and to sacrifice positive advantages where they are, for fancied ones in Kansas or elsewhere, it is an evil.” Notwithstanding the widespread suffering the mass movement entailed and the inadequate relief measures this misery engendered, it was difficult, if not impossible, to state undoubtedly where the Exodusters’ “positive advantages” lay. Neither the situation in Kansas nor that from which they fled was desirable. Regardless, the migration at least symbolized positive action and change, albeit often illusive.⁶⁰

Another serious shortcoming of Douglass’s analysis was his underestimation of the internal compulsion of the movement, as well as the depth and accelerating intensity of southern white racism. While Douglass suggested that white southern violence against blacks had to have a limit and would inevitably abate, Greener questioned such optimism. Unlike Douglass, he viewed racist southern whites as “utterly untrustworthy and incapable of generous or humane instincts.” Although Douglass admitted the wretchedness of the conditions which the Exodusters fled, still he tended to exaggerate the role and significance of professional agents in the movement. It was true that once the mass movement got under way innumerable dishonest agents tried, sometimes successfully, to make money from it. Certain railroad companies, Douglass alleged, paid such agents a dollar for each Exoduster they convinced to take their “freedom” run to Kansas. As a group, however, agents, good and bad, were in no way a central cause of the movement. The desire for freedom and economic opportunity compelled the Exodusters; the influence of agents was distinctly subordinate.⁶¹

That it was the duty of the federal government to protect both the lives and the civil and political rights of its citizens wherever they resided was Douglass’s most cogent point. “The public and noisy advocacy of a general stampede of the colored people from the South to the North,” he charged, “is

necessarily an abandonment of the great and paramount principle of protection to person and property in every state of the Union.” Furthermore, he maintained that the Negro had to fight to protect his life and his civil and political rights. Whereas Douglass offered that “the South must let the Negro vote, or surrender its representation in Congress,” there was no active federal commitment to the protection of the rights of southern Negroes as demanded by law.⁶²

Douglass’s subsequent acknowledgment of the absolute necessity for some kind of Negro exodus from parts of the South and his related realization of the federal abandonment of the Negro in the face of vicious repression at the hands of southern whites were bitter lessons to accept. These facts were an intolerable affront to his humanist and nationalist vision of racial elevation and a resounding betrayal of America’s statutory commitment to freedom, justice, and equality for its black citizens.

Douglass’s initial condemnation of the Kansas exodus was not one of his better moments as race leader. Yet, his cogent analysis and vigorous condemnation of the terrible and escalating practice of Negro lynching, principally in the South, revealed him once again at his best. Between 1884 and 1900, there were twenty-five hundred lynchings, mostly of Negroes, in the United States. Humanitarians everywhere assailed this lawless and inhumane trend. Leading the assault were black activists, notably Ida B. Wells, whose international campaign against lynching did a great deal to publicize the swelling tragedy and to engage worldwide support for the campaign to force the American government to take action. Douglass joined forces with Wells and others to demand that Americans put an end to this racist violence.⁶³

Violence, Douglass personally and painfully understood, was an integral aspect of the racist repression of the Negro. His introduction to this brutal fact came early as a slave. In his *Narrative*, he recalled that his master’s vicious whipping of Aunt Hester was his first introduction to the savage violence of slavery. “It struck me with awful force. It was the blood-stained gate, the entrance to the hell of slavery, through which I was about to pass.” The surging wave of Negro lynchings during the last years of Douglass’s life likewise struck him “with awful force.”⁶⁴

Douglass’s campaign against lynching reflected his perception that his world view and that of his people were synonymous. He thus expressed “a colored man’s view” of the lynching horror. This perspective, he suggested, was necessary to comprehend the unconscionable phenomenon. The root of the lynching practice, he argued, was the psychopathology of white racism. Douglass observed that “the lynchers and the mobocrats are not like other men.” The irrationality and “irresponsible power” of slavery had warped their minds. They operated under the delusion that their humanity and dignity

required that Negroes be suppressed. Douglass averred that they were mad murderers and their crimes a monumental disgrace. "There is nothing in the history of savages," he affirmed, "to surpass the blood-chilling horrors and fiendish excesses perpetrated against the colored people . . . by the so-called enlightened and Christian people of the South."⁶⁵

The extent of this madness, Douglass maintained, was evident in the fallacious and alarmist nature of the indictment against the typical victim: the Negro male. The usual charge was a Negro male assault upon a white woman. Douglass noted that the accusations were suspiciously recent in origin. They had never been trumpeted before. Such a sudden outbreak of criminal activity was highly dubious, Douglass charged, for it suggested too radical a shift in the character and actions of Negro men.⁶⁶

Additional evidence that the charges were trumped up was overwhelming. Facts demonstrated that the Negro male was usually blameless, and that regardless, the senseless sway of mob testimony sanctioned his murder. In addition, whereas the Negro's recent history showed no previous evidence of such charges, the recent history of his accusers showed evidence of groundlessly killing Negroes. In the initial years of Reconstruction, Douglass pointed out, the rationalization "was said to be Negro conspiracies, Negro insurrections, Negro schemes to murder all the white people, Negro plots to burn the town and to commit violence generally." When that false allegation no longer worked, they claimed they had "to check the domination and supremacy of the Negro and to secure the absolute rule of the Anglo-Saxon race." Next came the charge of Negro male assaults upon white women. Douglass inferred "that this orderly arrangement and periodicity of excuses are significant. . . . They show design . . . and invention."⁶⁷

The rationale for the lynching of Negroes, Douglass contended, betrayed "a well-devised reactionary movement against the Negro as a citizen." This movement included the 1883 repeal of the Civil Rights Law (1875), the growth of states' rights sentiment, the intensifying campaign to disfranchise the Negro, and the shift among the Republicans to a "party of money, rather than a party of humanity and justice." Douglass saw that even "the fairest and most humane of the Negro's accusers . . . paint him as a moral monster, ferociously invading the sacred rights of woman and endangering the homes of the whites." The pervasive white acceptance of the myth of the black male rapist, Douglass implied, struck a key psychosexual nerve of racism—the taboo against sexual intercourse between black men and white women. With the hysteria this deeply emotive taboo engendered as a smoke screen, southern whites expanded their campaign to segregate, disfranchise, and dehumanize the Negro. The rape charge—the most hideous crime of man against woman,

"a crime that awakens the intensest abhorrence and tempts mankind to kill the criminal on first sight"—greatly exacerbated the psychosexual hysteria. The intensified subjugation of the Negro, as a result, was made to seem that much more imperative.⁶⁸ The white lynch mob's castration of black men accused of raping white women graphically symbolized the racist desire to suppress sexual intercourse between white women and black men and to emasculate the latter.

Douglass insisted that the rape allegation aggravated incalculably the racism directed toward black people. "It throws upon every man of colour a mantle of odium, and sets upon him a mark of popular hate, more distressing than the mark set upon the first murderer. It points the Negro out as an object of suspicion, avoidance and hate." It gave the Negro "a revolting and hateful reputation," portraying the entire race as depraved and criminal. That Negroes as a race disproved this racist slur only further embittered its source. In fact, as Wells stressed, innumerable lynchings victimized well-to-do blacks accused of nothing, except success. The violent repression of the successful and intelligent Negro, Douglass earlier explained in 1850, proved that his assailants "recognize in him a contradiction to their ungenerous and unsound theories respecting the Negro race, and, not being able to reason him down to a level with the brute, they use brute force to knock him down to the desired level."⁶⁹

The cruel irony of the rape hoax, Douglass perceived, was that racism sanctioned the rape of black women in addition to the emasculation of black men. He emphasized that "slavery . . . was a system of unmitigated, legalized outrage upon black women of the South, and no white man was ever shot, burned or hanged for availing himself of all the power that slavery gave him at this point." White men continued to defile black women, he implicitly charged, without any real recourse on the black woman's part to justice in the courts or even lynch mob justice. As the Negro male was the rapist in the racist imagination, the Negro woman was its whore.⁷⁰ Blacks thoroughly rejected these degrading images and all other attempts to rationalize their oppression at the hands of whites. Douglass and his black contemporaries, in part out of the repudiation of such images, waged a vigilant campaign to force the American nation to halt lynching and the racism that bred it. Their antilynching campaign drew upon their profound commitment to the moral and humanitarian principles on which America was founded. They simply asked that their native country live up to its principles.

The conflicting identities of race leader and Republican politician converged head-on in the political thought and life of Frederick Douglass. As the preeminent race spokesman and Negro Republican of the nineteenth century,

Douglass embodied the deep-seated tension between black liberation politics and Republican party politics. Whereas freedom, equality, and justice for the Negro were the goals of black liberation politics, the advancement of the Republican party as a viable political institution was the goal of Republican party politics. At certain points, these divergent political phenomena ironically coalesced. The abolition of slavery and passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, the acknowledgment and protection of black citizenship rights in the Fourteenth Amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1875, the granting of suffrage to black men in the Fifteenth Amendment, and the ill-fated attempt at Negro uplift through Reconstruction represented the apogee of this curious and unstable alliance. The actual undoing of the alliance, clearly symbolized by the Republican party's abandonment of the Negro as part of the Compromise of 1877, resulted from the inherent incompatibility between black liberation politics, humane and idealistic, and postbellum Republican party politics, opportunistic and materialistic.

As the Republican party increasingly became the vehicle for the interests of wealth and big business, the party's commitment to humanitarian and moral concerns, especially the Negro's rights, dwindled. In the course of the late nineteenth century, peonage replaced slavery. Public segregation and legalized civil and social discrimination proceeded apace, and in the turn-of-the-century South was soon codified. In 1883, the Supreme Court found the Civil Rights Act of 1875 to be unconstitutional. Lacking federal protection and Republican party commitment to its continuance, the voting rights of southern black men often met overwhelming white resistance: intimidation, violence, and proscription. The promise and achievements of Negro participation in local, state, and federal government, demonstrated so well in "Black Reconstruction," met stern white opposition and, as a result, languished.

Douglass's crucial prewar ideological shift from opposition to support of political action as a viable and necessary adjunct to moral suasion had fundamental and long-term ramifications. This was so not only for his philosophy of social reform and his burgeoning political consciousness, but also for his race leadership. Espousing a humanist politics of morality, justice, and equality, he increasingly allied himself with mainstream political institutions in order to influence as wide an audience, white and black, as possible. The active pursuit of this pragmatic political posture, however, tended to blunt the edge of his insight into American politics. The radicalism of his philosophy of social reform, then, typically did not spill over into his increasingly moderate political philosophy and activity. He ceaselessly admonished the nation to renew and strengthen its dedication to humanitarian and moral concerns, particularly the Negro's freedom struggle. Yet, he inevitably chose to do so within tradi-

tional channels, notably the Republican party, without adequately assessing their utility. As a result, Douglass's mainstream political activism exerted an increasingly conservative influence, exacerbated by increasing age and bourgeois venerability, which impinged upon both his political consciousness and his race leadership.

In 1852, shortly after his conversion to political action, Douglass asserted that "Justice, Liberty, and Humanity" were "the principles . . . at the bottom of all political progress." He also declared that "fealty to party has no claim against fidelity to truth." Critically applying this idealistic political standard to the Republican party four years later, he unwittingly divined the party's subsequent abandonment of the Negro. "The anti-slavery movement," he surmised, "is every hour liable to be entirely superseded by a movement to uphold the political strength of the North—to promote the freedom of white men, without in any way promoting the freedom of black men." In 1864, moreover, he perceived that "the Democratic party belongs to slavery; and the Republican party is largely under the power of prejudice against color." The Republican party, he conceded, was comparatively more favorable to black freedom than the Democratic party, which "is our bitterest enemy, and is positively and actively reactionary." But, he added, "the Republican party is negatively and passively so in its tendency."⁷¹

Opting for the lesser of two evils, Douglass supported the Republican party, whose association with Union victory and whose vital part in the achievement of black emancipation and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments heightened his attachment to it. Thus, in 1876, when seven white Republican senators joined the Senate majority and voted against granting the disputed Louisiana Senate seat to P. B. S. Pinchback, a qualified Negro, for what seemed to be prejudiced motives, Douglass was pained yet understanding. He criticized the action, but remarked that with age he had grown wiser. Consequently, his capacity for political compromise had expanded. He explained that he was now "more disposed to find good motives for bad deeds, and to make allowance for education and circumstances. I have learned the difference between conscious wrongdoing and unconscious wrongdoing."⁷² To combine, with any degree of success, careers as both race leader and Republican party loyalist in late nineteenth-century America required, for better and for worse, an ability to rationalize and compromise as well as to analyze critically.

Notwithstanding the limitations of Republican Reconstruction politics (1865–1877) as a means to promote the Negro's cause, post-Reconstruction Republican politics (from 1877 on) constituted an ignominious betrayal of the Republican party's alleged commitment to that cause. Whereas the Republican

party during Reconstruction had endeavored to build a southern base primarily upon the cultivation of the freedpeople's support, in the post-Reconstruction period the party forsook that tactic and began to cultivate the support of southern whites. Consequently, given that the Democratic party was generally even less concerned with the Negro's plight than the Republican party, neither received the Negro's unqualified support.⁷³ Like Douglass, most stuck with the Republican party, in spite of its increasingly proeconomic and pro-southern white policies, because it at least officially espoused the Negro's cause and to a significant extent had actually done so during the war and Reconstruction. Much of Negro post-Reconstruction political thought and activity, then, focused on criticism of the Negro's abandonment by the Democrats and Republicans, in addition to protest against southern white persecution of the Negro and the related demand for federal intervention to protect the Negro and his basic rights. It likewise focused to a degree on the futile politics of nostalgia and, to a larger degree, on the fundamental politics of physical survival and moral transcendence.

The growing indifference of the Republican party toward the Negro complicated Douglass's relationship to it. An increasing ambivalence toward the party revealed his torment. Between 1877 and his death in 1895, there was little, if any, concrete evidence to sustain hope for the Republican party as a vehicle for humanist issues, especially the Negro's declining fortunes. To sustain his allegiance to the party while representing the interests of a people whom that party increasingly scorned meant that Douglass had to work ceaselessly to change the rapidly worsening response of Republicans toward his people's plight. This difficult challenge was too much for Douglass. In reality, the Republican party's betrayal of the Negro coincided perfectly with the surging ascendancy of racism in late nineteenth-century America, a trend beyond the influence of any one person, regardless of his personal power.

As a party personage, Douglass gave speeches, wrote articles and editorials, and, at various levels, both stumped the campaign trail for fellow Republicans and participated in Republican conventions praising the party and exploiting the glory of Union victory under its leadership (in waving the "Bloody Shirt"). He personally knew many Republican congressmen and most American presidents after Lincoln and discussed national policy and Republican party issues with them. He also received several essentially functionary and symbolic, as distinct from policymaking and decision-making, political appointments: United States marshal for the District of Columbia (1877 to 1881), recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia (1881 to 1886), and *chargé d'affaires* for Santo Domingo and minister to Haiti (1889 to 1891).

Douglass relished the honor and comfortable wages these appointments

entailed, especially for a black man, and chose not to dwell upon their lack of real political influence. He also publicly minimized the significance of certain slights he endured as an appointed Negro official. Instead, he emphasized that his appointments represented, more importantly, a blow against prejudice and for Negro advancement. "In keeping with the rest of my life," he noted, "it was an innovation upon long established usage, and opposed to the general current of sentiment in the community." Nonetheless, he thought, progressive Americans, white and black, would sincerely applaud the innovation. As a result, when President Rutherford B. Hayes decided against the custom of allowing the marshal, in this case Douglass, to assist him at the Executive Mansion and to undertake the presidential introduction for state occasions, Douglass accepted his decision graciously. He reasoned that the custom was a very recent one and wholly within the president's right to alter. To the charge that President Hayes had only changed the custom because Douglass was black, Douglass replied that he knew of no evidence to sustain the accusation. He insisted that President Hayes had never shown any prejudice toward him for any reason, including his color. Nonetheless, these public explanations concealed a private hurt in part endured out of party loyalty.⁷⁴

Douglass's appointment as United States marshal of the District of Columbia assumed special significance as it coincided with Hayes's withdrawal of federal troops from the South and his official policy of restoring home rule, in effect white rule, to the South. Prior to appointing Douglass to the post, Hayes apparently had received Douglass's endorsement for his policy, having convinced him that the restoration of home rule in the South encompassed the full recognition and protection of recently achieved Negro rights. Shortly after his inauguration, Hayes's troop removal policy went into effect. It does not appear that Douglass immediately foresaw and openly criticized the policy's dire ramifications for the freedpeople.⁷⁵

His critics later charged that "a fat office gagged him." Hayes, they alleged, had appointed Douglass to the post to muzzle potential Negro criticism of his plainly anti-Negro policy and to give the illusion of promoting Negro rights while actually surrendering them. Douglass responded: "I was, from first to last, outspoken, and among those known to be opposed to his Southern policy, and of this no one knew better than President Hayes himself. He knew it before he came to Washington." The evidence, however, suggests that at worst the position could only have obscured his comprehension of the policy's true meaning for a brief while. Even if the job had really silenced him, it ceased to do so late in 1877 when he declared: "I do not disguise the fact, . . . officeholder though I am, that the way this peace has been sought is not my way, nor do I believe that it will or ought to succeed." In early 1878, he called upon the

nation to fulfill its irrevocable responsibility to protect the liberty of the freedpeople. "When society is divided into two classes, as oppressed and oppressor," he argued, "there is no power and there can be no power, while the instincts of humanity remain as they are, which can provide solid peace." A year later he instructed the public: "When the influence of office, or any other influence, shall soften my hatred of tyranny and violence, do not spare me, let fall upon me the lash of your keenest and most withering censure."⁷⁶

Douglass was not reappointed United States marshal for the District of Columbia under President Garfield. Rather, he received the lower position of recorder of deeds for the District. The demotion proved acceptable to him because the job was easier and entailed less public notoriety. As with the previous position, the new one signified a first for a Negro. He later remarked, however, that neither as recorder of deeds nor as United States marshal was he any less critical of what he construed to be "the errors of rulers" than he was as a private citizen.⁷⁷

Speaking before a National Negro Convention in 1883, Douglass, labeling himself "an uneasy Republican," expressed his ambivalence toward the Republican party in particular and political parties in general. Negroes, he insisted, "should follow no party blindly. If the Republican Party cannot stand a demand for justice and fair play, it ought to go down." He explained: "We were men before that party was born, and our manhood is more sacred than any party can be. Parties were made for men, not men for parties." The convention resolution calling for support of the Republican party created such an uproar that it had to be shelved. The post-Reconstruction southern strategy of the Republican party, notably the Republican administrations of Hayes and Arthur, heightened Negro discontent with the Republicans. Sacrificing the southern Negro's political rights and support in a move to recruit southern whites into the Republican party, as Hayes and Arthur did, proved unacceptable to Negroes. This despicable trend, Douglass suggested, revealed an integral aspect of the Republican party's growing moral degeneration. The administrations of Hayes and Arthur, Douglass contended, were "full of darkness and dismal terror" for blacks. He also maintained that their reactionary policies, as well as James G. Blaine's role in the defeat of a bill to protect southern black lives and political rights, contributed to Blaine's unsuccessful Republican presidential bid and general Republican losses at the polls in 1884.⁷⁸

For Douglass and other black leaders, the infamous 1883 Republican Supreme Court decision nullifying the Civil Rights Law of 1875 clearly illustrated the Republican party's accelerating descent. The decision struck Douglass as "one more shocking development of that moral weakness in high places which has attended the conflict between the spirit of liberty and the spirit of

slavery.” It constituted “a concession to race pride, selfishness and meanness, and will be received with joy by every upholder of caste in the land.” Douglass blasted the decision’s disingenuous and dubious logic. “What does it matter to be a citizen,” he asked, “that a State may not insult and outrage him, if a citizen of a State may? The effect upon him is the same, and it was just this effect that the framers of the Fourteenth Amendment plainly intended . . . to prevent.”⁷⁹

Douglass found especially reprehensible the tactic of opponents of the Civil Rights Law wherein they stigmatized it as an attempt to legislate social equality, a bugbear of racist whites. He countered that “social equality and civil equality rest upon an entirely different basis, and well enough the American people know it.” The former rested upon condition and, to an extent, choice; the latter upon rights and law.⁸⁰ It was misleading to associate social equality, a privilege, with civil equality, a right, for they denoted different things. The threat of black equality, rather than interracial social equality, represented the actual racist fear, according to Douglass. “To degrade and stamp out the liberties of a race” signified the “studied purpose” of linking social and civil equality. Douglass concluded that if the Civil Rights Law attempted to promote social equality, so did “the laws and customs of every civilized country in the world,” including the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule, and the Apostles’ Creed. He warned his fellow Americans that if the vile spirit of caste as exemplified in the ignoble Supreme Court decision of 1883 persisted there would be a “black Ireland in America.”⁸¹

Evidence of the Republican party’s betrayal of blacks encompassed its failure to enforce the letter and spirit of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. It likewise included its failure to pass: an Election Reform Bill (during President Hayes’s administration) to eliminate election abuses in the South; the Lodge Force Bill (during President Benjamin Harrison’s administration) to compel the president to send troops to the South if necessary to protect citizens’ lives and rights; and the Blair Educational Bill (again during Harrison’s administration) to subsidize a basic education for all American children. Due to these and like disappointments, Douglass became increasingly critical of Republican presidents starting with Hayes. On the contrary, he continued to think well of Republican Ulysses S. Grant, Hayes’s presidential predecessor, who, unlike his successors, had stood firmly by the freedpeople. Notwithstanding the corruption among Grant’s advisors and associates, and the resulting moral taint this gave his administration, Douglass had supported him for reelection in 1872 because of his efforts on behalf of the freedpeople as well as the nation.⁸²

Douglass's growing loyalty to the Republican party in the 1870s reflected several motives. First and foremost, he identified the party, regardless of its shortcomings, as the Negro's best friend in the political arena. In 1871, he had declared that "if as a class we are slighted by the Republican party, we as a class are murdered by the Democratic party. Whatsoever may be the fault of the Republican party, it has within it the only element of friendship for the colored man's rights." A little more than a year later, using a famous nautical metaphor, Douglass portrayed the Republican party as "the deck," and all other political parties, "the sea." Similarly, in 1888, he still viewed "the Republican Party as the sheet anchor of the colored man's political hopes and the ark of his safety."⁸³ Second, in Republican party politics, Douglass found excitement, prestige, and a challenge. It offered a platform to promote his people's cause, a golden opportunity for the realization of his political ambitions, and a boost to his self-esteem. Third, it enabled him to act upon his maturing political consciousness: his growing belief that the national political arena represented a viable context to espouse the cause of humanity, notably the Negro's elevation. This complex and interrelated set of motives influenced the whole of his postwar political career and helped to make the elder race statesman more amenable to compromise and more understanding of human foibles.

Both Douglass's unwavering support of Grant and his growing involvement with stalwart Republican politics caused him to break with his longtime friend and ally, Charles Sumner, on the issues of the Liberal Republican insurgency and the annexation of Santo Domingo. The mutually bitter antagonism between Grant and Sumner caused the latter to form an uneasy alliance with Liberal Republicans, who advocated civil service and tariff reform, besides amnesty for the South. Douglass and Sumner agreed that the freedpeople's plight was critical. They disagreed, however, on the need to replace the corrupt and inefficient Grant administration in 1872 with one to be headed by Horace Greeley, presidential nominee of the Liberal Republicans and Democratic party. Douglass, whose overriding concern was the freedpeople, could not accept Sumner's position linking a "New Departure," amnesty for the South, with an insistence upon protection for the freedpeople's civil rights. Virtually all Liberal Republicans, with the notable exception of Sumner, were willing to forsake the freedpeople in order to achieve the "New Departure" they viewed as essential to their insurgency. Douglass, consequently, rejected the Liberal Republican movement, railing against "the intention of this new party to check the progress of the nation to complete freedom." Furthermore, he editorialized that "all reform movements started by Republicans outside of their own party, are impudent frauds, devised by demagogues for corrupt purposes."⁸⁴ As a result, he helped to convince his people, who revered Sumner for his dedication to their struggle, to reelect Grant, against Sumner's opposition.

The telling limitation of Douglass's opposition to the liberal reform movement, nevertheless, was his failure to assess fully the merits of their program to alleviate corruption and inefficiency in government. Given his fundamental commitment to social reform, this failure to give adequate attention to the need for political reform was quite ironic. Douglass's growing ties to stalwart Republicans, as well as his procapitalist bias, also promoted his ironic failure to analyze objectively the progressive potential of the Labor Reform party and other radical parties and movements. Clearly, the race prejudice of both Liberal Republicans and radical parties and movements greatly contributed to Douglass's blindness to their ideological and practical merits.⁸⁵

The ideological rift between Douglass and Sumner over the annexation of Santo Domingo had preceded their political break over Grant's reelection. Sumner's opposition to Grant's annexation treaty had greatly exacerbated the bitter personal feud between them. In 1871, even after the treaty no longer had a chance for passage, Grant appointed a commission to reassess both the prospects and the Haitian desire for annexation. The commission included former senator Benjamin F. Wade; Andrew D. White, president of Cornell; Samuel Gridley Howe, reformer and friend of Sumner; and Douglass, as secretary. Not surprisingly, the commission returned with a report favorable to annexation.⁸⁶

One of Sumner's arguments against annexation had been that it would mean the destruction of a black nationality and the possible beginning of a policy to destroy the other black nationalities in the West Indies. He had urged that the Antilles "should not be absorbed by the United States, but should remain as independent powers," and "should try for themselves to make the experiment of self-government." The United States, he believed, should assist these republics in the development of "a free confederacy, in which the black race should predominate."⁸⁷

Douglass's response to this particular argument of Sumner offered the paradoxical spectacle of Douglass favoring the extinguishment of a black republic. "The idea that annexation meant degradation to a colored nation," he argued, "was altogether fanciful." While he claimed to be against annexation "without regard to the just rights and feelings of other nations," and to believe that the notion of manifest destiny was "often but another name for piracy," his proannexation rationale smacked of manifest destiny. As long as the slavocracy dominated the government, he had opposed United States expansion abroad. Once freedom and equality became the law of the land, however, he reversed himself and began to favor United States expansionism.⁸⁸

For Grant, the annexation of Santo Domingo would provide a place to resettle American blacks and thus alleviate America's race problem. Apparently unaware of Grant's colonizationist vision, Douglass saw the proposal as

an alliance between “a weak and defenceless people” and a powerful people. Annexation would give Santo Domingo “peace, stability, prosperity, and civilization.” It would help to revitalize that West Indian country by introducing “wholesome competition” and “a healthy activity.”⁸⁹ Nevertheless, in light of the persistence of the racist oppression of blacks in the United States, Douglass’s extravagant claims for the benefits the people of Santo Domingo would derive from annexation were dubious.

Douglass surmised that the proannexation sentiment among Dominicans was greatest among “the patriotic and intelligent citizens.” Most Dominicans, he had failed to observe, opposed annexation. Taking his argument to the lofty plateau of the dominant worldwide ethos, he submitted that “organization, progress, unification” signified the current “inspiring ideas.” Annexation, then, was consistent with “the grand organizing impulse of the age.” Besides being the nation best-suited to expand in the New World, the United States, “the hope of freedom throughout the world,” needed a foothold in the Caribbean.⁹⁰ Regardless, the annexation of Santo Domingo was an already defeated cause.

In part, Douglass’s strong support for annexation grew out of his fealty to President Grant and the Republican party. Through such loyalty, he retained his status within the party as the predominant Negro Republican of his time. Another reason for Douglass’s unswerving support of Grant, other than his commitment to the cause of the freedpeople, was his self-serving desire for an appointive office in the government. Ironically, Grant, the Republican president whom Douglass spoke most kindly of, outside of Lincoln, never rewarded him with an appointive position. Instead, Hayes and Harrison, both of whom he would eventually criticize severely, and Garfield, whom he barely knew, all did.

In 1889, Harrison, whom Douglass had campaigned hard for, appointed him minister resident and consul general to Haiti. This time around, however, in both his duties, which comprised *chargé d’affaires* for Santo Domingo, and his perspective he displayed greater sensitivity to the proud Haitian tradition of self-government. In fact, some Haitians who recalled that almost twenty years earlier he had favored Grant’s treaty to annex Santo Domingo opposed his appointment. Now, as the United States’s chief diplomatic officer in Haiti, he chose to act upon his seemingly recent understanding that “nothing is more repugnant to the thoughts and feelings of the masses of that country than the alienation of a single rood of their territory to a foreign power.” Haiti, Douglass came to see even more vividly, gloried in the fact of its successful liberation struggle against France at the turn of the century. He now chose not to discuss his previous contention that Sumner’s worry for the self-governing integrity of black West Indian republics, in the face of the opportunity to join

the United States, was fanciful. He was finally coming around to comprehending both Sumner's perspective on the issue of the annexation of black republics, and more important, the perspective of the citizens of these republics on the issue.⁹¹

Even when he had pushed for annexation, Douglass remained deeply aware of Haiti's symbolic importance to the Negro race. As part of one of his editorials touting the mutual benefits of annexation for Haitians and Americans, he pointed out that he had the greatest admiration for Haiti, for that black republic was largely responsible "for the little respect meted out by the nations of the Caucasian race towards those of African descent. It was she that first proved that the colored man is capable of . . . patriotism, that he can and will hazard safety and life itself for the sacred cause of country and freedom." Still, he had pushed the futile cause of annexation. Now, though, he emphasized that "whether civilized or savage, whatever the future may have in store for her, Haiti is the black man's country, now and forever."⁹²

In his role as the ambassador to Haiti, Douglass endeavored to deal justly with the Haitians as well as to represent diligently United States interests there. His efforts to balance these sometimes conflicting aims led to the false accusation by his American detractors that he was primarily responsible for the United States' failure to negotiate a lease for a naval station at Môle St. Nicolas. Douglass vigorously represented United States interests in the unsuccessful negotiations. He also tried, with only modest results, to establish a positive working relationship with Rear Admiral Bancroft Gherardi, the headstrong United States special commissioner to Haiti. Gherardi had been appointed, without Douglass's knowledge, to direct the delicate negotiations with both Anténor Firmin, Haitian minister of foreign affairs, and His Excellency Florvil Hippolite, president of Haiti. Several factors entered into the Haitian decision to reject the proposal. These included the stringent American terms; popular Haitian fears of American imperial domination, exacerbated by the expansionist tone of the American press (notably in New York); fierce Haitian pride and nationalism; and, Douglass added, "the minatory attitude assumed by us while conducting the negotiation." During his two years as United States ambassador (he resigned in 1891), Douglass refused to become a mere tool of American economic and imperialistic interests. Instead, he sought to convince his Haitian counterparts of the mutuality of economic interests between themselves and the United States as a basis for United States investment in the island republic. This diplomatic approach did not suit the dominant American business interests vying for Haitian ports and markets. Douglass's resignation, therefore, was not a very difficult decision; after a while, it was a foregone conclusion.⁹³

A common and false charge against Douglass by his critics, while he served

as ambassador to Haiti, was that he placed his race above his country. Similarly, a common charge against Douglass by his black critics during his final years was that he placed his party above his race. This criticism derived primarily from Douglass's steadfast opposition to independent black political activity, whether in the form of black support for the Democratic party, a pragmatic division of the black vote between the two major parties, a separate race party, or the Populist party. Accelerating black discontent with the Republican party in the 1870s and 1880s forced several key black leaders to espouse various forms of independent black political action. Chief among the erstwhile black Republicans turned proponents of black political independence were Peter H. Clark, George T. Downing, Calvin Chase, and T. Thomas Fortune.⁹⁴

The most articulate spokesman for this point of view was Fortune, the author and journalist. "No colored man can ever claim truthfully to be a Bourbon Democrat," he declared in 1884, "but he can be an independent, a progressive Democrat." Black voters, he contended, "should cease to be the willing tools of a treacherous and corrupt party; . . . cease to be duped by one faction and shot by the other. . . . The color of their skin must cease to be an index to their political creed. They must think less of 'the party' and more of themselves; give less heed to a name and more heed to principles." Two years later, he again encouraged the Negro to organize and to participate actively in all political parties. "Throw away sentimentality in politics," he urged. Our slogan should be "Race first; then party." In 1889, he pointedly expressed the dilemma of black political independence in the context of a racist two-party system where the Republicans at least paid lip service to the Negro's cause—more than the rabidly racist Democrats were willing to do. Negroes would support Republicans, he noted, until Democrats ceased to be "a party of unmitigated cussedness."⁹⁵

Even though Douglass theoretically endorsed the right of each citizen to vote his conscience, he characterized a "colored Democratic party," given the opposition of the Democratic party to Negro rights, as a "strange and unnatural spectacle." He believed that notwithstanding its serious flaws, the Republican party "is the best party now in existence. In it are the best elements of the American people, and if any good is to come to us politically it will be through the party." Similarly, he opposed the notion of a separate political party based upon race. Such a party, he argued, "would be not merely a misfortune but a dire calamity to our people" because "the rule of the majority is the fundamental principle of the American government." The American people, Douglass contended, would oppose a minority party based upon race as a possible threat to its majority rule principle. Regarding Populism, he believed, as he told a correspondent three days before his death, "still we have a chance of getting a better man from the Republicans than from the Democrats or Populists."

Douglass also criticized black political independence as retrogressive. He insisted that “political independence can have no existence in organized society; we must depend upon one party or another, or else go back to barbarism.”⁹⁶

In 1888, Douglass addressed the issue of the conflict between race loyalty and party loyalty in his personal letter to blacks of Virginia’s Fourth Congressional District opposing the candidacy of John Mercer Langston, an eminent black Republican. Douglass, instead, supported Judge R. W. Arnold, the white candidate chosen by William Mahone, state Republican committee chairman. The long-standing animosity between Douglass and Langston led Douglass to excoriate him as a political opportunist. “To look at the contention in the Fourth District of Virginia wisely and properly,” Douglass contended, “the question of color should be entirely subordinated to the greater questions of principles and party expediency. There is no moral or political quality necessarily involved in color.” Douglass refused to support a political candidate simply because he was a Negro, especially if he was a personal enemy “whose mad political ambition would imperil the success of the Republican party.”⁹⁷ Regardless, Langston carried virtually the entire black vote and won the Republican congressional nomination. Following a dispute over the final election results, Langston finally assumed the congressional seat in 1890.

Ideologically speaking, Douglass’s opposition to Langston’s candidacy reflected his belief that Negroes should rise above a narrow political purview to a broad one. The latter, Douglass maintained, might occasionally necessitate that Negroes compromise their racial perspective and support a better-qualified white candidate over a less-qualified black one. In effect, it theoretically necessitated the subordination of racial responsibility to national responsibility. Ideally, this notion was attractive. In the context of a racist two-party system, however, it was illusory. Douglass, in fact, rejected either a blind national or party spirit, especially when it went against the cause of the Negro in particular and the cause of humanity in general.

For Douglass, the Negro’s liberation took precedence over the Republican party’s ascendancy. The conflict between party and race politics which he embodied, however, posed a distressing dilemma that likewise infringed upon his activist reformism. Notwithstanding his valiant efforts to articulate his people’s postemancipation hopes and dreams, in addition to their postemancipation grievances, his alliance with the Republican party dulled the critical edge of his political insight. The co-optative pressures of mainstream political participation, a more conservative wisdom growing out of venerability, and a measure of opportunism eventually mollified his earlier political insurgency.

4. Humanism, Race, and Leadership

Douglass's approach to race leadership exemplified his egalitarian humanism. A deep-rooted moral ethos anchored this enlightened vision of human oneness and equality. Douglass's philosophy of racial leadership thus clearly reflected his life's philosophy. In a sense, these philosophies were synonymous, for he envisioned his personal destiny as inextricably bound with that of his race. He sincerely believed that his people's liberation necessitated that they follow those principles which he found conducive to freedom in his own life. A natural outgrowth primarily of his personal experiences and of Enlightenment and bourgeois thought, Douglass's philosophy of race leadership was eclectic and intricate. America's absurd racial reality, however, blatantly contradicted reason and progress. The impact of this basic contradiction on his philosophy of race leadership and his thought in general can be seen in the paradox of humanism and race and the irony of complexional institutions.

Douglass's lifelong dedication to understanding and alleviating America's race-conscious fixation grew paradoxically out of his deep-seated sense of racial responsibility as well as his even more deep-rooted egalitarian humanism. His race leadership graphically illustrated the inherent tension between his race consciousness and his humanism. The politics of race leadership—for him and other black leaders in the humanist mode, notably Martin Luther King, Jr.—epitomized the worldwide struggles for human rights. The most revealing aspect of Douglass's approach as a race leader, however, was its assimilationist and integrationist thrust: the paradox of using race leadership to help realize a nation devoid of race-consciousness. His raceless vision thus contradicted his role and image as racial patriarch; it undermined the view of a narrow emblematic conception of his leadership. He envisioned his leadership role catholically; ultimately, he spoke for all mankind, not just blacks.

In a letter to Senator Frederick T. Frelinghuysen, a stalwart New Jersey Republican, thanking him for his prominent role in the passage of the Civil Rights Bill of 1875, Douglass observed that “the colored man was charged with a want of self-respect, a want of race pride, because he asked for this Bill. How absurd. It is precisely because he has this sentiment natural to all men that we opposed all discrimination against us on the score of race.” Speaking before the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in New York City in

early May 1853 on “The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People,” Douglass stressed that he was proud to be a spokesman for his people. He strongly rejected “that cowardly meanness (I will not call it pride) which leads any colored man to repudiate his connection with his race.” Race pride, he suggested, was essential to blacks weathering these perilous times. “We must rise or fall, sink or swim with our race.”¹

Alexandre Dumas—like Douglass, the son of an illicit affair between a white man and a black woman—was one of Douglass’s favorite novelists. He especially liked the Frenchman’s romantic histories, notably *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Nevertheless, Douglass criticized Dumas for his failure to speak out for his people’s cause. As Victor Schoelcher, the eminent French senator who played a key role in the emancipation of French slaves, reminded Douglass of Dumas: “he was a clever writer, but . . . nothing in morals or politics, he never said one word for his race.” Because of Dumas’s lack of race consciousness, Douglass remarked that “we have nothing to thank Dumas for. Victor Hugo, the white man, could speak for us, but this brilliant colored man who could have let down sheets of fire upon the heads of tyrants and carried freedom to his enslaved people, had no word in behalf [of] liberty for the enslaved.” While touring Paris in late 1886, Douglass conceded that he had not yet seen the Parisian statue of Dumas. When he did see it, though, he would interpret “it as . . . an acknowledgment of the genius of a colored man.” Nonetheless, this interpretation could not obviate Douglass’s refusal to “honor the character of the man himself.”²

Douglass’s sense of pride was inbred and intense. He likewise understood his people’s need for dignity and self-respect. Positive and desirable character traits, he maintained, were shaped to a significant extent by how the individual saw himself as well as how others viewed him. Good character, therefore, signified a self-fulfilling prophecy. “Man,” Douglass argued, “derives a sense of his consequences in the world not merely subjectively, but objectively. If from the cradle through life the outside world brands a class as unfit for this or that work, the character of the class will come to resemble and conform to the character described.” He inferred that “to find valuable qualities in our fellows, such qualities must be presumed and expected.”³ If blacks were to see themselves and to be seen by others as a virtuous race, blacks themselves had to possess and to foster virtue. Racial positivism, Douglass implied, buttressed racial optimism and progress.

A clear and positive sense of racial awareness, according to Douglass, demanded a hopeful perception of race relations. The progressive reformation of race relations required that blacks comprehend precisely the politics of race in America: white power versus black powerlessness. To improve this political

relationship, blacks had to struggle ceaselessly. They also had to emulate and to follow the leadership of their best race men. Douglass submitted, in 1871, that “every colored man should now feel himself to be a representative of a race, and that the success or failure, the glory or shame of his whole people depend in some measure upon his exertion.” In addition, the alleviation of the interracial political gulf meant blacks had to understand, as Douglass did, that “there are some things which ought to be said to colored people in the peculiar circumstances in which they are placed, that can be said more effectively among themselves, without the presence of white persons. We are the oppressed, the whites are the oppressors, and the language I would address to the one is not always suited to the other.”⁴ On balance, however, Douglass shared few thoughts with blacks only, even about blacks themselves and their elevation, that he did not share with whites as well. For as he knew all too well, whites would play an indispensable role in the progressive reformation of race relations and would have to take major responsibility for alleviation of their own racism.

Racial self-reliance and unity were also articles of faith in Douglass’s ideology of racial politics. Indeed, his emphasis on the need for racial awareness, self-reliance, and unity has typified black uplift ideology, especially that of the nineteenth century. Race consciousness, Douglass suggested, compelled blacks to develop their own cultural as well as social identity. They had to think and do for themselves. They had to develop their own traditions. Above all, they had to accept and respect their blackness. “If the colored people will continue to strut about in the mental ‘old clothes’ of the white race and refuse to think for themselves,” Douglass insisted, “they will be a disgraced race.” Similarly, he lamented that far too many blacks were “unconscious of having an associate existence or common cause.” As a result, they often showed more confidence in whites than themselves. Still worse, “our women powder their faces and buy the hair of the white race to make themselves more acceptable or less objectionable to the white race.” However, this was not strange, he asserted, because “the honor, the power, the wisdom, wealth and glory are all with the white race.”⁵ Douglass suggested, nonetheless, that blacks had to overcome the imitativeness and self-doubt, even self-hatred, which inevitably grew out of the psychology of racist oppression. The all-too-common and tragic black delusion of trying to be white had to be extirpated.

Black self-reliance meant not only persistent efforts to overcome white social and intellectual dominance, but also primary reliance upon blacks themselves for their own elevation. In 1855, Douglass wrote: “OUR ELEVATION AS A RACE, IS ALMOST WHOLLY DEPENDENT UPON OUR OWN EXERTIONS. . . . No People that has solely depended upon foreign aid, or rather, upon the efforts of those, in any way identified with the oppressor, to undo the

heavy burdens," history demonstrated, "ever stood forth in the attitude of Freedom. Someone, imbued with the spirit of human freedom, from among themselves, has arisen to lead them on to victory."⁶ In this case, Douglass envisioned himself as the someone to help lead his people's struggle for freedom. The black nation, as distinct from the white nation and as inseparable from the American nation, had to forge its own freedom with its own leaders.

Race unity, furthermore, was indispensable if the black "nation within a nation" was ever to achieve full freedom, equality, and justice. "We need, as a people," Douglass maintained, "unity of effort, to impart efficiency to any self-elevation movement, we may institute. If we rise, we must rise together; if we fall, we must fall together." Emancipation constituted the first order of business; however, emancipation and elevation were inextricably bound. In the first issue of *The North Star*, Douglass reminded his "Oppressed Countrymen" enslaved in the South "that we are one, that our cause is one, and that we must help each other, if we would succeed."⁷

Douglass's humanism, nevertheless, superseded and complicated his racial awareness. Although he ultimately placed the politics of humanity above the politics of race, the hierarchical distinction was often implicit and at times confusing. It is clear that Douglass, a mulatto, lacked the fierce race pride associated with Delany, Blyden, and Alexander Crummell, full-blooded black leaders and intellectuals. Of Delany, for example, Douglass noted: "I thank God for making me a man simply, but Delany always thanks Him for making him a black man." Likewise, a report in *Douglass' Monthly* (August 1862) of Delany's pro-African emigration lectures in Rochester characterized them as "terribly African," notwithstanding their "American bearing." Delany, Douglass emphasized, "is one of the very best arguments that Africa has to offer. . . . He is the intensest embodiment of black Nationality to be met with outside the valley of the Niger."⁸

Douglass's racial vision reflected his fundamental belief in a composite or mixed American race, which he, as a mulatto, personified. That Negroes came in all colors of the human spectrum represented further evidence of their universal humanity. In late 1870, Reverend Benjamin Tucker Tanner, editor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church's *Christian Recorder*, accused Douglass of being either prejudiced against or "ashamed of his color." Tanner excoriated him for having described His Excellency Salnave, the late Haitian president, as "a fine representative of our race" with the "brown and velvety complexion of an Indian, with hair black and silky." Douglass's description, Tanner suggested, reflected his preference for light-skinned blacks like himself. It also allegedly showed that he had trouble identifying with dark-skinned blacks and thus was trying "to run away" from his race.⁹

Black skin, as distinct from brown skin, Douglass responded, was no

different qualitatively or aesthetically in his mind; between them, he had no preference. The physical description of Salnave as Indian-like was just that, description, and demonstrated in no way a lack of identity with all colors of his people. Tanner's criticism, Douglass alleged, signified an effort "to fan the embers of division and hatred between the darker and lighter colored people of the country." Eight months later, in a similar vein, Douglass condemned intraracial color prejudice, or caste distinctions among blacks themselves based upon color, as a "contemptible and senseless imitation of one of the meanest feelings that ever crept into the human heart."¹⁰ Skin color, Douglass believed, was incidental to human identity and only a secondary element of racial identity.

For him, the liberating spirit of humanism ideally subsumed and eventually overrode the stifling spirit of race. Consequently, West Indian emancipation, he contended, was, like emancipation in the United States, a humanitarian triumph above all else. After that historic event on 1 August 1833, the day became forever "preeminently the colored man's day," impinging upon "not merely the intelligence, but the feeling." Thus, that historic day filled Negroes "with those grateful sentiments which link mankind in a common brotherhood." The reason and emotion of race pride, then, derived fundamentally from human identity and pride. Whereas humanism was pan-cultural and idealistic, race consciousness was cultural and realistic. Most important, Douglass assumed, unlike the spirit of human pride, "the spirit of race pride will not always prevail."¹¹

Douglass argued against an excessive and irrational, as distinct from a balanced and rational, race consciousness. His ideology of race leadership, therefore, emphasized the inherent limitations of a world view circumscribed essentially by race rather than humanity. Ideally, for instance, individual ability and achievement had nothing to do with race. "Man's greatness," he explained, "consists in his ability to do, and the proper application of his powers to do things needful to be done, and not in the color of his skin."¹² He consistently maintained that achievement, and not mere race or color, was the basic source of pride, human and racial.

The course of Douglass's views on the viability of race pride revealed an intriguing pattern. Even though he evinced an inveterate race pride throughout his life, he did so most vigorously during the oppressive 1850s—the period of his most rapid and radical ideological growth. During this pivotal time, he broke with the Garrisonians, expanded his activities as a political abolitionist, grew more skeptical of organized religion, and became more intimately involved with his people's continuing struggle for liberty.

Douglass's shifting autobiographical portrayal of his lost white patrimony

strikingly illustrated the changing character of his race pride. His 1845 *Narrative* was written at a time when his burgeoning race pride could tolerate the unequivocal admission that his father was white. Yet in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, published in 1855, he was equivocal about his father's racial identity, stressing that he was either white "or nearly white."¹³ Perhaps, he insinuated, his father was a very light-skinned Negro. This evasive insinuation obscured his white patrimony and enhanced his black identity at the crucial juncture where he was fast becoming the representative Negro American and the preeminent race leader.

In his *Life and Times*, both the 1881 and 1892 editions, Douglass claimed: "Of my father I know nothing." This rationalization reflected, most significantly, his mature accommodation to the inescapable fact of his lost, though presumed white, patrimony. His human identity had undoubtedly come to overshadow his mulatto identity, minimizing the apparent conflict between them. As the issue of race pride became less central to his own identity, Douglass correspondingly perceived it as less significant for collective black liberation. Most important, he would argue, were the fundamental issues of human identity and pride. He thus forthrightly rejected the idea "that a man must be black to be true to the rights of black men."¹⁴

In the increasingly racist and repressive environment of post-Reconstruction America, Douglass stressed the danger of excessive or false race pride among his people. In 1889, he criticized what he saw as an increasing overemphasis among Negroes on race pride. Neither race nor color represented "a proper source of pride or complacency," he explained, because these aspects of the human make-up went beyond human choice. Achievement, he reiterated, was "the only excuse for pride in individuals or races." He interpreted "this everlasting exhortation by speakers and writers among us to the cultivation of race" as "a positive evil," as "building on a false foundation." An overzealous and delusive race pride, he reasoned, was a basis of white racism: "the thing we are fighting against . . . the mountain devil, the lion in the way of our progress . . . an assumption of superiority upon the ground of race and color." He warned: "Do we not know that every argument we make, and every pretension we set up in favor of race pride is giving the enemy a stick to break our own heads?"¹⁵

The problem with Douglass's argument was to determine the point at which race pride became racialism or racism. In fact, in the 1880s and 1890s, his tendency to refer loosely to race pride as akin to racism obscured the differences between them and invited criticism. Nevertheless, Douglass rejected the accusation of his critics that he lacked race pride. "Bruce Grit," journalist John Edward Bruce, maintained that Douglass's position against the encouragement

of Negro race pride was “bad advice.” Bruce labeled Douglass’s assimilationism a dream “which he nor his posterity will hardly live to see realized. Mr. Douglass evidently wants to get away from the Negro race, and from the criticism I have heard quite recently of him, he will not meet with any armed resistance in his flight.” Douglass’s response to such criticism was simple. “If fifty years of uncompromising devotion to the cause of the colored man in this country does not vindicate me,” he maintained, “I am content to live without vindication.” He then reemphasized that there was no reason to be prouder of any one race than another. He argued, without fear of contradiction, that no one was prouder than he of Negro achievement. This pride did not originate in his race or color, “but in a sense of justice common to all right-minded men.” He felt this pride, he stressed, “not because I am a Negro, but because I am a man.”¹⁶

In addition to false race pride, Douglass also criticized what he termed, “our noisy assertion of equality with the Caucasian race.” The Negro, he insisted, should not be content with theoretical equality, but should strive to realize empirical equality.¹⁷ In spite of the often seemingly insurmountable barriers to accomplishment, blacks had to persevere. Douglass understood, however, that equality of condition between the races necessitated equality of opportunity.

Another aspect of his moderate vision of racial politics, one that reflected its integrationist as well as assimilationist thrust, was his belief that racial unity was subordinate to national unity. Racial separatism, the perilous extreme of race unity, contradicted and threatened his ideal composite vision of an American nationality. Douglass drew a fine distinction between race unity as a fulcrum for black self-elevation and race unity as an impediment to interracial relations. While black self-help necessitated race unity, the grandiose ideal of a singular American people controverted the need for race unity in the popular sense. “Our policy,” Douglass admonished his people, “should be to unite with the great mass of the American people in all their activities, and resolve to fall or flourish with our common country.”¹⁸

Douglass’s marriage to Helen Pitts, a white woman, on 24 January 1884 represented the supreme embodiment of his commitment to assimilationism, integrationism, and a composite American nationality. They had known one another since the late 1870s when Douglass met her through her uncle who lived in the estate next to Douglass’s Cedar Hill. She had also served for a while as his secretary while he was recorder of deeds (1881–1886) for Washington, D.C. Miss Pitts, forty-six years old at the time of the marriage and twenty years younger than Douglass, came from a solid western New York family and had graduated from Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1859. Her many interests included a commitment to woman’s suffrage, an enthusiasm

she and Douglass shared. Unlike Douglass's first wife, Anna, who had died seventeen months before he remarried, Helen was someone with whom he could share more fully his intellectual and cultural passions. They often played music together—he on the violin, she on the piano. Their spiritual and sexual companionship was clearly a mutual joy that neither racial nor age differences diminished. Unfortunately, that joy extended to neither her family nor Douglass's children, none of whom was ever quite reconciled to the celebrated interracial union.¹⁹

The public reaction was intense and predictable. Close friends and supporters were generally happy for the union and gave it their blessings; incensed whites and blacks condemned it; sympathetic and understanding whites and blacks praised it. Julia Griffiths Crofts, Douglass's close friend and former work associate, wrote to him from England to "express the hope that the step you have now taken may tend to promote your true happiness in the evening of your days." One white newspaper, in a contrary spirit, carried an article sarcastically noting: "So Frederick Douglass has crowned the devotion of a lifetime to his race by marrying a white woman." Another branded him a "lecherous old African Solomon" and the marriage "a deliberate challenge to the Caucasian race."²⁰

The reaction among blacks was particularly intense. Some praised the marriage as a courageous slap in the face of American race prejudice; others argued that Douglass had slapped his race in the face and abandoned it by marrying a white woman. One observer wrote that "the colored ladies take it as a slight, if not an insult, to their race and their beauty." Richard Greener opined that he could only understand the marriage as a verification of the maxim that "reason ceases when love begins." Most blacks apparently did not approve of their foremost race leader marrying a white woman, but they resigned themselves to it. Anne Weaver Teabeau, Douglass's great-granddaughter, remarked that even in 1979, his marriage to a white woman seemed to be the only thing his people knew about him. Some blacks at the time claimed that the controversial union diminished Douglass's influence among the black masses. Although T. Thomas Fortune apparently thought the marriage quite acceptable, he added that "big colored men, like big white men, owe some deference to the prejudices of the people they represent."²¹

Douglass insisted that the choice of a marriage partner was a strictly private matter. He confided to Elizabeth Cady Stanton that "I would never have been at peace with my own soul or held up my head among men had I allowed the fear of popular clamor to deter me from following my convictions as to this marriage. I should have gone to my grave a self-accused and a self-convicted moral coward." Furthermore, his second marriage, as many of his friends

observed, was wholly consistent with his basic belief that racial and color distinctions were artificial and absurd. His first wife, he often jokingly pointed out, “was the color of my mother, and the second, the color of my father.” As a product himself of amalgamation, then, he thought interracial marriage only natural and desirable. As evidenced by the large numbers of “illegitimate” mulattoes in America, it seemed to Douglass “that what the American people object to is not a mixture of the races, but honorable marriage between them.”²²

One observer wrote to Douglass that “your act has startled the public, but it has set it to thinking, and a happy result of your union will do more to harmonize the ‘races’ than all constitutional amendments, civil rights laws and judicial decisions.” Although this response misread and thus overstated the eventual impact of Douglass’s second marriage, it did touch upon its immediate social significance. Douglass himself delighted in challenging America’s taboo against interracial marriage, but he received the greatest pleasure from simply marrying the woman of his choice, who happened to be white. He was not deeply worried about the impact of his marriage to a white woman on his role as a race statesman. In his mind, the color and race of his wife was immaterial to the successful performance of that role. Indeed, if his vision of an America where race and color were no longer an issue ever came about, it would represent the realization of his grandest hope: a composite American nationality. Toward that end, his second marriage signified a step in the right direction. In response to the furor surrounding that marriage, he reflected upon his position as the preeminent race leader, stating wryly: “I do not presume to be a leader, but if I have advocated the cause of the colored people it is not because I am a Negro, but because I am a man.” Nevertheless, it seems likely that his own interracial marriage contributed to his tendency in his later years to minimize the significance of race pride.²³

In early 1848, Douglass criticized not only the shortcomings of the black church as an institution, but also the very notion of complexional institutions. Besides their emotionalism, otherworldliness, conservatism, and lack of qualified ministers, these churches drained the already limited financial resources of Negroes. Douglass maintained that the Negro’s struggle for equal rights would have been best advanced by battling for equality within white churches, with their trained, though often prejudiced, ministry and thoughtful theology. He suggested that these churches were more amenable to black elevation than the plethora of Negro churches with their “would-be ministers” and their intellectually stultifying theology. Equally as bad, recognition of the rightful existence of one complexional institution assumed and rational-

ized others. Furthermore, “Negro pews in the church; Negro boxes in the theatre; Negro cars on the railroad; Negro berths in the steamboat; Negro churches and schools in the community, are all the pernicious fruit of a wicked, unnatural, and blasphemous prejudice against our God-given complexion; and as such stand directly in the way of our progress and equality.” This position echoed that advanced earlier by William Whipper and Robert Purvis, in the 1835 National Negro Convention and institutionalized in the short-lived American Moral Reform Society, a Garrisonian-influenced Negro universal reform vehicle which they led.²⁴

Throughout his life, Douglass consistently deplored institutionalized racial segregation, or racial caste, as “a relic of barbarism” belonging “to a bygone dispensation.” He, therefore, remained philosophically “opposed to doing anything looking to the perpetuity of prejudice.” Racial caste signified the fallacious doctrine of innate Negro inferiority, inculcating it among the American people. The destruction of both racial caste and the notion of Negro inferiority, Douglass contended, demanded color-blind institutions. Consequently, he condemned unsparingly “this shameful outrage upon the institutions of free, humane, enlightened and Christian America.” He loathed the fact that “caste is the god the nation delights to honor.” Chiding American Christians, he remarked: “Caste is in their singing and praying. They talk about the caste of the Hindoo, while they out-Hindoo, in the development of this insatiate and malignant spirit, every nation under heaven.”²⁵

Douglass personally challenged racial caste wherever he met it. Many incidents demonstrating the black struggle against racial caste, as well as his own struggle against it, run throughout his life. He refused, for example, to send his children “to an inferior colored school” on the opposite side of Rochester from where they lived simply because they were not allowed to attend a white public school near their home. In 1848, Rosetta, his eldest child, had briefly attended Rochester’s fashionable Seward Seminary for girls until the objections of a parent of another student forced Rosetta’s withdrawal. She subsequently attended school in Albany for two or three years and Oberlin College’s Preparatory Department (1854–1855). Throughout the 1850s, at various intervals Douglass also provided a private tutor for Rosetta and his other children. In 1857, due largely to the continuing protests of Douglass and other local progressives, Rochester desegregated its public schools.²⁶

Douglass, likewise, opposed all-white trade unions, which besides prohibiting black membership, restricted the ability of blacks to learn and practice trades. When the Washington, D.C., branch of the Columbia Typographical Union denied membership to Lewis, his son, because of his race, Douglass went on the offensive. He pointed out that his son “is made a transgressor for

working at a low rate of wages by the very men who prevented his getting a high rate. He is denounced for not being a member of a Printer's Union by the very men who would not permit him to join such a Union. He is not condemned because he is not a good printer, but because he did not become such in a regular way, that regular way being closed against him by the men now opposing him." Extrapolating beyond the example of his son's dilemma, Douglass suggested that "for the moment, Lewis H. Douglass represents our whole people, rising up from degradation to respectability, and from proscription to equal rights." In light of pervasive institutional racism, Douglass and most black leaders embraced not only all-black trade unions, but other all-black institutions as well.²⁷

Blacks generally comprehended the need for all-black institutions, notwithstanding their humanist idealism and its basic opposition to racial caste. Race pride, self-reliance, and elevation demanded all-black institutions in the context of a racist society. Indeed, the relentless persistence of racial discrimination and segregation made complexional institutions inevitable and desirable, besides necessary. Lewis Woodson had reasoned that "whenever a people are oppressed, peculiarly (not complexionally), distinctive organization or action, is required on the part of the oppressed, to destroy that oppression. The colored people of this country are oppressed; therefore the colored people are required to act in accordance with this fundamental principle." William Hamilton, president of the 1834 National Negro Convention Board, asserted similarly that "under the present circumstances it is highly necessary that the free people of colour should combine and closely attend to their own particular interest. All kinds of jealousy should be swept away from among them, and their whole eye fixed, intently fixed, on their own peculiar welfare."²⁸

Enunciating the logic behind holding separate black conventions, Douglass insisted that whites "are already in convention against us in various ways and at many important points. The practical construction of American life is a convention against us." He thus affirmed that "human law may know no distinction among men in respect of rights, but human practice may." Nonetheless, Douglass believed that complexional institutions "should always be regarded as temporary institutions, forced upon us by the unjust and wicked prejudice which excludes us from the like institutions among the whites, and ready to be given up whenever a sense of justice and liberality shall assert its dominance in the American mind." All-black institutions, therefore, constituted for Douglass, as for virtually all black leaders, a transitional phase in America's evolution to a color-blind society. Black institutional separatism represented a requisite means toward the end of singular American institutions. The reality of racial caste did not preclude an optimistic vision of interracial integration and assimilation.²⁹

Douglass's initially august vision of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company, an institution symbolic of the hope of "black Reconstruction," signified that of most blacks and their white allies. The Freedman's Bank, established in 1865, would encourage industry, thrift, and saving among Negroes, especially the freedpeople, and thus promote their progress toward middle-class success and respectability. Douglass wrote that the bank's agents endeavored "to instill into the minds of the untutored Africans lessons of sobriety, wisdom, and economy, and to show them how to rise in the world." The bank itself and its apparent success enhanced Negro pride and dignity. The luxurious headquarters with its resplendent black staff in Washington, D.C., symbolized this feeling of race esteem. So impressed was Douglass with the Freedman's Bank and "the integrity and wisdom of its management" that he deposited twelve thousand dollars there himself. "The more millions accumulated there, I thought, the more consideration and respect would be shown to the colored people of the whole country." For many blacks, the bank's progress clearly illustrated the race's progress since emancipation.³⁰

In March 1874, the bank's Board of Trustees elected Douglass president in order to bolster sagging confidence in the institution. In spite of his personal reservations about his fitness for the task and the concerns of friends that the post might diminish his reputation and material assets, Douglass accepted the job primarily out of a sense of duty. He also accepted it because of the challenge and honor involved. Ensnared in his new and exhilarating role, he pondered its personal significance. "I could not help reflecting on the contrast between Frederick the slave boy, running about at Colonel Lloyd's with only a tow linen shirt to cover him, and Frederick—President of a bank counting its assets by millions. I had heard of golden dreams, but such dreams had no comparison with reality." Douglass's new post seemed to represent another triumph in both his own and his people's quest for the American dream.³¹

Still, Douglass perceived that the bank had problems, chief among them rumors of insolvency and imminent collapse. As he sought to obtain an accurate assessment of the bank's condition, he attempted to allay these disturbing rumors. As he learned more of the bank's true state, the pressures of the post grew. He wrote to Senator Frelinghuysen in May 1874: "The truth is [,] I have neither taste nor talent for the place [,] and when I add as I must, that the condition of the bank is not prosperous and possibly not sound [,] you will appreciate my ill fortune. I am only persuaded to remain in it for the present with a view to restore confidence and save the depositors themselves." Unfortunately, there was nothing Douglass could do in his position as newly elected president to restore a bank already decimated by bad loans, speculation, and the Panic of 1873. Internal structural liabilities including fraud, theft, inefficiency, unaccountability, and too many untrained cashiers had also taken their

toll. Within six weeks after becoming president, Douglass realized that the bank was no longer a safe repository for his people's hard-earned money.³²

On 2 July 1874, the bank failed. With that tragic failure sank the hopes and dreams of thousands of Negroes, most notably the former slaves. Personally, Douglass felt humiliated. He claimed that his tie to the bank at the time of its failure, even though he bore no responsibility himself for the fiasco, caused him the greatest amount of criticism and abuse he ever experienced. Lamenting that in associating himself with the bank he "was married to a corpse," he loudly proclaimed his innocence of any wrongdoing, and the record sustained him. The day after the bank's failure, Douglass observed that the bank "has been the black man's cow, but the white man's milk." In 1890, he remarked that as with the Freedman's Bank and similar institutions designed to assist Negroes (like the Peabody and Slater Educational Funds), "the hands are white that handle the money."³³ Douglass implied that whether through abdication of responsibility or self-aggrandizement at the bank's expense, key whites who exercised ultimate control over the bank bore a large measure of the responsibility for its collapse.

Douglass supported the unsuccessful movement to have the depositors fully reimbursed for their losses. The typically partial and scattered repayments inevitably bypassed innumerable depositors, especially illiterate former slaves. Any refund, partial or full, could not have atoned for the sense of loss and betrayal that the bank's collapse engendered among the former slaves. The bank's failure soured many of them on the vaunted American dream, apparently discouraging thrift, saving, and enterprise among an untold number.³⁴

Several months after the Freedman's Bank failed, Douglass's last newspaper, the *New National Era*, also ceased to exist. In April 1873, he had turned the venture over to Lewis and Charles, his sons, who formed a stock company and under its auspices assumed the newspaper's management. Nevertheless, Douglass continued to have doubts about the paper's future existence. Writing to Gerrit Smith, he vented those doubts and sought to explain why the paper faced possible extinction. He pointed to both massive black illiteracy and a lack of adequate black confidence in black institutions that competed with comparable white institutions for black patronage. During an interview on the Negro press in 1891, he offered that comparatively speaking, white newspapers were often the "best and cheapest." Black newspapers, he maintained, "from their antecedents and surroundings, cost more and give their readers less, than papers and publications by white men." On the other hand, he proposed that Afro-American editors—racial restrictions and individual deficiencies aside—"demonstrated, in a large measure, the mental and literary possibilities of the colored race." Of the defunct *New National Era*, moreover,

he maintained that it had been a worthwhile and personally instructive experience, "for I have kept well out of newspaper undertakings since." He claimed, furthermore, that it had contained "columns of which the colored people are indebted for some of the best things ever uttered in behalf of their cause."³⁵

As a Negro newspaper editor and publisher for twenty years, Douglass naturally felt extremely close to the Negro press as "a powerful lever for the elevation and advancement of the colored race." He always believed that a first-rate newspaper conducted by blacks represented "a telling fact against the American doctrine of natural [Negro] inferiority, and the inveterate prejudice which so universally prevails in this country against the colored race." Equally important, the Negro press was a vital public forum for the discussion and dissemination of the best means to enhance the race's elevation. Douglass maintained, as a result, that the Negro press "has special claims upon all who desire to raise colored people in the estimation of themselves and their surroundings."³⁶

Nevertheless, according to Douglass, the quality of some Negro newspapers needed to be improved. Indeed, he argued that just because a paper happened to be edited and published by a Negro was not an adequate reason for fellow Negroes to support it. "Whether he [the editor] should be supported," Douglass contended, "depends upon the character of the man and the quality of his work. Our people should not be required to buy an inferior article offered by a colored man, when for the same money they can purchase a superior article from a white man." To do otherwise, he suggested, was false race pride and foolish economy. He asserted that "we need, and ought to have, the best supply of mental food that the American market affords."³⁷

His reservations about the quality of Negro newspapers and his related questioning of the Negro's responsibility to support allegedly second-rate Negro newspapers engendered sharp criticism, notably from Negro editors. Chief among these was John Edward Bruce, a free-lance journalist who later joined Marcus Garvey's inner leadership circle. In 1889, he declared that Douglass's criticisms of certain Negro newspapers, whose names he chose not to reveal, suggested a lack of courage on his part. Furthermore, Bruce charged that Douglass's popularity ironically owed largely to the "colored fool editors" whose infatuation with and constant coverage of him had made him "something less than a god." Douglass had consciously exploited this Negro journalistic fixation with himself, according to Bruce, lauding the Negro newspapers in his own orbit "as indispensable auxiliaries in the work of lifting the race to a higher plane in the social and intellectual world." Douglass's growing criticism of the Negro press and his "contemptuous flings at their 'youthful imperfections,'" Bruce charged, derived from their growing independence from him.

He, apparently, could no longer manipulate them as he wished.³⁸ Though excessive, these charges nonetheless suggested that Douglass's sometimes imperious pronouncements as a race leader did not suit innumerable blacks.

Critics notwithstanding, Douglass persisted in his exhortations to Negro newspaper editors and publishers both to improve their qualitative standards and to speak more forcefully and directly to the human as well as racial condition. In 1891, he was asked "What future course do you think the Press might take in promoting good among our people?" The Negro press, he replied, should elevate humanism and American nationalism above racialism, racial self-reliance above government aid, advocacy of Negro rights and social responsibility over social recreation, and civic and political rights and responsibilities—and the government's duty to ensure them—over political offices for a hand-picked few. It should also stress both middle-class values and an objective appraisal of the Negro's actual situation in the context of America's continuing racial dilemma.³⁹ Douglass suggested that an optimistic future for the Negro, not even to mention their press, required that these concerns be dealt with immediately and successfully.

Douglass's perception of the inherent conflict between race consciousness and humanism mirrored his perception of the related and inherent conflict between race consciousness and nationalism. In each case, he saw an ultimately impermanent race consciousness as secondary. An ageless and transcendent humanism, moreover, superseded an ultimately transient nationalism. In 1897, W. E. B. DuBois observed that Negro Americans embodied a "double-consciousness" or "twoness"—a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others"—reflected in part in the historic tension between their racial and national identities. Like Douglass, most blacks have sought to reconcile these "two warring ideals"—to achieve a "true self-consciousness"—through humanism and assimilationism.⁴⁰ Indeed, Douglass personified this struggle to achieve a "true self-consciousness."

Part Two

Social Reform

Two hostile and irreconcilable tendencies, broad as the world of man, are in the open field; good and evil, truth and error, enlightenment and superstition. Progress and reaction, the ideal and the actual, the spiritual and the material, the old and the new, are in perpetual conflict, and the battle must go on till the ideal, the spiritual side of humanity shall gain perfect victory over all that is low and vile in the world.

— Douglass, “It Moves,” Douglass Papers
(Library of Congress)

5. The Ideology of White Supremacy

The relation subsisting between the white and black people of this country is the vital question of the age,” Frederick Douglass observed in 1854. To comprehend his view of nineteenth-century America, it is necessary to come to grips with his analysis of that era’s race problem: the ugly, yet inescapable, specter of white racism that haunted both whites and blacks. The ideology of white supremacy or white racism in Douglass’s time—like today—encompassed attitudes, beliefs, values, ideals, behavior, and thought on individual, group, and institutional levels. It subsumed antiblack prejudice and Negrophobia. In addition, it represented a deep-seated philosophy of black dehumanization. Predicated upon the assumptions of black cultural inferiority, black biological inferiority, or both, the ideology of white supremacy matured and gained intellectual respectability during the nineteenth century. It signified a rationale and a justification for white oppression of blacks.¹

As a victim and, more important, a survivor of the American racial impasse, Douglass developed a profound understanding of white supremacy. Indeed, the primary sources for his continuing analysis of the racial dilemma were his personal experiences as a black man in a white and racist society. His lifelong examination of the ideology of white supremacy touched upon its history, nature, causes, consequences, and possible remedies. The broad outline and major tenets of this examination, moreover, remained remarkably consistent throughout his life.

Even though Douglass often thought about the impact of white supremacy on blacks, he also pondered its impact on others, especially whites. His larger concern, however, focused on its effect on Americans as a people. Its social and moral as well as political and economic effect on his native land troubled him. Consequently, his Americanness in conjunction with his Negro-ness shaped his examination of the ideology of nineteenth-century American white supremacy. In addition, his reform commitment led him to believe that white supremacy could be alleviated.

To Douglass, the very idea of prejudice was utterly revolting. He deplored it in all of its manifestations, whether based on religion, class, color, race, or sex. “A moral disorder” and the consequence of a “diseased imagination,” prejudice was irrational, evil, unnatural, and unjust. “Few evils are less acces-

sible to the force of reason” than prejudice, he argued, “or more tenacious of life and power. . . . It . . . creates the conditions necessary to its own existence, and fortifies itself by refusing all contradiction.”² Like slavery, prejudice—an active and seemingly self-perpetuating phenomenon where passion reigned unchecked and reason languished imprisoned—was difficult to understand, much less battle and overcome. “There is nothing to which prejudice is not equal in the way of perverting the truth and inflaming the passions of men,” Douglass asserted. It represented an invidious social tragedy, a vast and regrettable waste of precious human potential.³

Yet, Douglass refused to submit to despair. Prejudice spoke ill of the national character and national prospects, but he kept the faith. Although race prejudice in particular signified “evidence of the darkness of this age” and a negative “commentary upon our enlightenment,” he continued to believe that eventually the spirit of human brotherhood would win out over race prejudice. He argued that “principles, self-acting, self-sustaining, and permanent” would triumph, while “passion and prejudice” would abate. As such thinking suggested, his interpretation of sociocultural change was more idealist than materialist.⁴

A most important feature of Douglass’s idealism was a strong belief in the inevitability and desirability of historical change and what he considered its corollary—human progress. Prejudice offered a critical challenge to this belief. The legacy of human prejudice, he maintained, dated at least as far back as recorded history. At some point in their record of contact with other peoples, as a result, every group had experienced some form of prejudice. Specific historical examples of race prejudice cited by Douglass included the chiding of Moses for his marriage to Tharbis, an Ethiopian, the oppression of the Jews by various peoples, and the oppression of the Saxons by the Normans.⁵

Douglass also found important distinctions between race prejudice and color prejudice, especially in a context where the races in contact differed in skin color. Whereas prejudice in general and race prejudice in particular seemed older and more pervasive than color prejudice, the latter appeared to be unknown in early Western civilization and more localized once it developed. The history of color prejudice seemed more closely tied to the history of the slave trade and slavery than to the history of race prejudice.⁶ There were two important implications in this argument. First, the enslavement of and trade in colored peoples by noncolored peoples were more crucial in the development and perpetuation of color prejudice than race prejudice. Second, by dealing almost exclusively in Africans, both slavery and the slave trade—as they waxed in America—helped to forge the links between color prejudice and race

prejudice while tending to obscure the differences between them. Skin color, then, immeasurably enhanced the complexity of the racial dimension of human prejudice.

Douglass believed that slavery in Africa and the Western world before both the European expansion into the New World and the evolution of the Atlantic slave trade had been based on neither race nor color. The modern reality of black slavery tied to antiblack prejudice, therefore, proved especially vexing for him as a progressive idealist. In this case, change was not necessarily progressive and progress not necessarily good. The pain of this contradiction was no less sobering than real. A proper assessment of change and progress required that the historical perspective and social results be weighed. If, as Douglass suggested, slavery was inevitably regressive, both a social and an historical analysis of Western and African slavery would show only freedom, as distinct from slavery, to be progressive.

Douglass, like his black colleagues William Wells Brown and Thomas McCants Stewart, used the model of the Norman subjugation of the Saxons and similar Western examples as evidence of the common, though often temporally remote, experience of a history marked at some juncture by slavery.⁷ The larger point, however, remained that New World Afro-American slavery, its uniqueness notwithstanding, formed part of a broader tradition of enslavement common to Africa and Europe. Afro-Americans, then, did not bear a stigma unknown and unshared historically by those around them. Regardless, this knowledge constituted only a meager beginning toward understanding the dilemma of race prejudice and color prejudice, the legacy and reality of slavery, and the ambiguity of change and progress.

The bigotry that hounded Afro-Americans in the United States, slave and free, was ubiquitous. "A general and withering prejudice—a malignant and active hate," Douglass protested, "pursues us even in the best parts of the country." It even infected the Negro's white friends and sympathizers, including abolitionists, social reformers, and Christians. Like their generally less enlightened white compatriots, the Negro's friends and sympathizers, too, had to become acutely conscious of the consequences of their own anti-Negro bias, notably its negative impact on whites as well as blacks. This understanding was necessary so that they might better help to lead the fight against it.⁸

A proper understanding of antiblack bigotry, Douglass continually stressed, had to begin with an informed perspective and a logical conceptual framework. The former encompassed a humanistic as well as a national and an international point of view; the latter an eclectic and multilevel approach. To begin with, the problem itself had to be clearly understood and stated. This proved easier said than done. It was especially wrong to hold, as whites

typically did, that the Negro himself was the problem. Throughout the postwar period as talk of the "Negro Problem" intensified, Douglass harshly criticized such discourse as wrongheaded and anti-Negro, for it engendered and fed Negrophobia. He noted, furthermore, that this deceptive phrase exploited Negroes themselves, by placing the onus upon the oppressed rather than the oppressor. It exploited Negrophobia by manipulating "offensive associations" projected onto blacks by whites. By "using language deceitfully and pandering to prejudice by misstating and misapplying terms to the existing relations of men," these "offensive associations" became powerfully negative cultural symbols of Negroess.⁹ The very notion of a "Negro Problem" struck him as "an anachronism, a misnomer, a false pretense, a delusion, and a sham." This point of view signified "a crafty appeal to the popular prejudice entertained against the Negro," for to link anything with the degraded image and symbol of the Negro tended "to damage it and himself likewise."¹⁰

The scapegoating and projection of the Negro as the source of the race problem was notoriously prevalent in the postbellum South where blacks, most of whom had only recently achieved a nominal freedom, were systematically denied basic human rights by racist and enterprising whites. Economic exploitation, political disfranchisement, legal discrimination, social ostracism, intimidation, and violence directed against blacks by southern whites intensified during the latter part of the nineteenth century, becoming quite common by century's end. Throughout the nation, in all regions, there were examples of and variations on these themes. Whites, North and South, honed their rationalizations for the oppression of blacks by reiterating in various guises their misguided focus upon the Negro as the race problem. This misguided focus, in fact, represented an important underpinning of the race problem and, thus, a vital impediment to its resolution.

From this troubled white psyche sprang an irrational fear of blacks, symbolized by the southern black nemesis: "a vast and mysterious problem, the mere contemplation of which should cause the North to shudder," Douglass noted. But, again he countered, this interpretation was nothing more than "a trick," a "red herring." In reality, the problem rested "not with the Negro, but with his white oppressors. It can be more properly called a white than a black problem, since its solution depends more upon the action of white men than upon that of black men."¹¹ As early as 1841, he had understood whites to be the source of the problem, the critical human agents behind black suffering and degradation. He thus bitterly chided them: "You degrade us, and then ask why we are degraded—you shut our mouths, and then ask why we don't speak—you close your colleges and seminaries against us, and then ask why we don't know more."¹²

Whites, therefore, as society's privileged and powerful, had to bear the major responsibility for getting rid of their own antiblack racism, while concurrently alleviating their woeful treatment of black people. In light of the historic ties among racism, power, and privilege in this society, though, the elimination of antiblack racism, Douglass increasingly understood, was easier to propose than to effect.¹³ It was clear, for instance, that justice and equality for blacks could only be realized insofar as their achievement did not significantly impair white advantage and control.

This kind of seemingly irresolvable dilemma implied an arresting moral paradox in the tortured relationship between the black oppressed and the white oppressor. As Douglass put it, "we may easily forgive those who injure us, but it is hard to forgive those whom we injure."¹⁴ The latter dilemma clearly acknowledges the individual's capacity for inhumanity alongside the individual's difficulty in accepting this unflattering fact. Rather than acceptance, the typical response is either evasion, denial, or cynicism. The problem, nevertheless, remains. The moral dilemma of the oppressed is not only to love the oppressor, but also to rise above oppression, bitterness, and self-doubt. That of the oppressor is no less difficult: to cease oppression, to love the formerly oppressed, and to rise above the will to dominate others while also rising above guilt and self-doubt. Douglass believed that, in this instance, the greater challenge confronted the oppressor.

The enigma of white racism, then, constituted more than a problem in black and white, more than an isolated, regional problem; it constituted at once a moral and national problem.¹⁵ For a moralist and nationalist of Douglass's conviction, this perception indeed signified a most serious problem. He argued that with the national morality in question, immediate commitment and concerted action was necessary. It had to be resolved, he maintained, "whether the nation has in itself sufficient moral stamina to maintain its honor and integrity. . . or whether it has already touched the dry rot of moral depravity by which nations decline and fall and governments fade and vanish." The question as to "whether a true Christian civilization can be established, maintained, and made to flourish in this professedly Christian country," thus constituted another important aspect of this "American Problem."¹⁶

Although the crux of the race relations dilemma was white racism, its larger context was quite expansive. For Douglass, it encompassed no less than the validity of both America's most cherished ideals and her destined greatness. In a perceptive assessment of "The Nation's Problem" in 1889, he concluded:

The real question, the all-commanding question, is whether American justice, American liberty, American civilization, American law and

American Christianity can be made to include and protect alike and forever all American citizens in the rights which . . . have been guaranteed to them by the organic and fundamental law of the land. It is whether this great nation shall conquer its prejudices, rise to the dignity of its professions, and proceed in the sublime course of truth and liberty marked out for itself since the late war, or shall swing back to its ancient moorings of slavery and barbarism. The Negro is of inferior activity and power in the solution of the problem. . . . It is not what he shall be or do, but what the nation shall be and do, which is to solve this great national problem.¹⁷

Interestingly enough, Douglass saw anti-Negro prejudice to be a problem primarily afflicting whites in the United States. For some countries like Turkey, Persia, and Brazil, he claimed evidence of the enslavement of colored peoples without color prejudice as either cause or effect.¹⁸ Unlike whites with relatively broad-minded racial attitudes in both Western European and other New World societies, whites in the United States demonstrated a blatant antipathy toward Negroes, according to Douglass. He observed the European situation three times: during an abolitionist lecture tour between 1845 and 1847; during a brief trip to England in late 1859 through early 1860 to escape capture and possible trial as an alleged coconspirator in John Brown's abortive raid on Harpers Ferry; and, during a honeymoon-vacation with Helen Pitts Douglass, his second wife, between 1886 and 1887. He observed the situation in Santo Domingo in 1871 as assistant secretary to the Commission of Inquiry to Santo Domingo, and in Haiti between 1889 and 1891 as charge d'affaires for Santo Domingo and minister to Haiti.

Of particular note were his European travels.¹⁹ While on his initial visit to Ireland in 1845, he wrote to Garrison that "one of the most pleasing features of my visit thus far, has been a total absence of all manifestations of prejudice against me, on account of my color." When railing against anti-Negro prejudice in the United States, likewise, he often contrasted what he termed the "American skin aristocracy" with European racial enlightenment.²⁰ The race prejudice he endured, exemplified by the discrimination he suffered aboard United States carriers to and from Europe, represented a tragic yet illuminating adventure, especially when contrasted with the comparatively equal social treatment he experienced abroad.

Douglass offered several explanations for the alleged greater racial tolerance of European whites. Again writing to Garrison in 1845 from Ireland, he noted, quite jokingly and sarcastically, that "white people in America are whiter, purer, and better than the people here. This accounts for it." Leaving humor aside, he sarcastically observed: "Besides, we are the freest nation on

the globe, as well as the most enlightened, and can therefore afford to insult and outrage the colored man with impunity. This is one of the peculiar privileges of our peculiar institution."²¹

Douglass suggested that the spirit of racial egalitarianism that he experienced in Europe appeared to be due in part to the lack of either an indigenous black population or a significant immigrant influx. It also seemed related to the impact of Roman Catholicism, notably in France.²² Regardless, Douglass's analysis typically neglected the often exploitative and racist ideas, policies, and actions of Europeans toward black peoples in the New World and Africa. He tended, moreover, to underestimate the impact of the racial, chromatic, and cultural heterogeneity so common in New World societies like the United States and so lacking in those parts of Europe he visited.

An important factor behind his admiration for Europeans, principally the British and the French, was the active involvement of so many of them in the movements to abolish the slave trade and slavery, in addition to their numerous other reform interests. This factor was perhaps second only to the apparent European spirit of racial egalitarianism in fostering his Europhilia. These valiant men and women were without a doubt some of the best advocates that the Negro in particular and the oppressed in general had anywhere. Daniel O'Connell, the great Irish nationalist and abolitionist, "the friend of liberty in every clime, class and color," personified the commitment to universal humanitarian reform that Douglass himself exuded and, thus, found so appealing in others.²³

His perception of anti-Negro prejudice among Europeans, nonetheless, left much to be desired. In fact, it was shortsighted and wrongheaded. It did not represent the kind of searching analysis that he made of anti-Negro prejudice among American whites. The corroborative testimony of other black American visitors to Europe, who also experienced relative racial equality while there, proved neither the absence nor the lack of European antiblack prejudice.²⁴ Like Douglass, they too evidently experienced Europe in a way that obscured its antiblack prejudice. Due to the unusual nature of his European reception and travels as a favorite of some of Europe's liberal and enlightened best, Douglass developed a skewed vision of Europeans and their racial attitudes and actions.

As evidenced by his outspoken sympathies for the Irish nationalists and the increasing masses of landless poor throughout Europe, Douglass empathized with the European downtrodden. He likewise condemned oppression and exploitation among Europeans. His blindness, therefore, was not to European problems, but to European antiblack prejudice. The critical factor blinding him to this prejudice was his failure to connect the domestic appearance of racial equality with the foreign reality of racist attitudes and behavior toward

blacks in Africa and the New World. From this point, it might have been easier to perceive the domestic roots and manifestations of European antiblack racism and the ties between it and its American counterpart. However, given the lack of an indigenous black European population to compare to the black population of the United States, it was perhaps inevitable that Douglass would not recognize European modes of antiblack racism. As these factors inhibited such an awareness, so did Douglass's attachment to European reformers and his Europhilia.²⁵

In a curious, half-serious, yet very revealing passage, Douglass implied that his grand reception in Britain and elsewhere in Europe revealed a European fascination with the Negro as exotic. As he quipped to Francis Jackson, a white abolitionist and friend who had aided and encouraged him: "It is quite an advantage to be a *nigger* [my emphasis] here. I find I am hardly black enough for British taste, but by keeping my hair as wooly as possible I make out to pass for at least half Negro at any rate."²⁶ As this European fascination with the Negro objectified, and, consequently, dehumanized him, it reeked of prejudice. Douglass's glorious reception in Europe, then, drew upon what he as a Negro symbolized for Europeans as well as his identity as an abolitionist-reformer and his genuinely engaging personality. Integral to both the European vision of the Negro and its Euro-American counterpart was white supremacy.

Once in the American setting, Europeans appeared to acquire easily and quickly the anti-Negro bias endemic among white Americans. The roots of this prejudice, nonetheless, were many and complex. The effect of the New World environment on Euro-American attitudes toward Afro-Americans and other nonwhite peoples constituted a necessary, but not a sufficient, explanation for this prejudice. Given the evidence of antiblack prejudice in European culture prior to European settlement and exploitation of the New World, both the European background and the American environment apparently contributed to the development of this bigotry.²⁷

The question of the pre-American roots of this prejudice notwithstanding, its nineteenth-century reality, according to Douglass, reflected learned behavior. He contended that white and nonwhite immigrants alike were taught to hate blacks. In addition, this prejudice flowed in part from a variety of factors, including the proximity of blacks to whites, the numerical proportion of blacks to whites, black social problems, white "pride and fashion," and proslavery politics. Douglass observed that for whites in America "it was easier to love the Negro at a distance than to love him at hand." The same observation might have been made of Europeans, even though Douglass did not make it. Furthermore, as American blacks increased in numbers relative to whites as well as in spatial closeness to them, antiblack bigotry surfaced and intensified.²⁸

Primarily the result of socioeconomic deprivation, black social problems like crime also exacerbated white prejudice. In Canada and the United States, for example, Douglass noted that “the great increase of the colored people, most of them ignorant and some of them vicious, has raised up prejudice against them.” The sparks which actually ignited the fire of this antipathy, he argued, were white ignorance and complacency about the plight of blacks. A transient sympathy for blacks, which soon turned to contempt, further inflamed this volatile mixture of ignorance and complacency. “The [white] masses do not look into causes,” he stated. “If they find a people degraded, they pity them for a while and at length despise them.”²⁹

This insensitivity reflected another set of factors yielding prejudice against Negroes: white egotism and prevailing social custom. Assessing several incidents of antiblack discrimination in public carriers, Douglass commented that white presumption combined with social habit “have much to do with the treatment commonly extended to colored people in the United States.” Similarly, proslavery politics, especially its grandiose rhetoric, exploited widespread anti-Negro sentiment. He thus condemned proslavery propaganda as a racist and cruel force that “belittled our virtues, . . . magnified our vices, and . . . made us odious in the eyes of the world.”³⁰

The hardy persistence of antiblack prejudice suggested to many, white and black, that its causes might be natural. Thomas Jefferson had spoken not only of the “real distinction which nature has made” between the races, but also of the “deep-rooted prejudices entertained by the whites against the blacks.” To most nineteenth-century whites, antiblack prejudice appeared natural and inevitable. Whether slave or free, blacks seemed to them to be innately inferior. Douglass noted that “some people will have it that there is a natural, an inherent, and an invincible repugnance in the breast of the white race toward dark-colored people.” Even worse, he decried, “some very intelligent colored men think that their proscription is owing solely” to their blackness. “They hold that they are rated according to their color, and that it is impossible for white people ever to look upon dark races of men, or men belonging to the African race, with other than feelings of aversion.”³¹

Nonetheless, the argument of antiblack prejudice as natural struck Douglass as erroneous. He countered that its unnaturalness might be established in several ways, beginning with the observation that it did not exist everywhere blacks and whites came into contact. As an allegedly natural phenomenon, though, it should have. Also, this prejudice resulted as much from factors within human control—custom, socioeconomic status, political condition, legal status—as from factors clearly outside human control—race and color. As many whites had apparently overcome the prejudice, or so he argued, it did not appear to be vital to their well-being. Besides, as prejudice was plainly

associated with the degradation of blacks, the spirit of altruism should induce whites to want, and he hoped to work for, a fair chance and progress for blacks. Yet, too often reality proved otherwise, For whites, consistent with society's "degeneracy, . . . the weakness of the Negro . . . [is their] best apology for robbing him of his liberty, crippling his energies, shutting him out from the light of knowledge, and making him a beast of burden."³² Juxtaposed against Douglass's highly ethical and optimistic view of human nature, such inhumanity posed an "unnatural" contradiction.

If white prejudice against blacks and other nonwhite peoples was natural, the worldwide historical implications were ominous. Such a hypothetical admission signaled the possibility and sanctioned the growing reality of racist exploitation of most of the world's peoples by whites, because, as Douglass explained, four-fifths of the world's population was colored. Consequently, for those already under the thumb of white hegemony, the probability of being "forever doomed to injustice, oppression, hate and strife" proved frighteningly real. The logical imperative of color prejudice as natural meant, furthermore, that "the religious sentiment of the world, with its grand idea of human brotherhood, its 'peace on earth and goodwill to men,' its golden rule, must be voted a dream, a delusion, and a snare."³³

Douglass maintained that there were at least two other reasons for rejecting the argument of anti-Negro prejudice as natural. First, this notion contradicted the fact of sexual attraction and intercourse between blacks and whites. "The hundreds and thousands of mulattoes, quadroons, etc." suggested that this prejudice was less powerful, less basic, and thus secondary to the sex drive, undoubtedly a natural biological phenomenon. Second, he contended human harmony, morality, and equality contradicted the naturalness of this prejudice. Its elimination was necessary because "like ignorance, superstition, bigotry, and vice," it was evil and destructive: "an enemy to the peace, good order, and happiness of human society."³⁴

Like many of his contemporaries, including Alexis de Tocqueville, the astute French observer of the American domestic scene, Douglass believed that slavery was the primary cause of anti-Negro prejudice. Lewis Woodson, the influential black minister who wrote under the pseudonym "Augustine," had previously inveighed against "the sin of that prejudice which grows out of slavery."³⁵ In Douglass's view, even though separating the effects of slavery from those of black skin color was often difficult, sometimes impossible, slavery more than black skin color caused white prejudice against Negroes. He, like virtually all articulate blacks, argued consistently that whites hated and persecuted blacks "not because we are colored, but simply because that color has for a series of years been coupled in the public mind with the

degradation of slavery.”³⁶ Color prejudice, furthermore, had grown out of the negative cultural connotations of blackness which black enslavement tapped and expanded. Douglass argued that in abstract and primordial terms there was no such thing as color prejudice. It could only evolve and persist in a specific cultural and social milieu. Attitudes and behavior reflecting prejudice against black skin color, consequently, were learned, not innate. For instance, young white children might at first be curious about black skin, but certainly not initially prejudiced against it. Color prejudice—race prejudice, too—according to Douglass, grew out of socialization. It had to be reiterated, then, that “the color is innocent enough, but things with which it is coupled make it hated. Slavery, ignorance, stupidity, servility, poverty, dependence, are all undesirable conditions. When these shall cease to be coupled with color, there will be no color line drawn.”³⁷

Douglass and his black cohorts uniformly agreed with “Augustine’s” contention in a letter to the *Colored American*, 16 February 1839, that “CONDITION And not color, is the chief cause of the prejudice under which we suffer.” The fault could not be pinned upon an alleged white aversion to the color black and to an alleged black inferiority and offensiveness. Brown, Garnet, Delany, Stewart, and Hosea Easton—besides Douglass—were among those blacks who rejected the racist reasoning of whites like Robert Goodloe Harper, who wanted to colonize blacks outside the United States. Harper contended that blacks were “condemned to a hopeless state of inferiority and degradation by their color, which is an indelible mark of their origin and former condition, and establishes an impossible barrier between them and the whites.” If blacks had accepted such thinking, they would have been forced to support white supremacy. They would have branded their own color as objectionable and defended antiblack prejudice as reasonable.³⁸

Even after the abolition of slavery, Douglass and his black colleagues continued to view slavery and its debilitating legacy as the primary cause of white racism. The Negro, Douglass argued, “has ceased to be the slave of an individual, but has in some sense become the slave of society.” The lingering shadow of slavery poisoned the nation’s “moral atmosphere” as well as its race relations. Whereas the economics of slave labor no longer strictly obtained, the demand for cheap and exploitable black labor did. The power and privilege which racism had given whites during the reign of slavery, however, persisted, enabling them to continue to exploit black labor. Racism, then, was as vital to the operation of the free labor economy as it had been to the slave labor economy.³⁹

The deeply embedded Western cultural associations of blackness with sin, evil, lewdness, pathology, dirt, excrement, and darkness insinuated that hu-

man blackness as a personality or character trait was despicable. These negative cultural connotations combined with the debasement endured by free and slave blacks to promulgate black complexion as a badge of human inferiority. They also functioned as a justification for white supremacy along with black slavery and dehumanization. Blackness had to be suppressed in all its guises and on all levels. The larger meaning of this invidious process was complicated. Douglass had observed, for example, that white children were often scared into behaving properly with the threat that otherwise the “black man come catch you.”⁴⁰ This not-so-innocent warning fired both Negrophobia and a critical element of its cultural roots: the image of black men as devils, bugbears, bogeymen—subhuman symbols of evil.

This endemic cultural racism gave force to the delusion, Douglass suggested, that blacks were “abnormal and unhealthy”: a “diseased member of the body politic.” Within such a context, black life and culture, compared to those of the white majority, were relatively worthless. A popular white saying, for instance, went: “It’s worth but half a cent to kill a nigger, and half a cent to bury one.” Similar expressions were commonplace. Moreover, the minstrel show, the most popular form of mass entertainment of the period, thrived upon racist stereotypes of blacks. Not surprisingly, Douglass railed against those “Ethiopian” singers and buffoons who “distort and disfigure the features of the Negro and burlesque his language and manners in a way to make him appear more akin to apes than to men.” While unalterably opposed to the demeaning characterization of blacks in minstrel shows, Douglass still felt that such shows, if properly done by black entertainers, and properly received by whites and blacks, could be an influential popular agency in the battle against cultural racism.⁴¹

Besides speaking out against and proposing ways to alleviate racism in the popular culture, Douglass also criticized the unflattering and dehumanizing characterizations of blacks by major American writers. Likewise, he argued, the sociocultural notion that individual black crimes and shortcomings somehow represented the black norm, while those of individual whites represented deviation from the white norm, attested to the depth of anti-Negro prejudice.⁴²

Douglass contended that even when white portraits were compared with black portraits, both the portraits and the comparisons were anti-Negro. So as to exaggerate the differences between them, the best or “highest type” of white portrait would be juxtaposed against the worst or “lowest type” of black portrait, thus praising the alleged white physical ideal as beautiful and scorning the alleged black physical ideal as ugly. Douglass observed that “the European face is drawn in harmony with the highest ideas of beauty, dignity, and intellect. Features regular and brow after the Websterian mold. The Negro,

on the other hand, appears with features distorted, lips exaggerated, forehead depressed—and the noble expression of the countenance made to harmonize with the popular idea of Negro imbecility and degradation.”⁴³ For a Negro to accept this racist, yet prevalent, sense of human physical aesthetics, Douglass implied, would be self-denigrating and conducive to self-hatred.

Douglass’s understanding of the psychology of white racism represented a subjective analysis cast in essentially historical and political terms. He maintained, for instance, that the white fear before, during, and after Reconstruction of “Negro domination” signified, on the one hand, the depth of the paranoia that racism engendered, and, on the other, the necessity of that paranoia to racism’s continuation. It stood to reason, Douglass argued in a postwar speech, that “the superior intelligence of the whites, the former subjection of the blacks, the habit of bearing rule of the whites, and the habit of submission by the blacks, make black supremacy in any part of our country utterly impossible.”⁴⁴ The white outcry and retaliation against the alleged threat of black domination, therefore, was absurd as well as irrational. By scapegoating the Negro, this racist white overreaction functioned as a smoke screen to cloak deep-seated white problems.

Douglass saw both a striking congruence and an integral relationship between the psychology of racism and the psychology of oppression. In his view, the charge of black inferiority served as “the philosophical and ethnological apology for all the hell-black crimes ever committed by the white race against the blacks and the warrant for the repetition of those crimes through all time.” As a result, he contended, the truth of the charge was essentially irrelevant, for it was not only a lie—a “monstrous argument”—but also a cloak to cover injustice and evil.⁴⁵ The racial oppressor, then, saw the racially oppressed as inferior and thus fit and destined to be oppressed.

“When men oppress and enslave their fellow men,” Douglass noted, “they have ever sought in the character of their victims the needed apology for their own tyranny.” Thus “the very vices and crimes which slavery generates are usually charged as the peculiar characteristics of the race enslaved.” To compound further the irony of making the victim the criminal, the system of oppression “not only begets a character in the oppressor favorable to the continuance of his oppression [of others], but also begets a corresponding character in his victim.”⁴⁶ Douglass implied that the oppressor, apparently freed of the responsibility and the guilt for the plight of the oppressed, might now more easily seek to strengthen his power. Regardless, as Douglass understood, both the intricate nature of the human bond and the inevitable dialectic of struggle between the oppressed and the oppressor compromise the oppressor’s hegemony. The relationship, in essence, is complex. Although

neither party can deny at least some guilt and responsibility for their conflicting situations, the primary onus for the overall situation, especially its inhumanity, lay with the oppressor.

As Douglass so often noted, the cause and effect relationships between white racism and black debasement are reciprocal and deep-seated. He argued that although black debasement affected and helped to cause white racism, the latter not only affected the former, but also was its primary cause. "This unnatural, unreasoning, and malignant prejudice," he charged, "is the secret of most of our social troubles and misfortunes." Black elevation clearly necessitated that this prejudice be alleviated.⁴⁷ Douglass advanced a similar argument in his assessment of black mental and emotional problems. Many, if not most, of these problems, according to this view, derived from the impact of white racism on blacks. Consequently, the impact of racist oppression had to be analyzed from the perspective of the black oppressed, as well as the white oppressor, because their perspectives inevitably clashed.

Douglass maintained that the negative emotional influence of white racism on many blacks was both deeply ingrained and complex. Generalizing from his own experience, he once remarked, quite revealingly, that "no colored man, with any nervous sensibility, can stand before an American audience without an intense and painful sense of the disadvantages imposed by his color."⁴⁸ This uneasiness implied that white racism helped to create and to sustain among blacks a haunting awareness of their dehumanization. It further implied a similar black awareness of the dehumanization of whites as a consequence of their antiblack racism.

Douglass constantly reiterated that white racism poisoned the psychology of race relations, particularly interpersonal interracial communication. It built a virtually impenetrable barrier between the races. As a result, it seriously obscured and almost foreclosed interracial empathy and understanding, even among the most sensitive whites and blacks. "Consciously or unconsciously," Douglass argued, "almost every white man approaches a colored man with an air of superiority and condescension. The relation subsisting between the races at once shows itself between the individuals, and each prepares, when brought together, to soften the points of antagonism. The white man tries his hand at being Negro, and the Negro, to make himself agreeable, plays the white man. The end is, each knows the other only superficially."⁴⁹

Yet, the most significant negative psychological impact of white racism on many blacks, Douglass believed, was a "consciousness of inferiority." Rooted in this particular disturbance were the most serious black mental and emotional problems. Douglass maintained consistently that this enervating sense of personal and group inadequacy resulted from social and environmental factors,

not heredity. Slavery, not surprisingly, epitomized those dehumanizing forces contributing to this “consciousness of inferiority.” Douglass lamented that even after emancipation, “the rigor of the slave system” remained evident in “the dwarfed intellect, the thoughtless, loud, and vacant laugh, the stunted figure, the flat feet, the shuffling gait, whip-scarred backs and awkward speech” of the freedpeople. Further circumstantial evidence suggestive of this “consciousness of inferiority” could be seen in the alarming increase in the incidence of black docility, notably among former slaves. “One of the most conspicuous evils of caste and oppression,” he concluded, was “that they inevitably tend to make cowards and serviles of their victims.” For him, moreover, the apparent and real acceptance of and resignation to racial segregation, discrimination, and violence by many blacks smacked of a sense of inferiority.⁵⁰

Curiously, part of this feeling of black inadequacy derived from a self-effacing black homage, witting and unwitting, to “the white man’s prejudice, whose wishes, like a well-trained servant, the Negro . . . is taught to anticipate and to obey.” Douglass despaired that far too many blacks emulated the worst and neglected the best “qualities and examples” of whites. Unlike the self-degrading example of antiblack prejudice, the lessons of the historical saga of the Jews—he and many others, white and black, agreed—were worthy of emulation.⁵¹ In spite of racial and religious proscription, Jews strove for knowledge, achievement, and socioeconomic mobility. They also prized and fought for human rights, dignity, and their identity as a people.

Douglass once wrote that “white prejudice is bad, but Negro prejudice is foolish.” Nevertheless, many blacks exhibited evidence of self-contempt and a primary source of it was their internalization of white antiblack attitudes. This ironic process exacerbated the problem of black self-hatred by further complicating its roots and manifestations. Douglass urged pride in both people in general and blacks in particular, given that “finding that the race about us holds us in contempt, we are too apt in imitation [to] hold each other in contempt.” He noted that qualified black professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, often failed to receive black patronage merely because whites refused to patronize them.⁵²

The black “consciousness of inferiority” was most “sad and discouraging” to Douglass, as it suggested that those blacks whom it afflicted had “fallen to a depth of degradation more profound and hopeless than any other people among us.” Despondency was not his style, but black self-contempt was unsettling, and, consequently, some measure of despondency was unavoidable. Late in his life, he often repeated his continuing concern that “the mountain devil that now stands in the way of the colored man’s progress is the

assumption of the white man's moral, mental, and physical superiority; and every colored person who denies to his race either mental or moral ability administers to this spirit of evil."⁵³ Undoubtedly, a conscious, all-consuming black desire to be white represented the most extreme and tragic manifestation of a black inferiority complex. Douglass, nevertheless, believed that grave concern over this black "consciousness of inferiority" should not culminate in despair, for only evasion and inaction could take place in such a context. Instead, as usual, he counseled focused analysis as a prelude to concerted action to alleviate both white racism and black "consciousness of inferiority." Given their tangled relationship, success toward the elimination of one constituted a blow for the elimination of the other.

The link between white racism and black "consciousness of inferiority" mirrored the power relationship between blacks and whites, functioning as both a cause and an effect of that relationship. Douglass tended to juxtapose in bold relief white power and aggression against black powerlessness and accommodation. He argued that black chattel slavery—clearly "an unnatural power" relationship—exemplified these alleged psychocultural traits. After studying the abolitionist message of *The Columbian Orator* as a young slave, he had concluded that "power" along with "pride" and "avarice" represented "the secret of all slavery and oppression": "their true foundation."⁵⁴

Douglass echoed Lord Acton's adage that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. "The perpetual tendency of power everywhere to encroach upon weakness, and of the crafty to take advantage of the simple," he declared, made power extremely dangerous. Unchecked power tended to become abused. As a result, evil and injustice inevitably increased. "The exercise of absolute and irresponsible power of man over man," then, "develops no true manliness either in the oppressed or the oppressor. It breeds a haughty spirit and hot temper, in the one, and cowardly servility, in the other." This "fatal poison of irresponsible power," epitomized by slavery, had even corrupted his once innocent mistress, Sophia Auld.⁵⁵ The exercise of irresponsible power by one person over another thus diminished the humanity of both parties.

Douglass's use of the stereotypical traits of white power and aggression, juxtaposed against his use of those of black powerlessness and accommodation, served a didactic as well as an analytic purpose. Besides his use of these traits as a tool to characterize and, accordingly, to examine relations between blacks and whites, he used them to offer a stinging criticism of those with a vested interest in the continuation of the uneven power relationship itself. He encouraged, moreover, understanding of, and sympathy and aid for, the relatively powerless. Furthermore, he counseled resistance to unjust power. Such

"power concedes nothing without a struggle," he argued. "It never did, and it never will."⁵⁶

Douglass knew, however, that his model of total white power versus total black powerlessness was unrealistic. In reality, the distinction between power and powerlessness was more relative and more ambiguous. The mutual dependency between them underscored both the general complexity of the interaction between them and the specific complexity of the compromises—though often delicate and weighted in favor of power—suggested by this interdependency. It was not surprising, then, that power was easily misunderstood and abused, for it was at once elusive and attainable. No human power, therefore, was absolute, not even that of the racist oppressor. Accordingly, no individual or group was either wholly powerful or powerless, wholly aggressive or defensive. Directed as it was at white and black, the relatively powerful and powerless, Douglass's analysis of and campaign against the causes and consequences of white racism demonstrated the perception of power as a complicated phenomenon.

The magnitude of racism never ceased to amaze Douglass. All presumptions, it seemed to him, were set against blacks. This perverse tendency often went so far as to promote the acceptance of their degradation. It also promoted the racist hatred and repression of black socioeconomic accomplishment: a purported subversion of that status quo. Furthermore, he noted, "the evil lies deeper than prejudice against color. It is an intense hatred of the colored man when he is distinguished for any ennobling qualities of head or heart."⁵⁷ Properly conceived, then, white racism signified, among other things, a sustained attack against black virtue and success.

The integral ties between racism and capitalism in the United States have made the racist offensive against blacks all the more powerful. In addition to ensuring the economic exploitation of blacks, these ties fit into the larger pattern of the social, political, and legal repression of blacks. Nevertheless, racism, an endemic part of the broader society and culture, is a vital element of the economic system. Capitalism, conversely, is a vital element of racism. Indeed, one of the primary factors behind white racism, if not the primary factor, was the enslavement and subsequent economic exploitation of Africans, free as well as slave, in the New World. This systematic effort "to coin dollars out of our blood," as Douglass phrased it, functioned as both a cause and an effect of white racism.⁵⁸

Beyond legalized slavery, the free Negro, confronted with economic repression, struggled valiantly to make a decent living. Consequently, in a famous letter written in 1853 to Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,

Douglass outlined the need for a black industrial school in order to train his people for skilled industrial crafts. Similar black proposals proliferated throughout the nineteenth century. Douglass argued that blacks struggled against almost insuperable odds in their quest for a decent living, as they typically lacked adequate employment. The increasing job competition between them and immigrant working-class whites made a bad situation even worse. As a result, many blacks fell into a cruel circle of “poverty, ignorance, and degradation.” Poverty is the Negro’s “greatest social enemy,” Douglass concluded, and “the want of money . . . is the root of all evil to the colored people.” In a speech before the Second Annual Exposition of the Colored People of North Carolina, on 1 October 1880, he went so far as to declare before his rapt audience that “we are despised more for our poverty than for our race or color.”⁵⁹

With emancipation and the specter (and reality) of increased job competition between blacks and whites, economic repression of blacks persisted and often intensified. Racism as well as the liberal and competitive ethos of capitalism undergirded the rapidly expanding postwar economy. Douglass contended that many whites, unsympathetic to the pathetic plight of innumerable freedpeople, cried out: “let the Negro starve.” Likewise, he maintained, the myth that blacks, once free, would be unable to withstand the inevitable competition with “superior” Anglo-Saxons, and, like the Amerindians, would eventually die out, also appealed to many whites. Both the cry to “let the Negro starve” and the myth of the eventual extinction of freed blacks jibed neatly with an economic system structurally dependent on racism and cheap, exploitable labor. In addition, the “cry” and the “myth” proved amenable to the apocalyptic struggle between the races predicted and supported by the explicit racism of the Social Darwinian world view.⁶⁰ The Negro, consequently, was not only marginal, but expendable to the economic system. Ironically, the exploitation of the Negro was not only central, but indispensable.

The economic picture for free blacks throughout the nineteenth century remained bleak. Emancipation and Reconstruction did not materially alter this disheartening reality. In fact, the full elaboration of the southern systems of black sharecropping, tenant farming, and convict lease labor during the postwar period simply caused the already deplorable economic situation of southern blacks in particular to stagnate. Northern blacks often fared no better economically. Although Douglass attacked the economic repression of blacks throughout the nation, he often focused his criticisms on the South’s notoriously brutal economic system in which the vast majority of blacks labored. The southern system, notwithstanding its distinctive features, represented

basically a regional variation on a national economic pattern. Douglass roundly criticized this pattern, for it wrongly, yet inevitably, “keeps back the wages of the black laborer by fraud; . . . refuses to rent and sell land [fairly, if at all, to blacks]; . . . excludes them from printers’ unions and other mechanical associations; . . . refuses to teach them trades, and shuts them out from all respectable employments.”⁶¹ While Negrophobes might explain the degraded economic status of Negroes as the result of their innate inferiority and their consequent unfitness for freedom’s demands, Douglass explained that status as the result of individual and institutional racism. Much of black crime and other black social problems, in addition, represented the logical outcome of the economic “defeat of emancipation”: the systematic restriction and denial of legitimate black livelihood.⁶²

During the nineteenth century, an important outgrowth of the dynamic interplay between capitalism and racism was its tendency to obfuscate class antagonisms. The division, conscious and unconscious, of the working classes and the poor along racial and ethnic lines constituted a major factor behind their inability to mount a united and sustained campaign on their own behalf against economic exploitation. Douglass sometimes talked of a utopian, quasi-Marxist unity of the black and white working classes and the black and white poor against their class enemies, South and North: slaveholding, landowning, and industrial oligarchs. He once spoke of poor blacks and whites rallying behind a poor people’s party in the South. He also talked of both a conflict “between the wealthy slaveholder and the poor man” and a conflict between the capitalist and the laborer. Both, he suggested, signified ingredients of a latent, yet incipient, class consciousness of the working classes and the poor.⁶³

Nevertheless, Douglass hinted that this class ideology had serious limitations given the integral ties between capitalism and racism. He suggested that the disposition of laboring whites, especially those in labor unions, to oppose the socioeconomic competition and mobility of blacks—real and imagined—grew out of their racism as well as a misperception of their class interests. “It is a great mistake,” he argued, “for any class of laborers to isolate itself and thus weaken the bond of brotherhood between those on whom the burden and hardships of labor fell.” He insinuated that regardless of race, the capitalist, not the Negro, was the class enemy of laborers. From the perspective of whites whose racism generally blinded them to their class interests, though, free black labor allegedly took jobs away from white labor. Black laborers allegedly ate “the bread which should be eaten by [white] American freemen.”⁶⁴ Historically, Douglass acknowledged, this confusion has grown out of a racist rationalization for the exploitation of labor under capitalism. The scapegoating of the Negro for the inherent conflict between laborer and capitalist has

revealed a basic confusion of class interests with racial prejudice. In addition, this scapegoating process has illustrated distinctly the critical link and the dynamic interplay between capitalism and racism.

Capitalists, Douglass suggested, were comparable to slaveholders; “wage slavery” was comparable to chattel slavery. “Experience demonstrates,” he remarked, “that there may be a slavery of wages only a little less galling and crushing in its effects than chattel slavery, and that this slavery of wages must go down with the other.” The ability of capitalists, like slaveholders, to manipulate ethnic prejudices as well as antiblack prejudice seriously undermined class consciousness across interracial and interethnic lines.⁶⁵ Capitalists have characteristically used racial and ethnic tensions to cloak the competition for a limited number of jobs endemic to capitalism. As Douglass noted, the slaveholders used a strikingly similar technique to pacify the white, nonslaveholding laborers.

The slave was robbed by his master of all his earnings, above what was required for his bare physical necessities, and the white laboring man was robbed by the slave system of the just results of his labor, because he was flung into competition with a class of laborers who worked without wages. The slaveholders blinded them to this competition by keeping alive their prejudice against the slaves as men—not against them as slaves. They appealed to their pride, often denouncing emancipation as tending to place the white working man on an equality with Negroes, and by this means they succeeded in drawing off the minds of the poor whites . . . that by the rich slave-master they were already regarded as but a single remove from equality with the slave.⁶⁶

As antiblack prejudice often blinded white, nonslaveholding laborers to their class interests, the enormity of racism, slavery, and other evils related to capitalism often obscured from its victims both capitalism’s inherent evils and its causal role in related evils.

Despite his various criticisms of the gross injustices that capitalism engendered, notably among laborers, black and white, Douglass was not anticapitalist. On the contrary, he favored capitalism, or private enterprise. Given his humble beginnings as a slave and both an unskilled and skilled laborer, though, he empathized with labor and the poor, and he often displayed insight into their plight. He denounced cheap labor as antilabor and too procapital. Cheap labor represented the concern of those with “but little sympathy with common humanity.” It was “the cry of the few against the many.” It was the desire of capitalists, “those who live by the sweat of other men’s faces,” rather than laborers. Speaking of the “sharp contrast of wealth and poverty,” more-

over, he argued that the capitalist's pursuit of profit necessarily defrauded labor of "its due proportion."⁶⁷

Nevertheless, Douglass opposed socialism, communism, or any attempt to abolish capitalism as chimerical. In the same procapitalist spirit, he criticized trade unions for excessive hostility toward their capitalist antagonists. The conflict between labor and capital, he admitted, was deep-seated and perplexing. He still alleged, however, that in the United States "the strife between capital and labor . . . is comparatively equal. The one is not the haughty master and the other the weak and abject slave as is the case in some parts of Europe. Here, the man of toil is not bowed, but erect and strong. He feels that capital is not more indispensable than labor, and he can therefore meet the capitalist as the representative of an equal power."⁶⁸ This interpretation contradicted the increasing degradation of labor as well as the overwhelming dominance of capital in the rapidly industrializing United States. It also illustrated the depth of Douglass's procapitalist bias.

Although Douglass acknowledged the ties between capitalist exploitation and racist oppression, he never fully fathomed the depths of their integral interrelationship. He suggested, as a result, that racist oppression and capitalist exploitation were separable and amenable to reform. His humanism and liberal optimism in conjunction with his reformist outlook supported this suggestion. Douglass's thinking on the relationship between capitalism and racism remained limited and ambivalent. He suggested that while there was much to criticize about capitalism, namely its exploitation of labor and its ties to racism, there was also much to praise: individual socioeconomic betterment and national economic progress. Capitalist progress had its human costs, but the relevant question was whether it was worth those costs. Notwithstanding his humanitarianism, Douglass accepted the economic system without questioning its human costs to the point where the system itself might be found irretrievably flawed. The critical problem, regardless, persisted: was capitalism as an economic system inherently exploitative and racist? If, as evidence suggested, it was, what, if any, were the alternatives?

In light of his bourgeois and assimilationist outlook, it is understandable that Douglass found a significant correlation between the intensity of race prejudice and the level of socioeconomic status among whites. Simply stated, higher socioeconomic status seemed to correspond to less antiblack prejudice. It is ironic, however, that he expressed so much admiration for an apparent lack of antiblack prejudice among whites who often achieved their wealth by exploiting labor and ethnic and racial prejudices. Indeed, he referred to abolition as "poor man's work" because "the rich and noble will not do it." The

latter, such as capitalists and high church officials, generally had too much of a vested interest in the status quo to oppose slavery. Douglass certainly condemned racism wherever it surfaced, regardless of its source. It just seemed to him to surface most clearly, contradictory evidence notwithstanding, among the lower classes.⁶⁹

To an extent, in Douglass's eyes, the glitter of socioeconomic success ultimately outshone the drab luster of its human costs. Furthermore, the generally more subtle prejudice among well-to-do whites, though no less repugnant, seemed less offensive and less harmful than the blatant prejudice among less well-to-do whites. Yet, as Douglass himself insinuated, given the widespread power and influence of wealthy whites, their antiblack prejudice exerted a social impact equal to, and often greater than, that of poor, working, and lower-class whites. Nevertheless, he believed that the best in morality and refinement could be found largely among those most like himself: the "better sort"—the middle and upper classes who had the luxury of the time and resources to cultivate such qualities. Evils like race prejudice, therefore, predominated among those most unlike himself: the "baser sort"—the poor and lower classes who lacked the advantages, if not the ability, of their class superiors. Thus, "the higher the gradation in intelligence and refinement," or "the higher we go up in the gradations of humanity and moral greatness," he maintained, "the farther removed are all artificial distinctions and restraints of mere caste or color."⁷⁰

This judgment expressed a clear class bias: the notion of the superiority of the "better sort" to the "baser sort." The elitism of this judgment as well as its class bias contradicted the democratic and egalitarian spirit that Douglass so vigorously embraced. In addition, the notion of the moralistic and humanistic superiority of the "better sort" vividly exemplified the irony of humanism and moralism growing out of the exploitative reality of capitalist success. Under capitalism, in fact, neither poverty nor wealth necessarily promoted either humanism or moralism. Suggestions to the contrary were consequently romantic, for—as Douglass would agree—these qualities existed irrespective of the individual's class situation. Nevertheless, Douglass apparently observed them to a greater extent among the "better sort."

Douglass suggested that both enlightenment, an active commitment to a better society, and gentility, a more democratic version of noblesse oblige, also helped to alleviate the race prejudice of the "better sort." Having mixed on equal terms with some of the most enlightened and more economically privileged individuals of his time, he surmised that "the higher the colored man rises in the scale of society, the less prejudice does he meet."⁷¹ The relatively well-to-do, reform-minded, and liberal whites among whom he moved so

effortlessly seemed to offer a ray of hope for the enduring racial impasse. When compared to the enormity of the problem, though, that hope paled.

Although many whites, like those with whom Douglass associated, might tolerate or even welcome black mobility and success, most did not. In general, he argued, "it seems that the more intelligent, orderly, and prosperous we become the more bitterly we are persecuted and the more stringently are the lines drawn against us." Hosea Easton, a black minister, had earlier suggested the likelihood that as blacks increasingly "possessed . . . redeeming principles" antiblack prejudice might intensify. Douglass went so far as to conclude that "in his downward course" the Negro "meets with no resistance," yet "his step upward is resented and resisted at every step of his progress."⁷² Indeed, black economic success aggravated white fears and anxieties covering a wide range of concerns: from job competition to status anxiety, from social equality to intermarriage, from black sexuality to interracial sexuality. Whites, therefore, repressed black economic success, especially that of black men, like they repressed the fears and anxieties this success signified and sparked. The economic repression of black men has undermined their breadwinning role, contributing to black degradation and, particularly, to black emasculation.

Douglass perceived that "the Negro as a poor ignorant creature does not contradict the race pride of the white race." Rather, "he is more a source of amusement . . . than an object of resentment" because "he conforms to the popular belief of his character, and in that character he is welcome."⁷³ The stark contrast that he continually noted between the white image of the faithful and beloved black servant, as against that of the haughty and despised black gentleman, illustrated the distressing persistence of white hatred and repression of black success. The irony of the situation was not lost on him. "The resistance we now meet," he charged, "is the proof of our progress." That resistance was aimed not at the Negro "as a slave, a servant or a menial," but "as a man."⁷⁴

Oddly enough, the problem of white repression of black success did not always unsettle Douglass. Once, for instance, he asserted that the problem might be interpreted as a period of probation. At another point, he refused to despair because "the same resistance in kind, though not in degree, has to be met by white men and white women who rise from lowly conditions." This view implied that economic racism and discrimination were inevitable but conquerable. Douglass's contention that "society resents the pretensions of those it considers upstarts" supported the view of the resistance of the "better sort" to the socioeconomic mobility of, and competition with, the "baser sort" as an inevitable, yet surmountable, status anxiety.⁷⁵

Douglass, like Booker T. Washington, believed that the resistance of whites

to black economic gains would “gradually yield to the pressure of wealth, education, and high character” achieved by blacks.⁷⁶ According to this argument, black economic progress, like economic progress for immigrant and poor whites, would proceed concurrently with and, in part, because of their increasing assimilation into the American mainstream. The difficult struggle for black bourgeois success and respectability would ultimately triumph over its powerful racist white opposition as a result of the increasing integration of blacks into the larger society. Looking at the strong opposition of whites to black integration into the larger society, particularly the economic sector, how the struggle for black bourgeois success and respectability might succeed in the foreseeable future, except on a small scale, or even more imperfectly in a segregated economic community, was unclear. An abiding faith in a moral universe bounded by an equally strong humanism anchored this overweening optimism in the economic fruits of black assimilation. Such optimism, however, obscured the countervailing and ubiquitous influence of white supremacy. Consequently, this optimism sometimes proved illusory, sometimes delusory.

Nonetheless, Douglass consistently advocated black bourgeois success and respectability in spite of the apparently inevitable racist repression it engendered. Blacks had to become an integral part of, and succeed within, the economic system, all the while struggling to help rid it of its antiblack racism and discrimination (and other evil aspects) through reform. For Douglass, as long as the economic system retained its viability, the black struggle to rise within it remained worthwhile.

The thoroughgoing materialism of his bourgeois mentality supplemented and complemented his basic idealism. He embraced idealism as the conceptual impetus behind economic change, like sociocultural change, while he embraced materialism as the concrete expression of that change. Thus, like Washington, Douglass believed that in the long run, black economic success would undermine white economic racism and discrimination by showing it to be economically unprofitable as well as morally wrong. A belief in the power of economic rationalism, then, in conjunction with a belief in the eventual triumph of morality fueled his belief that whites must accept black economic accomplishment at some point. If moral appeal failed, as it often did by itself, then certainly those Negroes whose economic contributions to the system were indispensable could not continually be repressed. At some point somewhere, they had to gain a measure of acceptance and thereby contribute to the alleviation of economic racism and discrimination, if only at first among liberal and sympathetic whites. “To live here as we ought,” Douglass reasoned, “we must fasten ourselves to our countrymen through their every day cardinal wants.”⁷⁷

This, of course, meant blacks had to be more than laborers, especially servants and domestics. It meant they had to be capitalists, too.

Douglass believed that racism could be overcome, notwithstanding tremendous obstacles, and that relations between blacks and whites need not be based on distrust and prejudice. Much of his optimism flowed from his fervent belief in the “enlightened and humane spirit of the age.” This progressive ideal also supported his commitment to protest ceaselessly against racism. In 1849, he editorialized that “this prejudice is so unjust, unnatural, and irrational, that ridicule and indignation seem to be the only weapons with which to assail it.”⁷⁸ Nevertheless, he maintained that protest in concert with reason and morality would help to alleviate it. As critical and powerful as these forces might be, however, they still confronted a titanic struggle in the offensive against racism.

The revolutionary issue of emancipation represented an illuminating gauge of the difficulty of alleviating prejudice. Even though its realization signified a step in the right direction, Douglass realized that “there is no such thing as immediate emancipation either for the master or for the slave.” He acknowledged that “pride of race . . . and prejudice against color will raise their hateful clamor for oppression of the Negro as heretofore.”⁷⁹ The vigorous and often intensified persistence of prejudice clearly exacerbated the problem of long-range emancipation. After the formal ritual of emancipation, much remained to be done for blacks. Regrettably, much of it, notably in the areas of economic assistance and protection of black freedom, went undone. Racism, obviously, was the primary reason.

Douglass concluded that the deeply ingrained, powerfully emotive, and complicated system of attitudes, values, beliefs, ideals, behavior, and institutions that made up racism would require “time, experience, and culture” to be overcome. In addition to white resistance, white backlash posed a serious threat to the battle against racism. Accordingly, “whenever the American people shall become convinced that they have gone too far in recognizing the rights of the Negro,” Douglass surmised, “they will find some way to abridge those rights.”⁸⁰ Both racist resistance and racist backlash, therefore, had to be checked and reversed.

In essence, the entire fabric touching upon race relations had to be reexamined and largely rewoven. Douglass acknowledged that a massive social reform—in effect, a social revolution—was in order. Minor alterations would not be sufficient. Legal reforms, for instance, though important, were woefully insufficient, in and of themselves, because “there is servility in the enslaved race and haughtiness in the master race which no legislation can reach or remove.” Indeed, “no two races sustaining the relations . . . that the

white and colored people have sustained could have those relations instantly changed by any change in the laws however stringently worded or faithfully enforced.”⁸¹ Social reform of race relations, consequently, necessitated related kinds of change, including, yet going beyond, the strictly legal.

Still, the question of practical steps to take toward improving race relations remained. Of Douglass’s many suggestions, several stand out. Most important, he urged blacks to assimilate. The more they became like whites, the more acceptable to them they would be. He stressed optimism, bravery, and patience as well as self-reliance and pride. In addition to hard work, thrift, saving, and accumulating property, he emphasized sound morality, good character, and the value of education and knowledge. In fact, Douglass argued that a commitment to middle-class virtue and respectability among blacks would eventually help whites to overcome their antiblack racism. The growth of a black middle-class would show whites the falsity of the notion of a black peril—economic, political, social, sexual, or otherwise. In addition, it would show whites how much like blacks they actually were. Thus “if the time shall ever come when we shall possess among the colored people . . . a class of men noted for enterprise, industry, economy, and success, we shall no longer have any trouble in the matter of civil and political rights. The battle against popular prejudice will have been fought and won, and in common with all other races and colors we shall have an equal chance in the race of life.”⁸²

Douglass counseled whites that they might begin to overcome their antiblack prejudice by trying to understand it through critical examination. He offered that they might begin to alleviate it by actually doing something to help blacks. They had to begin to conceive of and to treat blacks as equals. “The way to break down an unreasonable custom,” he concluded, “is to contradict it in practice.” As whites helped blacks to help themselves, their antiblack prejudice would necessarily diminish. Quite understandably, then, he saw his political jobs as United States marshall of the District of Columbia (1877–1881), recorder of deeds for the District of Columbia (1881–1886), and *chargé d’affaires* for Santo Domingo and minister to Haiti (1889–1891), as important blows in the fight against prejudice. In 1880, Senator George F. Hoar of Massachusetts, head of the National Republican Convention, struck a similar blow when he asked Blanche K. Bruce, former black Mississippi senator and future registrar of the United States Treasury, to assist him. Douglass and Richard T. Greener, an eminent black lawyer-politician, thanked Senator Hoar for what they saw as an important act on behalf of equality and justice.⁸³

Douglass often stressed the importance of socialization and education, especially in a multiracial society like the United States, as a way to help people to accept different races of people as an equal and integral part of

humanity. This was particularly significant for the training of the youth. Like his other suggestions to improve race relations, this one reflected a basic idealism undergirded with moralism and rationalism. In light of the continuing vigor of racism and discrimination, though, his idealism might appear excessive. "Let colored children be educated and grow up side by side with white children, come up friends from unsophisticated and generous childhood together," he contended, "and it will require a powerful agent to convert them into enemies, and lead them to prey upon each other's rights and liberties."⁸⁴ Familial, peer, community, and customary influences are among the many that have often worked against such an optimistic outlook. Regardless, his optimism continued undaunted.

Douglass suggested that strategically the problem of racism should be attacked at once in its various manifestations. It was important, he implied, to tackle the multifaceted problem on the institutional and individual levels. Attempts to purge individuals of racism necessarily had to be accompanied by related efforts to purge institutions of the same malady. Individuals and institutions had to be made safe for one another. Granted the interrelationship between them, a serious flaw like racism in one would necessarily surface in some guise in the other. Douglass's repeated calls for justice and equality for blacks and other oppressed groups and individuals mirrored this understanding. He urged blacks, for instance, to strengthen their families and communities, and to employ the school, the church, the various instruments of government, the press, the bar, the public platform, and other vital institutions to promote race progress, and by implication, to promote progress in race relations.⁸⁵ All-black institutions, furthermore, logically had to give way to colorblind institutions. Douglass deemed imperative an all-out attack on white supremacy. Without such an attack, racism has endured and frequently worsened since his time.

6. Feminism, Race, and Social Reform

The contributions of black and white women to the antislavery cause were indispensable. They not only spoke and wrote effectively on behalf of the slave, but they also conducted annual antislavery fairs that helped to finance the movement. Similarly, they assisted the petition campaign against slavery by signing and circulating petitions. Through their participation in the antislavery cause, many of these women gained a deeper comprehension of the comparable, though different, oppression of slaves and women. Quite a few of the pioneering nineteenth-century American women who espoused feminism—the doctrine of equality between the sexes, of woman’s need for self-definition and self-determination, and the struggle to realize these goals—first spoke out publicly as antislavery advocates. These included Maria W. Stewart, Sojourner Truth, Maria Weston Chapman, Lydia Maria Child, Lucretia Mott, and Angelina and Sarah Grimké.

The emancipation struggles of slaves and women became increasingly symbiotic as the tactics and ideology of antislavery began to function as a primary basis for those of women’s rights. Moral suasion, political action, speeches, appeals, conventions, petitions, on one hand, and natural rights, egalitarian, and humanistic concepts, on the other, served the causes of slave and woman.¹ The argument for woman’s emancipation, like that for the slave’s emancipation, constituted an integral component of the larger struggles for human rights and a truly democratic and republican America. Both abolitionism and women’s rights took root and flowered in the reformist ethos of nineteenth-century America.

Commitment to women’s rights constituted an article of faith among orthodox Garrisonians as well as other radical social reformers. The 1840 split between the moral suasionist wing of abolitionism, the American Anti-Slavery Society, and the political wing, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, derived in part from a difference over the “Woman Question.” The former accepted women as equal participants in the organization with the right to positions of leadership, while the latter did not and preferred that women work through auxiliary societies.² The difference over the comparative merits of moral suasion and political action as abolitionist tactics, however, was the major cause of the split.

Around the time of this historic split, Elizabeth Cady Stanton converted Frederick Douglass to feminism. Stanton was recently married and just back

from London where the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention had reenacted the split over the "Woman Question" by barring her and Lucretia Mott. Douglass, only two years removed from slavery, remembered her on that occasion as "a young lady and an earnest abolitionist . . . at the pains of setting before me in a very strong light the wrong and injustice" of woman's exclusion from the political process. "I could not meet her arguments," he recalled, "except with the shallow plea of 'custom,' 'natural division of duties,' 'indelucacy of woman's taking part in politics,' the common talk of 'woman's sphere.' . . . All of which that able woman, who then no less logical than now, brushed away."³

Douglass's abolitionist activities brought him into contact with other feminist-abolitionists who furthered his commitment to women's rights. "Observing woman's agency, devotion, and efficiency in pleading the cause of the slave," he later wrote, "gratitude for this high service early moved me to give favourable attention to the subject of . . . 'woman's rights' and caused me to be denominated a woman's-rights man." This badge, notwithstanding the popular opprobrium it engendered, Douglass wore sincerely and proudly. At least as important to his commitment to feminism as his initial conversion by Stanton, therefore, was the praiseworthy work "of the honorable women, who have not only assisted me, but who according to their opportunity and ability, have generously contributed to the abolition of slavery, and the recognition of the equal manhood of the colored race." Thus, he surmised that:

When the true history of the Anti-Slavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages; for the cause of the slave has been peculiarly woman's cause. Her heart and conscience have supplied in large degree its motive and mainspring. Her skill, industry, patience, and perseverance have been wonderfully manifest in every trial hour. Not only did her feet run on 'willing errands,' and her fingers do the work, which in large degree supplied the sinews of war, but her deep moral convictions, and her tender humane sensibilities, found convincing . . . expression by her pen and her voice.⁴

Equally as important to the motivation for Douglass's commitment to women's rights as the antislavery contributions of female feminist-abolitionists was the vital role of women generally in his life. The most important of these were Harriet, the mother he barely knew but whose memory he cherished and whose critical significance for his sense of identity haunted him throughout his life; Betsey, his kind-hearted and loving grandmother; Sophia Auld, the slave mistress who began his formal intellectual training; Anna and Helen, his loving and devoted wives; and Julia Griffiths, his loyal friend and indefatiga-

ble abolitionist cohort. In part, Douglass's feminism represented his awareness of his immeasurable personal debt to them. It likewise illustrated his growing awareness that sexism circumscribed and degraded their lives as well as those of all men and women. For him, sexism and racism represented twin aspects of a larger evil: the refusal to embrace and act upon the immutable principle of human equality. Douglass's feminism, like his abolitionism, signified a struggle to foster human emancipation as a means toward human understanding and unity. A profound belief in human equality clearly undergirded these lofty and laudable aims.

Throughout his life, Douglass expended the bulk of his reform energies in the black liberation struggle. Once the slave was emancipated, he was able not only to focus this energy more directly on the problems of free and freed blacks, but also to rechannel some of it into the cause of woman's emancipation. In 1885, he wrote to Oliver Johnson, a fellow feminist-abolitionist, that "I am taking much interest just now in the Woman Suffrage question, and find the meetings for this purpose a substitute for the old anti-slavery meetings." Besides serving as an outlet for his profuse reform energy, the woman suffrage movement served as an extension of Douglass's abolitionism. He remarked in a woman's rights speech in 1888 that "in some respects this woman suffrage movement is but a continuance of the old anti-slavery movement. We have the same sources of opposition to contend with, and we must meet them with the same spirit and determination, and with much the same arguments."⁵ Douglass aimed his abolitionism at the slavery of sex in addition to the slavery of race.

Douglass praised female feminist-abolitionists for their work in the antisexist battles. He lauded as an intrinsic element of their antislavery activities their efforts to aid the free Negro's elevation. In the 15 June 1848 issue of *The North Star*, he commended the small, interracial Women's Association of Philadelphia for both their antislavery work and their aid to free Northern blacks. Their financial support of *The North Star* when the newspaper needed it most particularly gratified Douglass. British women abolitionists also struck a blow for the elevation of the free Negro through their contributions to various philanthropic affairs on behalf of the slave. Speaking in Cork, Ireland on 23 October 1845, he praised those "ladies, English, Irish, and Scotch," who gave money and items to sell to the Boston Anti-Slavery Bazaar sponsored by the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society under Maria Weston Chapman's leadership. He assured them that "whatever is done, every stitch . . . taken—every motion made with the paint brush, has a treble value on our side of the Atlantic. We are made to know that there are hearts beating in unison with our own." More directly important for the cause of free black elevation, he re-

marked, "we hold up those little works of art . . . as incentives to industry on the part of our own people."⁶

Douglass observed, too, that antislavery work among women was a boon to the cause of women's rights. During his abolitionist tour of the western United States in 1847, he noted that wherever women engaged in antislavery causes, "there is more intellectual life and vigour among . . . [them], and much more happiness." The conclusion proved inescapable: "Anti-Slavery is doing much here for the elevation and improvement of woman." He likewise interpreted the involvement of women in the various social reform movements of nineteenth-century America as an important means for them to assess and to improve their situation as women and, consequently, to develop a feminist consciousness. Besides their involvement in the abolitionist, temperance, and peace movements, he also noted their involvement in public education, institutionalization (notably hospitals, asylums, and prisons), health and sanitation, police protection, and court justice. Reform activity among women, then, taught them to think for themselves and to view the world from their perspective as women.⁷ A heightened and sometimes novel comprehension of man's oppression of woman represented an important result of the introspective and extrospective scrutiny central to a genuine reform commitment for many men as well as women, according to Douglass.

Douglass applauded the courage and achievements of women who withstood intense popular disapproval and championed woman's rights. He likened their bravery, naturally enough, to that of the abolitionists. That these same women were often also abolitionists only enhanced his respect and admiration for them. In an 1888 speech to the annual meeting of the New England Woman Suffrage Association, he expressed his deep appreciation for "the noble women who dared to speak for the freedom of the slave, at a time when it required far more courage to do so than is required to speak in the woman suffrage cause at this day." He attributed the successes of the woman's rights movement, particularly woman's struggle to realize her talents and potential, to such bravery. At the remarkable achievements of women in the formerly overwhelmingly male-dominated enclaves of scholarship, teaching, and literature, for instance, he could only marvel and rejoice. "Only a few centuries ago," he pointed out historically, "women were not allowed to learn the letters of the alphabet, now she takes her place among the intellectual forces of the day, and ranks with our finest scholars, best teachers and most successful authors."⁸

Nineteenth-century feminists typically accepted the notion of inherent and immutable psychological and emotional differences, in addition to biological and physiological ones, between the sexes. These differences supported the

related notion of woman's proper sphere as wife-mother of the nuclear family. Thus, feminists who (apparently including Douglass) supported voluntary motherhood—the right of woman to choose when to be pregnant through mutual or unilateral abstinence—remained largely wedded to traditional notions of wifedom as well as motherhood and family. This obtained even though they often criticized aspects of the family as presently constituted, like involuntary motherhood.⁹

To make the family work, it was imperative that the wife-mother be warm, loving, intuitional, and the protector of manners and morals. These feminine qualities balanced well against man's cold, detached, and rational qualities, and his roles as familial breadwinner and protector. The expansion of woman's private sphere to include a public personality constituted the central thrust of nineteenth-century feminism. These feminists endeavored principally to alleviate sexual inequality by gaining political rights and power for women, notably the vote. Feminist leaders, like black leaders, typically viewed the political process as the front where their liberation struggle would be waged and won. As a black leader and a feminist, Douglass personified the ideological and practical congruence between the political liberation of blacks and women.

Douglass's feminism, consistent with nineteenth-century feminism in general, was more politically than socially radical. Woman's political equality, he argued, would change neither her familial roles and duties nor her exemplary nature. He noted that while the experience of limited woman suffrage in Austria had not been a panacea for Austrian women's many and serious grievances, it had exerted no discernably negative effect on her vital domestic roles and duties. "Austrian society," he observed, "has not been unhinged, and domestic peace is not perceptibly disturbed. Households are well managed and children as well cared for as formerly." Douglass viewed as unfounded and alarmist the charge that political differences between wife and husband might create division in the home. "A difference of opinion, like a discord in music," he remarked, "sometimes gives the highest effects of harmony. A thousand times better is it to have a brave outspoken woman by our side than a piece of mincing nothingness."¹⁰

A major assumption underlying the argument for woman's claim to political rights and power was her inherently good character. Being "an angel of peace, temperance, and social order," and "the mold of manners, the model of refinement, the mainstay of virtue," as well as "an angel of beauty," meant that she would naturally exercise a salutary effect on public life and politics. Douglass and his feminist colleagues were convinced "that Woman's influence will be found to be refining and elevating in public, as all experience proves it

to be in private.” In Austria, women voters, even those of the landed aristocracy, Douglass claimed, voted for liberty and progress and often, consequently, favored more radical candidates.¹¹

In the United States, woman’s innately beneficent nature had already led many women to identify with and fight for the slave’s emancipation. In retrospective praise of Lydia Maria Child, feminist-abolitionist, Douglass noted: “sympathetic in her nature, it was easy for . . . [her] to ‘remember those in bonds as bound with them.’” He similarly praised the women involved in the antislavery bazaars as characteristically “true to their noble natures as women” who convincingly answered “no” to the poetic speculation:

Shall we behold, unheeding
Life’s holiest feelings crushed;
While woman’s heart is bleeding
Shall woman’s voice be hushed?

While man was characteristically heartless, “the heart of woman is ever warm, tenderly alive, and throbs in deepest sympathy with the sorrows and sufferings of every class, colour, and clime, over the globe. She is the last to inflict injury and the first to repair it. If she is ever found in the ranks of the enemies of freedom, she is there at the bidding of man, and in open disobedience to her own noble nature.”¹² Thus while man’s natural greed promoted oppression, woman’s natural altruism promoted freedom.

Woman’s ethical influence, Douglass argued, necessarily opposed and softened man’s greater insensitivity and susceptibility to wrong. In 1851, he acknowledged that he thought “a great deal of female influence in all great moral undertakings.” As a result, he recommended that “a warm-hearted, earnest and intelligent” female correspondent would greatly enhance the moral quality of his newspaper. More important, woman’s “instinctively gentle, tender, peaceful, and orderly” ethical sense could be used to improve political morality. At the moment, he lamented, the government “is divested of woman’s instructive perception of character, and her quick sense of right and wrong, her tender solicitude for childhood, and her abhorrence of war. It deprives itself [of] her delicacy and refinements, and makes possible drunken and dissolute rulers.” Woman’s most worthwhile influence, though, would undoubtedly be her instinctive opposition to war. Douglass maintained that “if the voices of wives, sisters, and mothers could be heard, no standing armies would menace the peace of the world today. . . . She naturally shudders at the thought of subjecting her loved ones to the perils and horrors of war, and her vote would be a peace guaranty.”¹³

Given the omnipresence of sexual inequality, it was understandable, albeit

ironic, that nineteenth-century feminists, like Douglass, used what they interpreted as natural differences between male and female personalities as arguments to promote sexual equality. This advocacy of sexual equality extended widely over the political and social terrain without seriously calling into question the crux of woman's oppression: her inability to escape the confines of her familial and domestic identity. Still, Douglass and his feminist colleagues saw the cause of woman's rights as inseparable from the broader and interrelated ideals of human equality and unity. These ideals ultimately transcended the apparent biological and physiological differences between the sexes. Thus even though he viewed women—"the almoners of the race of man"—as "superior to the opposite sex in all the offices of benevolence and kindness," he also viewed them, more importantly, as "fully equal [to man] in moral, mental and intellectual endowments." As a result, woman was indisputably "entitled to an equal participancy in all the designs and accomplishments allotted to man during his career on earth." Indeed, woman's cause was man's cause. The struggle for woman's rights, Douglass maintained, "is the cause of human brotherhood as well as the cause of human sisterhood, and both must rise and fall together. Woman cannot be elevated without elevating man, and man cannot be depressed without depressing woman also."¹⁴

Douglass's commitment to sexual equality demonstrated the depth and range of his humanism. All individuals were equal in natural rights and duties, in addition to basic capacities and endowments, regardless of sex or race. The great social reform goal of universal emancipation, therefore, necessitated the liberation of oppressed women as well as oppressed racial and ethnic minorities. Douglass viewed the component issues of his human rights campaign as intimately interwoven. "Standing as we do upon the watch-tower of human freedom," he contended, "we cannot be deterred from an expression of our approbation of any movement, however humble, to improve and elevate the character of any members of the human family." A victory for the rights of woman signified a victory for the rights of humanity because "all good causes are mutually beneficial." These benefits, moreover, would "be shared by every effort to promote the progress and welfare of mankind everywhere and in all ages."¹⁵ They were a crucial element of the historical legacy of ever-increasing human happiness and progress.

Notwithstanding its shortcomings, Douglass's egalitarian humanism represented a critique of the culture and ideology of male supremacy. He emphasized the factors of man's superior physical strength and the antifeminism of tradition, notably religion, as basic to male dominance. He interpreted the exclusion of woman from civil government not only as contradicting the natural equality between the sexes, but also as resting upon "a purely physical

fact.” The rationale went that because “man is physically stronger than woman, . . . he has the right to make her a subject of his will.” In another context, Douglass labeled “not only wrong but mean” the physical basis of male dominance.¹⁶

Traditional religious beliefs, he maintained, reinforced male supremacy. As in the church’s support of slavery, its support of male supremacy was antihumanist, antiegalitarian, and antiprogressive. Similarly, he likened the antifeminism of the Christian churches in America to that of the Islamic churches in Egypt and the Middle East. During his trip to Egypt in 1888, he had noted that “the most painful feature met with in streets are the hooded and veiled women.” He lamented “that half of the human family should be thus cramped, kept in ignorance and degraded, having no assistance except that of ministering to the pride and lusts of the men who own them as slaves are owned.” In a telling suggestion of male antifeminist fantasy, he concluded that the worst part of “this social and religious annihilation of women” was that the women apparently liked it.¹⁷ That these women, like most women, adjusted to male dominance did not necessarily mean that they enjoyed it. Douglass would have done well to compare the plight of these women to the slave’s adjustment to slavery, or the Negro’s adjustment to racism, as a means to explore how and why woman’s adjustment to male dominance could not simply be equated with seeming to like her oppression.

When the Methodist church refused women seats and voting rights in their councils, Douglass saw evidence of “a strong element of this Mahometan idea of the proper sphere and treatment of women.” He could not see the harm or wrong of women participating in Christian conferences, especially given the preponderance of women in Christian churches and the high incidence of social intercourse between the sexes in most church activities. Nor could he see the validity of the churches’ claims that they had done so much for the cause of woman recently. Of one thing, though, he was certain. Regardless of its antifeminist record, the church would be among the first to both rejoice and claim a large share of the responsibility when woman finally achieved full equality with man.¹⁸

Besides the plight of Moslem women, Douglass took special note of the plight of European women. He criticized “the oppressive customs in the Old World, which so wronged woman, that they subjected her to the most laborious as well as degrading means for a livelihood.” These women, like their American sisters, needed a feminist movement to promote both their elevation and the destruction of male dominance. Yet, the sight of European peasant women working as hard as their men appalled Douglass. This astonishment derived in part from his traditional view of woman as the gentler and more

refined sex. It likewise reflected his corresponding and similarly antifeminist view that American women should not have to work as hard as American men—the so-called “American idea of the true position of woman.”¹⁹

Like black liberation, woman’s liberation was indubitably a moral and spiritual crusade. Taking note of a woman’s rights convention in Syracuse in 1852, Douglass asserted that the realization of equality for women would augur “the reign of universal righteousness.” Full sexual equality would represent fulfillment of the prophecy that “‘as woman was the first, so will she be the last slave.’” After the slave’s emancipation, Douglass expanded his scrutiny of woman’s cause. In sheer numerical terms, woman’s emancipation, he conceded in an 1888 speech, was “a much greater cause” than the slave’s emancipation, for the former encompassed “the liberation and elevation of half of the whole human family.”²⁰

Douglass rebuked those enemies of women’s rights who charged the cause with fostering religious infidelity. He countered that this false accusation represented the reactionary hysteria of institutional religion seeking to subdue progress. Indeed, the religious tactic of denouncing novel and revolutionary ideas as infidelity had a long and ignominious history. The tactic, Douglass pointed out, “has appeared in all of the world ages and has been met with by nearly every effort yet made to make the world wiser and better.”²¹

For Douglass, sexism—like racism and slavery—constituted a vicious contradiction of and attack on the principle of the human personality’s inviolability. The basic principle of all human liberation, he suggested, was the inviolability of human identity. Sexual difference paradoxically undergirded this principle. Douglass argued that “the great fact underlying the woman suffrage movement is this: Woman is woman. . . . Her selfhood is as complete, perfect and absolute as is the selfhood of man. She cannot part with her personality any more than she can part with her identity.” As no one could rightfully own another, neither could man rightfully own woman. Douglass felt compelled to reiterate that woman “belongs to herself, just as fully as man belongs to himself—that she is a person and has all the attributes of personality that can be claimed by man, and that her rights of person are equal to those of man.”²²

Given the ubiquitous influence of sexism, woman had to be and to represent herself; man had to be and to represent himself; and both had to represent each other, or humanity. “This fundamental, unchangeable and everlasting condition of the fitness of things,” Douglass contended, “is not only recognized by the law but is organized into law and practice.” The feminist challenge, Douglass thus deduced, was to reform this “law and practice,” which was often sexist, in accordance with sexual equality. Woman was “her own best advocate” toward that end, he argued. Man was “the sinner,” woman “the

preacher.” Sounding the battle cry of resistance to sexist oppression, Douglass likened the liberation of Negroes and women. “With her as with us,” he reasoned that those “who would be free themselves must strike the blow.” For women fully committed to their emancipation, “the price demanded for the good sought, is labor, self-sacrifice, the loss of popularity, loss of good opinions of men.”²³

Woman was “her own best advocate” not only because of her sufficient “selfhood,” her ethical, religious, and humanist principles, her compulsion to be emancipated, and the necessity that she lead the woman’s liberation struggle, but also because she best understood her own cause. A common humanity notwithstanding, the great sexual divide separated man from woman. Man lacked woman’s experiential sensitivity to and insight into male dominance. As Douglass’s feminist consciousness grew, he became more sensitive to the need for women to articulate and to lead their own liberation cause due, in part, to their personal knowledge of sexism. This need Douglass compared to that for Negroes to articulate and to lead their own struggle because, in part, of their experiential sensitivity to and insight into racism.²⁴ As with the Negro, woman had to be allowed to determine her own destiny. According to Douglass’s mature feminism, woman’s right to self-definition and self-determination was crucial to her liberation.

The very first issue of *The North Star* proclaimed the feminist slogan: “Right is of no sex.” This slogan encapsulated Douglass’s ethical, civic, and political rationales for sexual equality. Woman, he asserted, as a matter of justice and morality should be “elevated to an equal position with man in every relation of life.” Rather than sexual identity, the “only true basis of rights” in the civic sense was the equal “capacity of individuals.” This extension of the classic liberal philosophy of individualism to woman was prerequisite to both the legitimization of her separate and equal identity as well as her demand for a political identity. Natural rights, namely political ones, precluded natural differences between the sexes. “In our eyes,” Douglass noted, speaking for his feminist cohorts, “the rights of woman and the rights of man are identical—We ask no rights, we advocate no rights for ourselves, which we would not ask and advocate for woman.”²⁵ They demanded equality, justice, and fairness for women, not special treatment.

Douglass constantly reiterated that woman’s inalienable political rights did not challenge her domestic or social roles. He maintained that “whatever may be said as to a division of duties and avocations, the rights of man and the rights of woman are one and inseparable, and stand upon the same indestructible basis.” Instead of undermining woman’s social roles, he contended that

institutionalizing her just political rights would enhance them. A political stake in society would make women better wives and mothers, in addition to more useful and productive citizens. "If, for the well-being and happiness of man, it is necessary that he should hold property, have a voice in making the laws which he is expected to obey, be stimulated by his participation in government to cultivate his mental faculties, with a view to an honorable fulfillment of his social obligations," Douglass reasoned, "precisely the same may be said of woman." In the political sphere, therefore, man and woman possessed the "same wants," were "exposed to the same evils," needed the same legal and constitutional protection, and possessed the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities.²⁶

Douglass interpreted the cause of woman's rights as a completely justified attack on woman's lack of a meaningful public personality. The first level of the struggle was to demonstrate woman's right to speak out in public. Maria W. Stewart, black abolitionist, and Sarah and Angelina Grimké, white abolitionists, pioneered that struggle. Woman's success in gaining access to higher education and the professions represented the second level, whereas the third was "enlargement of her industrial vocations." Douglass cheered what he viewed as particularly commendable progress on the latter two levels. It seemed to him that the employment barriers women faced were difficult, but less rigid than those they faced assuming a public personality and gaining equal political rights. He pointed to such pathbreaking examples as physician Harriet K. Hunt, Reverend Antoinette L. Brown, and Paulina Davis, editor of *Una*, the first feminist paper in the United States. As feminist-abolitionists besides professional career women, these individuals challenged woman's traditional sphere in terms of the first two levels and illustrated untapped intellectual potential. Douglass thought that woman had "a right to the same intellectual cultures as man"; "her sphere should be bound only by her power."²⁷ The growing number of women holding industrial jobs, moreover, illustrated woman's "physical power" as well as her progress in the industrial labor force.

In spite of the claims of Douglass and his feminist colleagues that the emancipation of women would not alter her social and domestic roles, it inevitably did. It took a most extraordinary woman, especially in the nineteenth century, to balance the contradictory demands of public, political, and career roles against familial and domestic roles. Obviously, a feminist wife needed a sympathetic and supportive husband. Paulina Davis and Antoinette Brown found such men; Harriet Hunt remained single. Whether single or married, however, these and other career women and abolitionist-feminists unavoidably defied convention. Even though Douglass's second wife, Helen,

was an ardent woman suffragist, both of his marriages were quite traditional. The reformation of sex roles certainly did not extend into the private sphere of the Douglass home. There were radically egalitarian marriages among Douglass's feminist-abolitionist contemporaries, though, including James and Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth and Henry Stanton, David and Maria Child, and Abby and Stephen Foster. Most nineteenth-century American women, however, did not see or conduct themselves as feminists. They acquiesced, wittingly and unwittingly, in woman's traditional sphere: the family and home. Even those who increasingly joined the labor force throughout the nineteenth century typically balanced as best they could their family, or private, and work, or public, lives without egalitarian marriages. Whether single or married, feminist or traditionalist, woman nevertheless existed within a basically male supremacist order.²⁸

The campaign for woman's equal rights assumed equal opportunity for her. This egalitarianism encompassed legal and constitutional guarantees as well as economic and political rights and opportunities. Douglass endorsed the feminist demands for equal pay for equal work, better paying jobs, the right of wives to their own earnings, the custody rights of widows to their own children, equality in property ownership and inheritance, and an equal role in estate administration. He echoed the civil democratic rhetoric of woman's right to a jury of her peers. It was wrong for her to be taxed by a government in which she could not serve as a representative. Most important, the government, to be legitimate, had to have the formal consent and participation of women.²⁹ The vote was absolutely imperative.

Douglass was an original and historically significant woman suffragist. He seconded and gave an eloquent speech on behalf of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's controversial resolution demanding woman suffrage at the first Woman's Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, 19–20 July 1848. His support helped to carry the resolution by a narrow margin. Feminists like Lucretia Mott believed that the call for woman suffrage went far beyond what the public was willing to countenance. Douglass, however, endorsed Stanton's radical demand for woman's right to the vote arguing "that the power to choose rulers and make laws, was the right by which all others could be secured."³⁰ He along with other male feminists played important roles in the woman suffrage movement throughout the nineteenth century. Douglass attended many conventions, made many speeches, and wrote many pieces detailing his support for woman suffrage. During the morning on the day of his death, he attended a meeting of the pro-woman suffrage National Council of Women.

In retrospect, however, no aspect of his involvement in the woman's rights cause meant more to him than his pivotal support of woman's right to vote at

the Seneca Falls convention. He acknowledged in an address before the Woman Suffrage Association in April 1888 that he was proud to have been “sufficiently enlightened” to support Stanton’s resolution. “I have done very little in this world in which to glory except this one act—and I certainly glory in that. When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; but when I stood up for the rights of woman, self was out of the question, and I found a little nobility in the act.” Twenty years later at a commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the historic Seneca Falls convention, Mary Church Terrell—black educator, club woman, female suffragist, and close personal friend of Douglass—praised his signal contribution to the woman suffrage crusade. “There is nothing he ever did in his long and brilliant career,” she remarked, “in which I take keener pleasure and greater pride.”³¹

Douglass’s arguments for woman’s suffrage echoed those on behalf of woman’s rights. First and foremost, the vote signified a natural, and inalienable right, regardless of sex, race, religion, or creed. Woman’s “individuality, rationality, and sense of accountability,” like man’s, buttressed his argument. “Our natural powers are the foundation of our natural rights; and it is a consciousness of powers which suggests the exercise of rights.” Furthermore, he maintained, “man can only exercise the powers he possesses, and he can only conceive of rights in [the] presence of powers.” Douglass thus surmised that woman’s power as “a moral and accountable being gives her a natural right” to the vote. “Unless it can be shown that woman is morally, physically, and intellectually incapable of performing the act of voting”—and according to Douglass this was impossible—“there can be no natural prohibition of such action on her part.”³²

It followed from being a natural and inalienable right that woman suffrage was inherently just. For Douglass, woman’s right to the vote was not contingent upon the question of her desire for freedom, for as with the Negro, it was assumed to be a natural human desire. Similarly, the primary issue of woman’s inalienable right to the vote was not contingent upon secondary questions: if she wanted it, if she could use it, and how she might use it. Douglass thought it man’s responsibility “to recognize the right of woman to vote, and leave woman the option as they leave man the option whether they shall vote or not.”³³

That “woman’s claim to the right of equal participation in government with man has its foundations in the nature and personality of woman, . . . in the admitted doctrine of American liberty and in the authority and structure of our Republican government” remained incontestable to Douglass. The rich could not exercise the political rights of the poor; whites could not exercise the

political rights of blacks; and, men could not exercise the political rights of women. Society's powerless, particularly the poor, blacks, and women, had to exercise their own political rights, especially in their struggle for power. Douglass perceived that the integral relationship between dignity and power bore directly on the issue of woman's right to vote. "Power," he observed, "is the highest object of human respect. . . . To deny woman her vote is to abridge her natural and social power, and deprive her of a certain measure of respect. Everybody knows that a woman's opinion of any lawmaker would command a larger measure of attention had she the means of making opposition effective at the ballot box."³⁴ As a vital "symbol of power," then, the vote would enhance both woman's self-esteem and influence as well as man's respect for her and for her political voice and influence. Equally important, it would help woman to realize her substantial, though presently "fettered" and potential, "mental and moral power." The vote would be a significant psychological as well as political boon for woman's emancipation.

Woman's exclusion from the United States government constituted a blatant violation of the Lockean contractual view of human government as a compact entered into freely and explicitly by individuals to protect their natural rights. The United States was obviously not a democratic republic with respect to the rights and interests of women. Woman, Douglass noted, "is not a consenting party to this Government. She has never been consulted." America's government, therefore, epitomized male supremacy. "Ours is a Government of men, by men, each agreeing with all and all agreeing with each in respect to certain fundamental propositions, and women are wholly excluded." Regarding women, Douglass concluded, "our Government is in its essence, a simple usurpation, a Government of force, and not of reason. We legislate for woman, and protect her, precisely as we legislate for and protect animals, asking the consent of neither."³⁵

The logical extension of Douglass's contractual view of government, moreover, meant that if woman continued to be excluded from the formal governmental compact, she had the right to revolt against the government. His argument that "no man or woman who is not consulted can contract an obligation, or have an obligation created for him or her" implicitly sanctioned the right to overthrow an unrepresentative government.³⁶ Preferring reform to revolution, however, he endeavored to resolve the dilemma of woman's disfranchisement by working through traditional channels.

The denial of woman's right to vote harmed government and society, in addition to woman. It was absurd, Douglass argued, for the government to ignore the just political claims of woman, thereby depriving itself of half of its strength. Woman suffrage represented the best interests of a fully powerful and

representative government. Douglass asserted “that society has a right to employ for its preservation and success all the mental, moral, and physical power it thus possesses and can make available.” Society did not have the right, though, “to cripple and maim itself, or to deprive itself of any power it naturally possesses.” A government guided by “enlightened reason” had to be unalterably committed to “the supreme law” of “the highest good.” Such a government also had to be guided by the fact that the “combined wisdom and virtue” of woman and man vastly superseded mere male “wisdom and virtue.” “That government is strongest and best,” Douglass contended, “which embodies the most wisdom and virtue.” Lacking woman’s special moral, intuitive, and sympathetic perception, furthermore, “a government by man alone,” Douglass deduced, “is at best a half supplied government. It is like a bird with only one wing—floundering to earth unable to soar . . . to the highest and best.”³⁷

In light of Douglass’s unswerving commitment to woman suffrage, his eager embrace of the argument by woman suffragists like Theodore Tilton and Victoria Woodhull that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments technically gave women the right to vote was understandable and consistent.³⁸ Reality, however, proved different and sobering. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, respectively, recognized black citizenship and the voting rights of black men, ignoring those of women. This refusal to acknowledge woman’s voting rights reflected both sexism against all women and racism against black women. It likewise revealed the paradox of a triumph for equality, granting black men the vote, which furthered male dominance. It also ignited the racist and sexist fires smoldering beneath the disarmingly quiet surface of the abolitionist-feminist coalition among blacks and whites, men and women. Most important for Douglass, it expanded his comprehension of racism, sexism, and their mutual and separate effects on social reform.

In his hierarchy of social reform priorities, Douglass viewed the abolition of black slavery as primary and the abolition of sexual slavery as secondary. As early as 1851, he had maintained that his major involvement in the black liberation struggle did not mean that he was insensitive to or desired to separate from the liberation struggle of women. Rather, this clear sense of priorities illustrated his perception of the most serious social evil to be destroyed: racism. He admitted in 1851 that “absorbed as we are in these perilous times, with the great work of unchaining the American bondman, and assisting the hapless and hunted fugitive in his flight from his merciless pursuers to a place of safety, we have little time to consider the inequalities, wrongs and hardships endured by woman.” Nevertheless, he argued that the “rights of woman and the rights of man are identical.”³⁹

For Douglass, the “Woman Question” and the race question were intimately interrelated in some ways and distinct and separable in others. The key issue in the 1840 split in the abolitionist movement, he argued, had been the conflict between the relative efficacy of moral suasion and political action as tactics. The “Woman Question,” he observed, had been “the occasion not the cause” of the split. Furthermore, he viewed the issue of woman’s right to participate fully in the abolitionist movement as peripheral to the principal thrust of abolitionism, and thought it tragic that this tangential issue exacerbated the split. He lamented that “a grand philanthropic movement” had been “rent asunder by a side issue, having nothing, whatever, to do with the great object which the American Anti-Slavery Society was organized to carry forward.” These brave, though misguided, women should have postponed their own protests, he suggested, “for the slave’s sake.” This “sad mistake” led Douglass to question the wisdom of aligning women’s rights too closely with abolitionism, because the former was even less popular than the latter. “The battle of Women’s Rights,” he surmised, “should be fought on its own ground; as it is, the slave’s cause, already too heavy laden, had to bear up under this new addition.”⁴⁰

Two disputes in the 1850s between Douglass and Lucy Stone, his abolitionist-feminist colleague, demonstrated the larger conflict of priority between abolitionism and feminism. Like Charles L. Reason, his black colleague, Douglass harshly criticized Stone in early 1854 for delivering a public lecture in Philadelphia’s Musical Fund Hall, an institution that forbade black attendance. Douglass and Reason saw Stone’s decision to lecture, regardless of her rationale, as pandering to racism. Previously, Douglass had criticized Samuel R. Ward—black minister and spokesman—for speaking, and Elizabeth Greenfield—a prominent black singer—for performing in halls that excluded blacks. Stone’s error had been aggravated, however, by her recent southern tour during which she, like Kossuth, the Hungarian nationalist, chose the safe course and espoused woman’s cause, while neglecting to discuss the slave’s cause, even that of the slave woman. Douglass loathed such compromise with the proslavery South. Similarly, he disagreed thoroughly with this sense of priority which elevated woman’s cause above that of the slave.⁴¹

Douglass drew important distinctions between racism, as evidenced by Stone’s conduct, and sexism. Racism, he implied, represented conscious as well as unconscious efforts to dehumanize black people. Sexism, on the contrary, represented a less dehumanizing form of conscious and unconscious oppression.⁴² This assumption, common among blacks and many white feminists, especially men, that sexism was less degrading than racism, weakened their feminism, revealing their racial and masculine biases. Douglass, for example, saw the issues of excluding black men from public meetings and

excluding women from them to be “as widely different as are good and evil.” He explained that “woman is not excluded with a view to her degradation, or out of a spirit of hate. On the contrary, a sentiment quite opposite to malice dictates her exclusion. It is an error, and one which is to be met with light and truth. Far otherwise is the case of the black man’s exclusion from public halls. A malicious determination to degrade, is here self-evident.”⁴³

The distinction Douglass drew between sexism as an “error” and racism as an invidious form of degradation was wrongheaded. Contradicting his egalitarianism, he concluded that “men and women may honestly and innocently differ as to the wisdom and propriety of woman’s speaking in public.” On the other hand, he surmised, “there can be no honest difference of opinion, as to the right of the colored man to hear a public lecture.” Douglass ignored in this case that the “merciless tyranny” and “wicked hate” so obvious in racial oppression had distinct, even if less clear-cut, analogues in sexual oppression.⁴⁴ He apparently did not see that male supremacy and racial supremacy were incomparably unconscionable. While his comparative ethical evaluation of sexism and racism was conceptually flawed, his comparative analysis of the actual lives of blacks and whites was flawless. Blacks, especially those in slavery, experienced a more vicious hatred and oppression than did white women.

Early in his abolitionist career, Douglass drew an analytic distinction between chattel or racial slavery and sexual slavery (or sexual oppression). The latter was less vicious and less total. For example, if slavery merely referred to the denial of the right to vote, “all women were slaves because they were universally deprived of this right.” Strictly speaking, he preferred not to use the term slavery in reference to sexual oppression because “slavery must be regarded as something different; it must be regarded as one man holding property in another, subjected to the destroying of all the higher qualities of his nature, deprived of his own body, his own soul.”⁴⁵

Douglass believed that the natural bonds of love and trust between men and women prevented drawing a strict analogy between racial supremacy and male supremacy. Unlike racism, sexism was not built upon hatred and deliberate abuse. Of course, more radical feminists like Stanton and Anthony disagreed with Douglass’s tendency to minimize the parameters and conscious viciousness of male supremacy. This tendency reflected both his own male bias and that of his time and society. He suggested that unlike a woman, “a slave is . . . to all intents and purposes a marketable commodity.” Arguing in effect that man’s historic dominance over woman amounted to his owning and abusing her as “a marketable commodity,” radical feminists disputed the rigidity of Douglass’s comparative analytic distinction between sexual slavery and racial slavery.⁴⁶

In 1859 when Stone invited Stephen A. Douglas, the racist and antifeminist Democratic party leader, to address a woman's convention in Chicago, an invitation "the little Giant" declined, she again incurred Frederick Douglass's wrath. Stone, he charged, had "too frequently compromised her anti-slavery principles by a feverish desire for prominence and popularity." Her reprehensible crime, "philanthropical toadyism," revealed her opportunism.⁴⁷ In addition, she evinced a tendency common among white feminist-abolitionist women not only to identify their cause with that of the slave woman, but also to see the feminist struggle as at least as important, if not more so, than the abolitionist cause. Stanton, for instance, maintained that although the oppression of free women "differs from that of the Negro slave," nonetheless it "frets and chafes her just the same." Stone, moreover, responded to the charge that her advocacy of woman's rights was tangential to abolitionism with the rejoinder: "I was a woman before I was an abolitionist. I must speak for the women."⁴⁸

The suggestion that the wrongs endured by white women were as bad as those endured by slave women greatly disturbed Douglass. Among white feminist-abolitionists, he noted, this error was highly insensitive and smacked of prejudice. Notwithstanding the just protests of white women against the injustices they suffered, "how trifling, how as the small dust of the balance," he cried out, "when compared with the stupendous and ghastly wrongs perpetrated upon the slave woman?" He agreed that "other women suffer certain wrongs, but the wrongs peculiar to women out of slavery, great and terrible as they are, are endured as well by the slave woman, who has also to bear the ten thousand wrongs of slavery in addition to those common wrongs of woman." Granted, the white woman's plight was hard, but Douglass reiterated: "it is harder still for a woman to have no rights which white men are bound to respect." In his criticism of Stone's southern lectures that ignored slavery and focused on woman's rights, he observed that "to speak for woman in a slave State where woman is made merchandise of, sold for the basest of purposes, robbed of all that makes woman honorable, without specifying these abominations, is to preach about the exceeding sinfulness of sin, without defining what sin is."⁴⁹ It was wrong, Douglass contended, to discuss the oppression of women without ever once mentioning the oppression of black women, especially black slave women.

The more perceptive feminist-abolitionists, like Douglass, were acutely sensitive to the racist and sexist dimensions of the oppression black American women faced. Indeed, the heavy involvement of women in the abolitionist cause reflected to a large extent their empathy for slave women as well as their allegedly more sympathetic and responsive nature. Comparing the lot of free women to slave women, for example, Elizabeth Chandler, the antislavery

poet, asked her more fortunate white sisters to empathize with and to help their less fortunate black sisters.

Pity the negro, lady! her's is not
 Like thine, a blessed and most happy lot
 She is thy sister, woman! shall her cry
 Uncared for, and unheeded, pass thee by?⁵⁰

Douglass constantly spoke out against the racist and sexist nature of the oppression black women endured. True to his social reform and life's philosophy, he counseled resistance, perseverance, and optimism. Consequently, in late 1849, he lambasted the decision of a white Philadelphia proprietor of an assembly building not to allow a local group of black women to hold a fair in one of his rooms unless they assured him that whites were managing the event. Douglass urged his "colored sisters" not to be disheartened by such "shameful and fraudulent treatment," but to "BE FIRM-UNDAUNTED-AND PERSEVERE," for "the greater . . . the obstacles . . . , the greater . . . the victory when it is gained."⁵¹

A proud black man and former slave, Douglass was keenly sensitive to the enslavement of black women. Thus in his abolitionist speeches, he, like many abolitionists, vivified the horrid inhumanity of slavery by detailing the physical, moral, and sexual abuse of slave women, primarily at the hands of white men. He spoke rhetorically of "America's soil reddened by the stain from woman's shrinking flesh." His abolitionist rhetoric, moreover, often featured a shocking description of a brutal beating of a helpless slave woman by a sadistic white master or overseer. As a young slave, he had witnessed many such scenes. In his autobiography, for instance, he gave a wrenching depiction of how his master Thomas, a Christian slaveholder, would often mercilessly beat Henny, his physically disabled slave cousin. He remembered that after cruelly whipping her, his master "would keep this lacerated woman tied up by her wrists to a bolt in the joint, three, four, and five hours at a time. He would tie her up early in the morning, whip her with a cowskin before breakfast, leave her tied up, go to his store, and returning to dinner, repeat the castigation, laying the rugged lash on flesh already raw by repeated blows."⁵² Such inhumanity clearly fueled Douglass's incipient feminism as well as his race consciousness and abolitionism.

That black liberation necessitated special attention to the elevation of black women has remained an article of faith among progressive blacks. Thus in his 1854 proposal for a black industrial school, Douglass included black women, who he argued particularly needed training in the "methods and means of enjoying an independent and honorable livelihood." Echoing innumerable

black leaders, moreover, Martin R. Delany charged that until black men “attain to a position above permitting their mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters, to do the drudgery and menial offices of other men’s wives and daughters; it is useless . . . to talk about equality and elevation in society.” Similarly, Alexander Crummell, eminent black Episcopalian clergyman, concluded that “a true civilization can only . . . be attained when the life of woman is reached, her whole being permeated by noble ideas, her fine taste enriched by culture, her tendencies to the beautiful gratified and developed, her singular and delicate nature lifted up to its full capacity.”⁵³

Black women enthusiastically concurred. “How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?” Maria W. Stewart had asked in the early 1830s. In her speech before the 1893 World’s Congress of Representative Women, Fannie Barrier Williams, perhaps best known for her work in the Negro woman’s club movement, discussed the commendable “mental, social, and moral” progress of black women since emancipation, notably the increased numbers and accomplishments of educated and professional black women. Even competent black women, however, everywhere confronted a “mean and unreasonable” discrimination, sexual as well as racial. “Taught everywhere in ethics and social economy that merit always wins, colored women carefully prepare themselves for all kinds of occupation only to meet with stern . . . disappointment,” she noted. The paradox of the white refusal to countenance black success has confounded innumerable blacks, including Douglass.⁵⁴

Nineteenth-century feminism was mostly a white, middle-class movement. While theoretically sympathetic to poor and working-class women—whether Negro, Asian, Hispanic, Native American, or white—this bourgeois feminism primarily dedicated to woman suffrage gave inadequate attention to their concrete economic needs. Thus, the movement’s political focus and class bias weakened its critique of the capitalist exploitation of woman’s labor. Furthermore, its racist bias undermined its potential relevance for black women, most of whom were peasants. Most black and white working-class women of this time were more interested in better jobs, working conditions, hours, and wages than the vote.⁵⁵

Douglass’s feminism reflected this political and class bias, too, but it encompassed a deep-seated concern for black women as well, which necessitated attention to their economic needs. Nevertheless, the nature of his feminist activities caused him to interact mostly with the middle-class women who dominated the movement. Except for a trip to Georgia and South Carolina in March 1888 when he actually observed the plight of black peasants, he had little first-hand knowledge of their situation. Not surprisingly, moreover, Doug-

lass, like most urban, middle-class blacks, was most comfortable among black women like himself. As a result, while he could praise someone like Sojourner Truth for her dedication to racial elevation and social reform, especially women's rights, he apparently found her lack of refinement unsettling.⁵⁶

During the Civil War, abolitionist-feminists, regardless of their stand on the priority between abolitionism (or black liberation) and woman's liberation, sloughed aside their differences and focused squarely on the issue of the slave's emancipation. In the closing months of the war, Douglass reiterated his support for universal suffrage, but added that he believed the related, though separable, issues of black male suffrage and woman suffrage rested upon different bases. Douglass joined forces with feminist-abolitionists in 1866 to form an Equal Rights Association dedicated to universal suffrage. Again, he emphasized his belief that the black man's claim to the vote was more urgent than woman's. An increasingly ardent Republican, more and more he interpreted the Negro's future advancement as inextricably tied to the Negro's allegiance to the Republican party. Black male suffrage, he believed, represented a necessary Republican strategy to enhance its constituency, notably in the South. Most important, black male suffrage signified an integral step toward black liberation: making the political system more responsive to its black constituency. Unlike Stanton and Anthony who believed the Republican party's Reconstruction strategy should endorse the highly principled ground of universal suffrage, Douglass believed that black male suffrage represented a necessary and more viable first step toward universal suffrage. Douglass's priority, black male suffrage, clashed with that of Stanton and Anthony, woman suffrage. The Equal Rights Association institutionalized that clash.⁵⁷

Douglass's willingness to subordinate woman's suffrage to black male suffrage during Reconstruction revealed several things. First, it showed his tendency to view the antiracist component of his human rights philosophy as more important than its antisexist component. He thus identified primarily with the black liberation struggle and secondarily with the woman liberation struggle. Second, it evinced his ostensible rationale for subordinating woman's cause to the Negro's cause. Whereas for women the vote was "a desirable matter," for black men it was "a question of life and death." Whereas men were "compelled to protect . . . women" out of "politeness and affection," most whites hated blacks "and in proportion to the measure of the dislike is the necessity of defence before and in the law."⁵⁸ Third, it illustrated the ineluctable male bias limiting his feminism. In part, then, Douglass's acceptance of the black man's vote, without the vote for woman, represented a compromise with, and tacit approval of, male supremacy.

Douglass, along with Gerrit Smith, Wendell Phillips, Lydia Maria Child, and Frances Ellen Harper, led those feminists who saw the woman's need for the vote as secondary to that of black men. Furthermore, they maintained that the prospects for eventually achieving woman suffrage were best working through the liberal, progressive wing of the Republican party. Stanton, Anthony, and Olympia Brown led those feminists who viewed woman's need for the vote as primary, arguing that even the liberal, progressive wing of the Republican party remained insufficiently committed to woman suffrage. As a result, they sought allies outside of what they construed to be an unsympathetic and unresponsive Republican party. These alliances were typically unstable and unsuccessful, for the other parties did not share the fervent singular commitment of the Stanton contingent to woman suffrage. This was particularly true in the cases of the attempted alliances between 1868 and 1869 with the National Labor Union and the Working Women's Association. In the latter case, the middle-class bias of the Stanton group helped to undermine the alliance. Another problem in both cases was the tricky question of manipulation. In both cases, the high-handed way in which the Stanton faction tried to graft their key concerns onto the key concerns of each group left them quite vulnerable to the charge of manipulation.⁵⁹

They attempted another series of more dubious alliances with racist Democrats, including James Brook, New York publisher and congressman, and Samuel S. Cox, Ohio journalist and congressman. Neither man evinced a cogent commitment to woman suffrage. Similarly, George Train, the eccentric railroad promoter, financier, woman suffragist, and racist, who initially helped to sponsor the *Revolution*, Stanton and Anthony's feminist newspaper, was another important ally.⁶⁰ This series of alliances alienated innumerable antiracists, notably Douglass, and actually gave the Stanton faction only marginal aid.

Congress ratified the Fifteenth Amendment guaranteeing black male suffrage on 25 February 1869. In early May, the Equal Rights Association met. Before the convention could respond directly to Stanton's keynote address calling for the association to dedicate itself to a sixteenth amendment enfranchising women, the problems of racism and priority between black male suffrage and woman suffrage touched off a series of heated exchanges. Stephen Foster accused Stanton and Anthony of racism because of their slurs against black men and their hostility to the Fifteenth Amendment. He maintained that their refusal to support the Fifteenth Amendment unless it included women represented a violation of Equal Rights Association principles and that they should consequently resign their offices.⁶¹

Douglass supported Stanton's call to rally around a sixteenth amendment

enfranchising women. Yet, the racist rhetoric she and her supporters exploited deeply upset him. Much of it, he observed, clearly aimed at vilifying black men—specifically, questioning their fitness to vote—sought to undermine congressional and public support for the Fifteenth Amendment. Indeed, as early as 1854, he had detected racism in Stanton’s ardent feminism. In that year, he had supported a woman’s rights pamphlet she prepared, but found it necessary to reject its assumption of the superiority of white women to Negroes. Arguing on behalf of the legal rights of white women, Stanton had remarked: “We are . . . moral, virtuous, and intelligent, and in all respects quite equal to the proud white man himself; and yet by your laws, we are classed with idiots, lunatics, and Negroes.” This racist logic highly offended Douglass, who, like Stanton, did not relish being legally classified with “idiots” and “lunatics.” He totally rejected as elitist and racist nonsense, therefore, her argument that somehow the political rights of white women rested on a firmer basis than those of black men. He noted: “We are willing to allow and contend that woman has as good a right as we have to the exercise of suffrage, but we can’t grant even as a matter of rhetoric or argument, that she has a better” right.⁶²

The blatant racism of Stanton’s feminism persisted. In a letter to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 30 December 1865, she blasted the notion that Reconstruction should be “the Negro’s Hour” alone. The nation’s “representative women” had labored arduously for the freedom of the Negro, she maintained. “So long as he was lowest in the scale of being we were willing to press his claims; but now, as the celestial gate to civil rights is slowly moving on its hinges, it becomes a serious question whether we had better stand aside and see ‘Sambo’ walk into the Kingdom first.” While willing to exploit “the strong arm and blue uniform of the black soldier” toward securing universal suffrage, she nevertheless saw the Negro as her racial and social inferior. She further argued that if the freedwomen were not enfranchised along with the freedmen, the former will have gone from one form of slavery to another. “In fact,” she claimed, “it is better to be the slave of an educated white man, than of a degraded, ignorant black one.”⁶³

Racism was not unusual, moreover, in the *Revolution*, which began publication in 1868. In fact, the publication of Train’s blatantly antiblack male suffrage column, “That Infamous Fifteenth Amendment,” in the *Revolution* sparked the charges of racism against the Stanton faction at the 1869 Equal Rights Convention. For Foster and Douglass, both of whom found the Train article pernicious, it did not matter that Train had disassociated himself from the journal. The article had been published and neither Stanton nor her supporters had repudiated Train, his arguments, and his racism. Douglass ac-

knowledge his deep admiration for Stanton's work on behalf of "woman's rights and equal rights," but countered that he found her apparent approval of Train's article and similar ones deeply disturbing. He found particularly repugnant references to blacks throughout the *Revolution* "as 'Sambo,' . . . the gardener, . . . the bootblack, and the daughters of Jefferson and Washington."⁶⁴

Douglass's disaffection with the Stanton contingent within the Equal Rights Association centered not only on their exploitation of racism, but also on their intentionally destructive opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment because it did not include women. He thought their position strikingly ungenerous, especially because as white women their male relatives voted. Of course for the Stanton group, this was precisely the issue: only the male relatives of white women voted. For Douglass, on the contrary, the issue remained the overwhelmingly more urgent necessity of black male enfranchisement. He reiterated before the convention that:

With us, the matter is a question of life and death, at least, in fifteen States of the Union. When women, because they are women, are hunted down through . . . New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lampposts; when their children are torn from their arms, and their brains dashed out upon the pavement; when they are objects of insult and outrage at every turn; when they are in danger of having their homes burnt down over their heads; when their children are not allowed to enter schools; then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own.

To a voice which asked—"Is that not true about black women?"—Douglass responded: "Yes, yes, yes; it is true of the black woman, but not because she is a woman, but because she is black."⁶⁵

Douglass thought generous and proper the position of Julia Ward Howe, white feminist, social reformer, and author. At the Boston convention of the Equal Rights Association the year before, she had acknowledged: "I am willing that the Negro shall get the ballot before me." Once black male suffrage became law, Douglass unequivocally embraced woman suffrage as the next step in the struggle for universal suffrage. In the heat of the battle for priority between woman suffrage and black male suffrage, however, he had sometimes fallen prey to the pervasive male supremacist notion that at least woman's interests were indirectly represented through their natural and affectionate ties with men. Clearly, neither black women nor black men possessed any comparable mode of indirect representation. If black men got the vote, though, black women, too, would gain this indirect representation. But when

the Fifteenth Amendment passed, there was no longer any need for Douglass to rationalize his elevation of the black male vote above woman's vote. Consequently, he no longer used the common antifeminist smoke screen of indirect representation.⁶⁶

Anthony had forcefully criticized the antifeminist bias of Douglass's indirect representation rationale. She suggested that it merely reinforced male supremacy. At the time, she observed of Douglass's stirring remarks before the final Equal Rights Association meeting in 1869 that the men rather than the women had clapped when he subordinated woman suffrage to black male suffrage. "There is not the woman born who desires to eat the bread of dependence," she argued, "no matter whether it be from the hand of father, husband, or brother; for any one who does so eat her bread places herself in the power of the person from whom she takes it." When Anthony suggested that Douglass would rather be a man than to "exchange his sex and take the place of Elizabeth Cady Stanton," Douglass implicitly agreed, asking sarcastically if woman suffrage would "change the nature of our sexes?" Douglass's question sidestepped the issue of sexism. It suggested, nonetheless, the preference, quite understandable from the male perspective, to face sexism from the vantage point of male dominance as opposed to that of female subordination.⁶⁷

Stone's "middle principle," which recognized woman's superior claim to the vote and the black man's superior practical need for it, eschewed the vulgar racism in the attacks of the Stanton faction on black men. She could forgive Douglass for his error of placing black male suffrage above woman suffrage "because he felt as he spoke." In her "middle principle," she soft-pedaled her theoretical contention that woman suffrage was ultimately "more imperative." Instead, she insisted that "we are lost if we turn away from the 'middle principle' and argue for one class." Ironically, however, she felt compelled to argue for woman's cause in response to Douglass's graphic description of southern racist oppression. She stressed the parallels between sexual and racial oppression. She contended that when Douglass spoke of "what the Ku Kluxes did all over the South," he failed to mention that northern "Ku Kluxes"—fathers—had total legal control over the custody of their children. Consequently, "any father—he might be the most brutal man that ever existed—"could separate a mother and child as effectively as a slave auctioneer on the block. Only in Kansas did mothers have legal recourse to claim their own children against such tyrants. Stone thus concluded that woman as well as the Negro faced "an ocean of wrongs too deep for any plummet." Indeed, she argued, "there are two great oceans; in the one is the black man, and in the other is the woman."⁶⁸ The black woman apparently straddled these "two great oceans."

Because black women battled both racism and sexism, the issues of which battle took precedence in their own lives and which battle should take precedence in the black liberation struggle most directly affected them. Most black feminists, women included, apparently shared Douglass's point of view that the struggle against racism was paramount. Nevertheless, the issue of the priority between the grand principle of universal suffrage, encompassing woman suffrage and black male suffrage, and the compromise principle of black male suffrage alone, split black feminists as it did the Equal Rights Association, in which several actively participated. Robert Purvis, Charles Lenox Remond, Sojourner Truth, and Francis Watkins Harper—besides Douglass—were active participants. Purvis, Remond, and Truth pressed for universal suffrage as the priority, while Douglass and Harper pressed for black male suffrage as the priority. Unlike the Stanton faction that favored universal suffrage, preeminently woman suffrage, and opposed the Fifteenth Amendment for its failure to include women, black feminists also criticized that failure, but supported the amendment nonetheless as an important advance in the recognition of black rights. This closing of the black feminist ranks in support of the Fifteenth Amendment suggested that they perceived the struggle against racism as the priority. Speaking as black women as well as feminists, Harper supported this rationale, while Truth asserted that the battle against sexism was equally as important and necessitated at least equal commitment.⁶⁹

The demise of the short-lived Equal Rights Association in 1869 led to the formation that same year of rival woman suffrage organizations: the American Woman Suffrage Association headed by Stone, Blackwell, and Howe; and the National Woman Suffrage Association headed by Stanton and Anthony. Naturally enough, Douglass favored and worked closely with the former, which, unlike the latter, both supported the Fifteenth Amendment and agreed to male participation. In 1873, the Stanton group still alienated Douglass and his cohorts with “their flings at the Negro and the constant parading him before their conventions as an ignorant monster possessing the ballot, while they are denied it.” Besides racism, these attacks revealed, Douglass maintained, “an aristocratic feeling” based on the status and superior education of these women.⁷⁰

By 1876, however, Douglass and the Stanton faction agreed upon a truce and united to work together for woman suffrage. Still, both parties remained sensitive to recent conflicts and did not apologize for past disagreements. A spirit of compromise prevailed in 1890 when the rival woman suffrage organizations finally merged. With Douglass and Stanton, as with their respective factions, though, now that the Fifteenth Amendment was law, the dilemma of the priority between black male suffrage and woman suffrage was moot.

Between 1876 and his death nineteen years later, Douglass's feminist awareness deepened as he became increasingly attuned to woman's need for self-definition, her need to lead her own cause, as well as the impenetrable depths of sexism. These were clearly the key developments in Douglass's mature, post-1876 feminism.

The struggle for woman's rights, Douglass perceived, was a social reform movement with revolutionary ramifications. If fully realized, the social, political, and economic position of woman—in fact her basic cultural and historical position—could never be the same. He likened the achievement of sexual equality to “a revolution, the most strange, radical, and stupendous that the world has ever witnessed. It would equal and surpass the great struggle under Martin Luther for religious liberty.”⁷¹ Like most feminists, nonetheless, his belief in the traditional nineteenth-century notions of woman's primary roles being familial and domestic circumscribed that understanding. Inadequate to the revolutionary task of total black liberation, even the most radical philosophy and pursuit of social reform were also inadequate to the revolutionary task of woman's total emancipation.

According to Douglass, male supremacy had complex roots: universal, historical, and cultural. Instead of fully detailing and exploring these roots, though, he generally described them. He spoke, for instance, of male supremacy being based upon “usage, custom, and deeply rooted prejudices” and “the universality of man's rule over woman.” An unconscionable wrong and logical fallacy, male supremacy, he contended, was “too transparent to need refutation.” Its origins, ideology, and reality revealed “strongly opposing forces”; “time-hallowed abuses”; “deeply entrenched error”; “world-wide usage”; “the settled judgment of mankind.” As with slavery and racism, sexism poisoned social relations. He reiterated constantly, in reference to serious social evils, that “relations of long standing beget a character in the parties to them in favor of their continuance.” This strong tradition of male supremacy worked especially against the vital feminist goal of woman suffrage. Douglass observed that “man has been so long the King and woman the subject—man has been so long accustomed to command and woman to obey—that both parties to the relation have been hardened into their respective places, and thus has been piled up a mountain of iron against woman's enfranchisement.”⁷²

Douglass was very sensitive to the problem of male bias. Personally and ideologically, however, he never fully resolved it. He excoriated man for viewing and treating woman “as his drudge, or a convenient piece of household furniture.” This blatant chauvinism constituted “striking evidence of his mental imbecility and moral depravity.” Unlike such “open, undisguised, and

palpable evils” as “war, intemperance, and slavery” which “the best feelings of human nature revolt at,” the undeniable evil of sexism, from the perspective of male dominance, remained quite ambiguous, if not imperceptible. Douglass noted, consequently, that most men thought everything just fine with woman’s condition. “She had no rights denied, no wrongs to redress.” They likewise believed that “she herself had no suspicion but that all was going well with her. She floated along on the tide as her mother and grandmother had done before her as in a dream of Paradise. Her wrongs if she had any, were too occult to be seen, and too light to be felt.” Although reinforcing male supremacy, the stifling impediments of male bias and false female consciousness, Douglass claimed, “did not appeal or delay the word and work” of woman suffrage which went forth, regardless.⁷³

The ironic antifeminist substratum of Douglass’s feminism was most evident in the beginning stages of his feminist work. During this period, he tended to interpret certain aspects of woman’s dependence on man as acceptable. He alleged, for example, that woman voted indirectly through her influence over her male relations. He also tended to be insensitive to the justifiable fears of many female feminist colleagues concerning male dominance within women’s organizations, suggesting that these women felt unable to compete equally with men for positions within them. This feeling, Douglass implied, smacked of an acceptance of the notion of woman’s inherent inferiority. The motivation and reasoning of his collegial feminist antagonists, however, were different. More personally and clearly than Douglass, they perceived the machinations of male dominance. The more important issue for them remained male supremacy, even among their male colleagues, rather than evidence of adherence to female inferiority among themselves.⁷⁴

Notably after his conflicts with the Stanton-Anthony faction over, first, the relative priority of woman suffrage and black male suffrage, and second, support for the Fifteenth Amendment, Douglass displayed a greater sensitivity to woman’s inherent need for self-definition, self-direction, and self-representation. Once the Fifteenth Amendment became law, he was able to focus more fully on and, thus, to understand better the “Woman Question.” He now unambiguously attacked the notion that woman was indirectly represented in government, as in society, through her male relations. “The vice of this relation,” he now exclaimed, was that “it gives influence and excludes responsibility.” He also elaborated upon the importance of responsibility as well as duty. “Divest woman of power [in this case, political power],” he warned, “and you divest her of a sense of responsibility and duty—two of the essential attributes of all useful exertion and existence.”⁷⁵

Douglass, along with other nineteenth-century American feminists, black

and white, men and women, waged a courageous struggle to reform the status of American women. The staunch opposition they met among most women and men failed to discourage them. In fact, the orthodox male supremacist counterattack forced them to examine and to argue their cause that much more rigorously and righteously. For feminists of Douglass's stripe, sexual equality, like racial equality, was indispensable to the millennium. Notwithstanding the limitations of nineteenth-century feminism generally and Douglass's feminism specifically, notably the failure to comprehend and to attack the conflict between woman's familial (and social) roles and her liberation, the struggle of these feminist pioneers to break out of the prison of male supremacy was remarkably advanced for the times.

The uneasy alliance between the struggles for woman's emancipation and blacks' emancipation, moreover, bore witness to the difficulty of trying to reform racism and sexism either separately or together. That Douglass and his feminist cohorts even attempted to do so attests to their path-breaking social reform vision and their undeniable historical importance. The greatness of their achievement, therefore, was not just what they actually accomplished, but even more important, their vanguard—albeit imperfect—commitment to egalitarianism in a profoundly sexist and racist society. In 1899 at a Douglass memorial meeting in St. Paul of the A. L. E. League of Minnesota, a Negro civil rights organization, Mrs. Rosa H. Hazel, a Negro spokeswoman, reflected upon the “Standard By Which Douglass's Greatness Shall be Determined.” She observed that “it may be that future biographers may think that the greatness of Douglass lay not alone in a life-long consecration for the elevation of his race, but in the breadth of view of this man of the people, who reached out not only for the good of the Negro race, but had the wisdom to foresee the larger good to be accomplished in that kind of justice which ignores both race and sex, giving to all equal opportunities, obligations and incentives in this country.”⁷⁶

7. The Philosophy and Pursuit of Social Reform

Douglass's philosophy of social reform vividly reflected his American cultural and social roots. Like most nineteenth-century Americans, he firmly believed in a necessary, though complex, relationship between a moral universe and the imperfect world of human events. Slowly yet inevitably, human progress was bringing the latter into conformity with the former. Not only did social change ultimately conform to moral law, but it also conformed to an evolutionary vision of human betterment. Douglass once described the process of reform as "a kind of Jacob wrestling with the angel for larger blessings." According to this Christian metaphor, reform was inseparable from man's innate desire to improve his life. Besides improvement in man's personal condition, the concerted pursuit of social reform meant, Douglass stated, working to realize the best in man's "moral, intellectual, [and] social universe."¹ Social reform thus encompassed concern for society as well as the individual.

A reformist approach predominated among nineteenth-century black leaders. Unlike white social reformers who inevitably possessed some measure of racial privilege, regardless of their reform commitments, black social reformers inevitably fought the stereotype of innate racial inferiority. The distinction proved pivotal, often determinative. While black social reformers, like their people, clearly understood white racism to be the most serious social problem in nineteenth-century America, precious few white social reformers, not to mention their people, understood it as clearly, if at all. Themselves afflicted with racism, white social reformers at best could only mount an ambiguous assault against it. Most sided with racial privilege. Even those who fought racism, notably many abolitionists, could never fully see beyond its blinders.²

The tradition of black social reform paralleled and dovetailed that of white social reform. The conflict between black social progress and white racism perpetuated and sometimes widened the gulf between the two traditions. Douglass's philosophy and pursuit of social reform drew upon both traditions attempting, in the process, to overcome the differences between them and to unite them. Racism remained the chief impediment to such attempted unions. Both the black social reform cause and the social reform cause in general needed progressive white allies not to promote racism, but to struggle against it. Notwithstanding the utility of alliances with progressive white colleagues,

black social reformers, like their people, understood that black uplift would depend primarily upon black effort. As a social reformer and a black leader, Douglass fully immersed himself not only in the black liberation struggle, but also in the related struggle to alleviate the tension between social reform and racism.

Douglass, thus, consistently mounted a blistering assault on the negative impact of racism on social reform. Speaking throughout Great Britain between 1845 and 1847, he delivered many such attacks against racism as a barrier to interracial social reform movements. In several temperance addresses, he carefully detailed how a group of black Philadelphians committed to temperance, yet barred from joining white societies, had organized their own. Blacks in other northern areas had done likewise largely for the same reason. This discrimination, nevertheless, did not diminish their commitment to temperance. Douglass argued that in temperance they saw “a moral and virtuous eminence, from which they would be enabled to look down upon those who were binding them with chains and fetters.”³

He further observed that the racism of the white temperance societies merely reflected that of the larger white society. Black social reformers, consequently, often encountered vigilant white “opposition and persecution.” Douglass argued that the brutal white assault on a peaceful black temperance parade in Philadelphia on 1 May 1842 graphically demonstrated the violent extreme of racist response to black social reform.⁴ Such incidents only reinforced his sense of racial duty that encompassed, yet went beyond, social reform.

Reflecting in 1893 upon the legacy of Reverend Daniel A. Payne, the late bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Douglass characterized him as “not a revolutionist but a reformer, . . . not a destroyer but a builder, . . . not an enthusiast but a reasoner.” Douglass’s characterization of Bishop Payne might also be accurately applied to Douglass himself. Central tenets of his social reformism were orderliness, constructive change, and reason. He rejected the revolutionary alternative to social change and its anarchistic implications as chaotic and irrational. “Government is better than anarchy, and patient reform is better than violent revolution.” Social reform, he thought, should adhere to the logic and clocklike order of divine and natural laws. Given that the basic institutional design of American government and society was sound, the task of the social reformer was to build upon that firm foundation, while rooting out discordant elements, such as slavery, racism, and sexism. Yet, his Lockean view of human government forced him to acknowledge that the individual owed no allegiance to a government or society that trampled upon human rights. “Human government,” he asserted, “is for

the protection of rights; and when human government destroys human rights, it ceases to be a government, and becomes a foul and blasting conspiracy; and is entitled to no respect whatever.”⁵ When government and society degenerated to that nadir, revolution—not reform—was imperative.

The ubiquity of racial, sexual, and class oppression rendered American institutions unsound. As a result, the most telling limitation of Douglass’s philosophy of social reform was that its two major goals, freedom and equality, were revolutionary and, consequently, demanded revolutionary tactics. This reformist philosophy, like a revolutionary philosophy, encompassed a call for radical changes in the status quo. Unlike a revolutionary philosophy, though, it generally neglected the crying need for fundamental structural changes, touting, instead, lesser structural modifications. The basic contradiction between reformist approaches and revolutionary problems, on one hand, and the specific inadequacy of social reform as a means to end slavery and racism, on the other, signified flaws endemic to much of American reform as well as Douglass’s social reformism.⁶

The reformist constraints of Douglass’s views concerning the revolutionary tactic of violence as a mechanism for social change reflected the contradiction between reformist means and revolutionary ends. Although he always believed that violence in self-defense was morally necessary and justifiable, at first he counseled slaves not to resort to en masse violence against slavemasters—although they could justifiably do so—because of the latter’s superior power and the likelihood of defeat. Several factors helped to convince Douglass to embrace slave violence, regardless of its practicality, as a liberation tactic. These included the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that endangered the liberty of all blacks; intermittent discussions with John Brown, the violent revolutionary, between the late 1840s and late 1850s; the growing call among black leaders, notably Garnet, for the slaves to revolt and seize their freedom; and, the growing violence and intransigence of the “slave power conspiracy.” In a speech on 31 May 1849, Douglass declared: “I should welcome the intelligence tomorrow, should it come, that the slaves had risen in the South, and that the sable arms which had been engaged in beautifying and adorning the South were engaged in spreading death and devastation there.” By 1857, he could state unequivocally that “the slave’s right to revolt is perfect, and only wants the occurrence of favourable circumstances to become a duty.”⁷

Douglass still saw himself as a social reformer. He began to advocate the revolutionary tactic of violence without actually considering if and how it meshed with his social reform philosophy. In this case, practical concerns superseded the contradictory dictates of principle. The irony of this antebellum social reformer’s embrace of revolutionary violence reached its apotheosis in

his support of the Union effort during the Civil War. Urging black men to enlist in the Union army, Douglass insisted that they had “to learn the use of arms” as a means to secure and defend their liberty. Indeed, he noted, “it is plain that for the present no race of men can depend upon moral means for the maintenance of their rights.” Violence in the defense of one’s liberty and manhood, then, was completely justified.⁸

After emancipation had been achieved, Douglass surmised that if the violence of war had not led to it, “the silent forces of moral and material civilization” would have. In a more perceptive contemporaneous reflection, however, he conceded the limitations of the social reform emphasis upon mere truth, or moral suasion, as against the efficacy of revolutionary violence. “While slavery was safe from physical force,” he wrote, “it could defy moral opposition.” Likewise, he agreed with moralists like Gerrit Smith, who argued that the spilling of blood was necessary as atonement for the sin of slavery.⁹

The fervid moral spirit born of evangelical Protestantism constituted a vital element of nineteenth-century social reform. Mere secular reform would not suffice; social reform also had to enhance society’s moral character. A dynamic belief in secular as well as spiritual notions of human perfectibility underlay this ethical and righteous vision of social reform. The ideal social reformer was a peerless Christian and moral giant. Through his selfless dedication to others and to “justice, liberty, and love,” the archetypal social reformer, Douglass argued, offered “the whole world a priesthood, occupying the highest moral eminence—even [higher than] that of disinterested benevolence. Whoso[ever] has ascended this height, and has the grace to stand there, has the world at his feet, and is the world’s teacher, as of divine right.” Whereas Christ’s altruism was unquestionably pure, egoism paradoxically complemented that of Douglass’s archetypal social reformer. Unlike Christ, he was equally concerned with his soul and personal situation as well as those of others. In Douglass’s view, given that self-concern necessarily preceded social concern, egoism and altruism were ultimately symbiotic. Douglass, like many of his social reform colleagues, aspired to and indeed represented this philosophy of social reform leadership at once ethical, altruistic, and egoistic.¹⁰

Improvement—self, collective, and national—had to be ethical above all else. Morality and virtue were clearly inseparable and indispensable to progress and civilization. Douglass maintained that the fall of the Roman Empire taught that vice bred social decay and national decline. In social as well as political life, he asserted, “the lap of pleasure, the pursuit of ease and luxury, are death to manly courage, energy, will and enterprise.” Understandably, therefore, moral education signified an important element in American social reform philosophy. This was especially true among blacks, who typically

viewed their elevation in large part not only as an ethical conflict, but also as a struggle to enhance the morals of the race. "Educate our youth," admonished an editorial in *Freedom's Journal* on 15 February 1828, "and you remove the moral infection that exists among the lower classes of our people—you elevate the intellect and excite an oppressed and injured people, to honourable and successful endeavors after virtue and competency." The efforts to inculcate sound morality among blacks, to promote black achievement and respectability, and to alleviate white racism went hand in hand. Thus, the 1835 National Negro Convention convened in Philadelphia and established an American Moral Reform Society, which espoused moral suasion rather than political action as the best means toward social reform.¹¹

Douglass energetically embraced the doctrine of morality as basic to social reform. This ethical perspective reflected his ideological debt to both the black moral reform tradition and the moral thrust of Garrisonianism. It also revealed his deep-seated ethical sense and his belief in traditional bourgeois morality. Moral law, he believed, was basic to social reform. He argued that "all genuine reform must rest on the assumption that man is a creature of absolute, inflexible law, moral and spiritual." In a grateful acknowledgment of his indebtedness to the interrelated Christian, Enlightenment, and Garrisonian visions of an ethical universe, Douglass recalled in 1892 that "schooled as I have been among the abolitionists of New England, I recognize that the universe is governed by laws which are unchangeable and eternal, that what men sow they will reap, and that there is no way to dodge or circumvent the consequences of any act or deed." The assumption of man's moral nature being an integral aspect of, and thus subject to, natural and divine law buttressed his philosophy of social reform. He reasoned that "if the smallest particle of matter in any part of the universe is subject to the law, it seems to me that a thing so important as the moral nature of man cannot be less so." The realization of progress and social reform distinctly illustrated that human "happiness and well-being" demanded full obedience to moral law.¹²

Beyond society and the individual, the ethical imperative of social reform encompassed the nation and the world. Evil was national and worldwide in scope and impact. As a result, social reform had to be international and national as well as social and individual. For Douglass, the national level was as important as the others. Early during the Civil War, he stressed that the American people must "reform the national heart, quicken the national conscience, root out wicked prejudices, abolish evil practices, and destroy the great moral evils"—slavery and racism—then stalking the land. Military force and war by themselves could not accomplish these goals. Rather, a profound elevation of national ethical consciousness and practice was imperative.¹³

Social reformers like Douglass saw their belief in morality as evidence of the nobility of their quest. Both the source and aim of social reform, as plainly evident in its ethical ethos, was truth: a romantic and transcendentalist vision of supreme knowledge and happiness. "The mission of the reformer," Douglass remarked, "is to discover truth, or the settled and eternal order of the universe." Brimming with "independent and distinct" truth, the social reformer theoretically could persuade more easily the public and the government to adopt his vision of what was best for the commonweal. Early in his social reform career, Douglass sincerely believed that the social reformer had to rely almost exclusively upon the intuitive "agency and power" of truth as a mechanism for progressive social change. Even in his mature thoughts about the lessons of the abolitionist crusade, he concluded that it had shown the value not only of "faith in the essential rectitude of human nature," but also faith "in the power of truth when earnestly written and spoken"—evidence in support of moral suasion. Nevertheless, as Douglass matured, he became increasingly aware of the serious limitations of truth as a sole and primary strategy for social reform.¹⁴

Truth symbolized "the light of the world." It might seem ironic that the rational enterprise of social reform would be directed toward the intuitive goal of truth, but social reform, like truth, was both a rational and an intuitive phenomenon. Truth and the imperative of social reform, he argued, were equally apparent to tutored and untutored minds, to the head and to the heart, to reason and to intuition. The premium each placed on human progress and happiness was likewise indisputable. In an abolitionist speech implicitly linking advancements in human rights to human progress and happiness, Douglass maintained that "the grand secret" of abolitionism's "power" was that "each of its principles is easily rendered appreciable to the faculty of reason in man." Abolitionism also derived its "power" from the fact "that the most unenlightened conscience"—mere intuition—"has no difficulty in deciding on which side to register its testimony. . . . In whatever else men may differ, they are alike in the apprehension of their natural and personal rights." In light of the inherently equal ability among men to perceive truth, once a single truth was established as a guide for social action, it would be easier to use that truth to formulate progressive policies and laws fully consistent with natural and divine law. As a result, social reform consistent with that particular truth would be more feasible. Douglass firmly believed and thus often cited the dictum of Theodore Parker, friend, social reformer, and Unitarian theologian, that "all the space between man's mind and God's mind is crowded with truth that awaits to be discovered and organized into law, for the government and happiness of mankind."¹⁵

Armed with truth, the social reformer was ready to battle evil. Before he in good conscience could enter into the fray, though, it was necessary that he subject his personal commitment to rigorous examination. This intense and introspective scrutiny would eventually become an integral part of the social reformer's philosophy and task. In light of their reciprocal bond, self-improvement as well as social improvement necessitated unyielding self-criticism. The "highest attainments of human excellence," Douglass asserted, "arise out of the power we possess of making ourselves objective to ourselves." Through this power of self-analysis, he continued, we "can see our interior selves as [a] distinct personality as though looking in a glass." In spite of his awareness of the inherent personal bias circumscribing the effectiveness of self-criticism, Douglass nonetheless envisioned the process as critical to social reform. The rewards of intensive self-scrutiny—individual and social enlightenment—far outweighed its heavy demands. Douglass thus concluded that "the process by which man is able to posit his own subjective nature outside of himself—giving it form, color, space, and all the attributes of distinct personality—so that it becomes the subject of distinct observation and contemplation is at bottom of all effort and the germinating principle of all reform and all progress."¹⁶

Having to function as a catalyst for progressive social change through exhortation and personal example, the social reformer faced a formidable challenge. Yet, if he expected others to heed his call for social reform, he had to show the way. Douglass told a meeting of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society in January 1855 that the true reformer, "the man who has thoroughly embraced the principles of justice, love, and liberty," was like "the true preacher of Christianity." Explaining the simile between the social reformer, in this case the abolitionist, and "the true preacher of Christianity," he noted that either "is less anxious to reproach the world of its sins, than to win it to repentance. His great work is to exemplify, to illustrate, and to engraft those principles upon the living and practical understandings of all men within the reach of his influence."¹⁷

Douglass interpreted the process of social reform as well as the roles of the social reformer and his audience in the context of an alleged natural human desire for change and improvement. Similarly, progressive social change, the goal of social reform, was an innate human desire. Criticisms and denials of the historic value of social reform, then, contradicted the historical record as well as human nature.¹⁸ This inherent craving for progressive social change revealed a deep human belief in progress and happiness as highly desirable and inextricably linked.

Summarizing the philosophy of moral education advanced by George

Combe, eminent nineteenth-century Scottish phrenologist, Douglass noted in an 1846 antislavery speech in Bristol, England that self-improvement—and by implication, social improvement or reform—was central to human happiness. Similarly, increased knowledge, the corollary of self-improvement, also bred human satisfaction. “Progress,” Douglass echoed Combe, “was the great cause and mainspring of happiness in the human family.” It exemplified “the improvement and expansion of our faculties.” Combe’s antislavery principles certainly enhanced the ideological affinity between him and Douglass. Prior to his initial trip to Great Britain, Douglass had read Combe’s work, *The Constitution of Man*. Subsequently, he had “a very intense desire gratified” when he and several abolitionist colleagues had breakfast with Combe, “the eminent mental philosopher,” in his Edinburgh home one morning in 1846. He later remembered “with much satisfaction . . . the morning spent with this singularly clear-headed man.” Douglass also remembered that his initial reading of *The Constitution of Man* “had relieved my path of many shadows.”¹⁹ While Douglass remained skeptical of the scientific claims of phrenology—he called it a “peculiar mental science”—he often reiterated Combe’s progressive philosophy of moral education. Indeed, Combe’s work gave Douglass’s burgeoning philosophy of social reform an influential and cogent epistemological rationale.

Douglass’s beliefs in a moral universe and moral progress buttressed his philosophy of social reform, especially its characteristic optimism. These beliefs demonstrated both his evolutionary interpretation of the historical process and his assumption that idealism, or truth, was the primary source and mechanism of social change. He repeated often that “the tendency of mankind is ever towards a higher civilization,” or that “men are growing better in the march of time and events.” A significant example of the “constant evolution of moral ideas,” he argued, was the growing belief in egalitarianism: a basic premise of emancipation. “The idea that man cannot hold property in man, that all men are born free, that human rights are inalienable, that the rights of one man are equal to those of another, that governments are ordained to secure human rights,” he noted, “did not come all at once to the moral conscience of men, but have all come very slowly in the thoughts of the world.” The study of intellectual as well as social history, therefore, was important. Moreover, this study had to become a part of the “living memory” and a starting point for contemporary thought and action.²⁰

Idealism profoundly affected social and intellectual change, according to Douglass. It was therefore a critical influence in the philosophy and practice of social reform. This penetrating influence, more specifically, was irreversible and unstoppable. In a speech gauging the historical and cultural significance of the concept of equality between the sexes, Douglass asserted that:

this new revolution in human thought will never go backward. When a great truth once gets abroad in the world, no power on earth can imprison it, or prescribe its limits, or suppress it. It is inscribed upon all the powers and faculties of our soul, and no custom, law or usage can ever destroy it. Now that it has got fairly fixed in the minds of the few, it is bound to become fixed in the minds of the many, and be supported at last by a great cloud of witnesses, which no man can number and no power can withstand.²¹

This belief in the unrelenting and elevating force of idealism nourished the optimism of Douglass's social reform outlook.

His characteristic optimism, notably with respect to social reform, was not romantic, however. On the contrary, his vivid awareness of life's inescapable ambiguities moderated his temperamental and philosophical sunniness. Patience, therefore, was essential for the social reformer. Douglass recognized that "it is painful to encounter stupidity as well as malice; but such is the fate of all who attempt to reform an abuse, to urge on humanity to nobler heights, and illumine the world with a new truth." In an editorial on "Cheap Labor," he observed that "so rapidly does one evil succeed another, and so closely does the succeeding evil resemble the one destroyed, that only a very comprehensive view can afford a basis of faith in the possibility of reform, and a recognition of the fact of human progress." Empathizing with the downtrodden, nonwhite, non-Western immigrant labor being brought to the New World by Western capitalists, Douglass saw this international "Coolie" labor market—"kindred in character and results to the African slave trade of other days"—as barbaric. Such calculated inhumanity, while inexcusable, demonstrated the unquestionable need for the radical reform of the "Coolie" trade, in particular, and for a complex and expansive view of the operation of immutable moral law, in general. It seemed clear to Douglass that in due time the "Coolie" trade would thus be radically reformed.²²

A deep secular millennialism owing to Enlightenment and romantic sensibilities, on one hand, and an even deeper religious millennialism owing to evangelical Protestantism, on the other, undergirded nineteenth-century American social reform. These congruent strands of millennialism likewise supported the vital reform belief that movements to realize progressive social change were possible and urgent. Douglass's philosophy of social reform exemplified the notion of the interdependency among basic human goodness, progress, human perfectibility, and the millennium. A righteous society was at hand if only the social reformer could convince enough people to accept and carry out his program for such a society. The social reformer, then, was a vanguard social activist struggling to mold public opinion and, in the process,

to shape social perception, policy, and action in line with his ideal society. The radicalization of mass consciousness or public sentiment was pivotal. “Humanly speaking,” Douglass contended, “all power in this country is in the hands of the people. Public opinion is, in this sense, omnipotent; and this public opinion is the matter with which we have to do,” or manipulate. An indispensable aspect of abolitionism, therefore, was “abolitionizing public sentiment.”²³

Douglass suggested that the social reformer’s persuasive, yet often minority, vision of what was best for the commonweal had to be transformed into mass perception as well as social reality. The best way to do this, he argued, was through ceaseless propaganda, protest, resistance: through agitation. Indeed, the efficacy of agitation was an article of faith in Douglass’s social reform philosophy. No social reformer in nineteenth-century America better grasped the value of relentless agitation for the promotion of social reform than Douglass. “Agitation,” he constantly reiterated, “is the life blood of all moral reforms.”²⁴

On 5 July 1852 before a packed audience at Rochester’s Corinthian Hall, Douglass, in his famous oration on the hollowness of United States Independence Day celebrations for slaves and their quasi-free brethren, invoked the power of unyielding agitation. Lamenting that rational and dispassionate discourse alone was insufficient to emancipate the slave, and by extension to abolish white racism, he intoned:

At a time like this, scorching irony, not convincing argument, is needed. O! had I the ability, and could reach the nation’s ear, I would today, pour out a fiery stream of biting ridicule, blasting reproach, withering sarcasm, and stern rebuke. For it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind, the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of the nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced.²⁵

Given the intransigence of slavery and racism in spite of cogent moral and rational counterarguments, the social reformer as agitator battling America’s continuing race relations nightmare obviously confronted a superhuman challenge. The agitator’s travail often was not visibly lighter in other social reform causes, like women’s rights, universal peace, and temperance. Difficulties notwithstanding, agitation remained imperative. During a West Indies Emancipation Day celebration speech at Canandaigua, New York, in 1857, Douglass enshrined the importance of agitation for social reform. First, he examined the process of struggle.

The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle.

Understanding that social reform made radical, at times even revolutionary, resistance to wrong unavoidable, Douglass then proceeded to examine the process of resistance.

Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. In the light of these ideas, Negroes will be hunted at the North, and held and flogged at the South so long as they submit to those devilish outrages and make no resistance, either moral or physical. Men may not get all they pay for in this world, but they must certainly pay for all they get. If we ever get free from the oppression and wrongs heaped upon us, we must pay for the removal. We must do this by labor, by suffering, by sacrificing, and if needs be, by our lives and the lives of others.²⁶

Mainstream nineteenth-century American Protestantism, notably black Christianity, encompassed a powerful sense of divine determinism in human affairs. In light of this common religious belief, the most radical and controversial aspect of Douglass's philosophy of social reform was its shift toward religious liberalism during the 1850s and 1860s. The process of the demystification of religion clearly signaled a watershed in his intellectual development. Whereas his early social reform philosophy displayed a more traditional religious belief in the divine determination of human affairs, his later and more mature philosophy displayed a liberal religious belief in the human determination of human affairs. This increasing emphasis on human will and activity rather than divine providence as the critical mechanism of social reform betrayed an increasing positivism in Douglass's thinking. The

major factor contributing to these fundamental developments was the endemic contradiction between Christian moral philosophy and Christian moral practice, notably the strategic failure of moral suasion by itself to abolish slavery. Progressive social change, Douglass surmised, depended more clearly upon the efforts of man himself than upon those of an unseen and inscrutable God operating ambiguously and indirectly in human affairs through human conduct.

Douglass's early social reform philosophy reflected the impact of his traditional religious background.²⁷ Even at this stage, his social reformism showed unwavering faith in the crystal clarity and immutability of God's moral determination of human affairs. As a result, on 11 August 1852 in a speech before the National Free Soil Convention, he blasted the notorious Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 because "nowhere has God ordained that his beautiful land shall be cursed with bondage. . . . Slavery has no rightful existence anywhere." Divine providence, then, willed emancipation; man was compelled to abide by that inevitability. Faced with the dominant and seemingly implacable national proslavery power, Douglass took comfort in the common abolitionist assumption of a divine law higher than man-made law. In the context of this "higher law," he noted that "the man who is right is a majority. He who has God and conscience on his side, has a majority against the universe. Though he does not represent the present state, he represents the future state. If he does not represent what we are, he represents what we ought to be."²⁸

Undeniably, abolitionism signified God's handiwork. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened," Douglass argued, "the doom of slavery is certain." Through "a happy interposition of God," he had "burst up through the dark incrustation of malice and hate" of southern slavery and had become an abolitionist. Like Thomas Jefferson, "the sage of the Old Dominion," Douglass argued that God had to side with the slaves in their struggle against their masters. "The moral government of the universe is on our side," Douglass asserted, "and co-operates, with all honest efforts, to lift up the downtrodden and oppressed in all lands, whether the oppressed be white or black."²⁹

That emancipation derived from war and military action, rather than peace and moral force, confirmed for him the truth of an enlightened religion. His uncompromising denunciation of a proslavery interpretation of Christianity enhanced this development. Even as a slave child he had questioned not only God's handling of the universe, but the notion of His undeniable goodness as well. In his autobiography, he recalled that "I was very early told by someone that 'God up in the sky' had made all things, and had made black people to be slaves and white people to be masters. I was told too that God was good, and that He knew what was best for everybody. This was, however, less satisfac-

tory than the first statement. It came point blank against all my notions of goodness."³⁰ Douglass's early doubts concerning a proslavery and prowhite God foreshadowed his conversion from traditional religion to liberal religion. These doubts likewise revealed that from early on he leaned away from the sacred world view of his fellow slaves and toward a supremely rational view of man and the universe.

His intensifying revulsion over Christian churches serving as "the bulwark of American slavery, and the shield of American slavehunters" ran deep. So deeply, in fact, did it run, that he blurred the already ambiguous distinction between church doctrine and practice and began to question seriously the church's traditional adherence to the efficacy of religious revelation and faith. This waxing skepticism increasingly revealed the cogency of a pragmatic religion of reason and predictability over a religion of blind faith and moral capriciousness. In 1852 during an effusive blast at Christianity, especially its ministers, for serving the interests of slavery and oppression, he thundered:

For my part, I would say, welcome infidelity! welcome atheism! welcome anything! In preference to the gospel, as preached by the Divines! They convert the very name of religion into an engine of tyranny and barbarous cruelty, and serve to confirm more infidels, in this age, than all the infidel writings of Thomas Paine, Voltaire, and Bolingbroke put together have done! These ministers make religion a cold and flinty-hearted thing, having neither principles of right action nor bowels of compassion. They strip the love of God of its beauty and leave the throne of religion a huge, horrible, repulsive form. It is a religion for oppressors, tyrants, manstealers, and thugs.³¹

It was not a religion for Douglass.

Douglass had always maintained that divine providence by itself would never abolish slavery. God's will and actions could only be realized, he believed, through human intermediaries. He rejected the immobilizing idea of waiting for God to end slavery "in the fulness of time." In response to Reverend Henry Ward Beecher's remark that he preferred to wait on Christian faith to destroy slavery, Douglass retorted that "if the Reverend gentleman had worked on plantations where I have been, he would have met overseers who would have whipped him in five minutes out of his willingness to wait for liberty." Neither the slaves nor the abolitionists could afford to wait for Christian faith to free the slaves, Douglass asserted. Furthermore, he clearly understood that emancipation could not be left to the agencies of chance or miracle.³²

Several intellectual influences accelerated Douglass's change from a tradi-

tional God-centered religious philosophy to a liberal human-centered religious philosophy. The trenchant Garrisonian criticism of the American church and clergy for their ties to slavery lessened his allegiance to traditional religious authority and institutions. His belief in the notion of human perfectibility rooted in an evangelical religion stressing “good works” over the fine points of faith and metaphysics did likewise. Douglass also found the liberal and ethical emphasis of Theodore Parker’s Transcendental Unitarianism intellectually stimulating and attractive. Upon hearing Parker preach one Sunday morning in 1854, Douglass observed: “No man preaches more truth than this eloquent man, this astute philosopher. . . . Though denounced and held up to the world as an infidel, he is a practical Christian.” Certainly, some of the religious liberalism of New England Unitarianism rubbed off on Douglass. Given the foregoing influences, in combination with his thoroughgoing adherence to Enlightenment principles of natural law and rationality, the die was cast for his transformation to religious liberalism.³³

Both the expanding secularism and the accelerating disillusionment with divine moral agency that the Civil War exacerbated engendered a less hostile—though hardly tolerant—environment for religious liberalism. In Douglass’s mind, dreadful national decisions like the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the 1857 Dred Scott decision reinforced his developing belief that not only were God’s designs inscrutable, but His direct involvement in human affairs was minimal. Throughout the 1850s, moreover, Douglass became increasingly receptive to political action and violence as abolitionist tactics, demonstrating his growing reliance on human over divine power. Following the slave’s emancipation primarily through the agency of the Civil War, his road to a liberal religion was completed. Consequently, he acknowledged, “I want to express my love and gratitude to God by thanking the faithful men and women who have devoted the great energies of their soul to the welfare of mankind. It is only through such men and women that I can get a glimpse of God anywhere.”³⁴

While many applauded Douglass’s remarks, others, notably orthodox black clergymen, were outraged that Douglass, their foremost race spokesman, thanked primarily man rather than God for emancipation. Leading the criticism of Douglass for what they saw as scandalous infidelity was Reverend Jabez P. Campbell, bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and editor of that church’s official publication, the *Christian Recorder*. Douglass’s “god,” these critics charged, was the “Vishnu of the heathen, a half-god—a god who acknowledges his fear of another god—a god who unable to subdue sin, unable to bring eventual good from it, washes his hands, and lets the monster go scot free.” The true God, they maintained, was the supreme

epitome of goodness, morality, and justice. He was also the first cause and essential force behind human conduct; “a universe without a God would be like a body without a soul, or a locomotive without steam.” Clearly, God had willed and produced emancipation. Douglass’s critics charged him with blatant self-aggrandizement and false pride; he had forgotten God. They called upon him to repent and proclaim the vital agency of God’s handiwork in emancipation. “Assume not the glory to thyself!” they admonished Douglass.³⁵

On 18 May 1870, a mass meeting was held in Philadelphia’s Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church to demonstrate that Douglass’s views did not find favor among many of his people. Reverend James Williams set the tone for the meeting after the devotional preliminaries, when he stated: “While we love Frederick Douglass, we love truth more. We admire Frederick Douglass, but we love God more.” As a result, the group passed a resolution demanding that God be thanked regularly for delivering their brethren from slavery and that the Bible be kept in public schools. Douglass’s free thinking principles had led him to oppose the use of the King James Bible in public schools as a violation of both the religious liberty of non-Protestants and the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state.³⁶

W. H. Hunter’s reaction to Douglass’s religious liberalism exemplified the traditional religious opposition to Douglass’s views. “While willing to accord all due respect to the editor of the *Era* for talent, intelligence, and devotion to the interests of humanity,” Hunter wrote, “we object to recognizing him as a leader of his people, because he seeks to enlighten and raise the masses by human instrumentalities, unaided by Divine influence.” A Christian people could not tolerate a leader such as Douglass whose “covert infidelity” went so far as to oppose the use in public schools of the Bible: “the oldest history, the truest philosophy, the purest system of morality, the groundwork of all other truth, the book of laws on which is based all human jurisprudence.” Douglass’s “liberal opinions . . . ‘broad enough for all reasonable men to stand upon,’” which condemned “‘ignorance, bigotry, and superstition,’” Hunter contended, “are in reality, secret thrusts at the pure faith of Christianity.” Unlike Douglass, the kind of leader blacks needed, he concluded, was “the man who acknowledges his accountability to God for his actions, who looks up to Him for wisdom to know the right, for strength to do the right, and who will boldly take this position before the world.”³⁷

Douglass understood that his shift to religious liberalism would alienate some of his admirers and followers, but he professed “such is the penalty which every man must suffer who admits a new truth into his mind.” His reply to his critics illustrated his sarcastic bite in addition to his insight into religious

bigotry: "Thanks not to faith, but to the enlightenment of the age, and the growth of rational ideas among men, [that] to differ with the Church today does not bring torture and physical death." He opined, moreover, that "there is no doubt that religious malice is the same today as three hundred years ago. It would bite, sting and devour now as then, if it only had the power."³⁸

Douglass especially resented that the Bethel Church which now so vigorously chastised him for his religious liberalism had once closed its doors to the cause of abolitionism because the issue was apparently deemed too controversial. That the same church now rejoiced in emancipation and excoriated him, the abolitionist and religious liberal, for giving primary thanks to the abolitionists themselves rather than God for emancipation, was predictable, according to Douglass. "Nothing that I said," he remarked, "was likely to cast the least doubt upon the theological soundness of my Bethel brethren. That church has never been noted for heresy, for heresy implies thought, inquiry, and reflection": intellectual processes unsympathetic to blind religious faith and tradition.³⁹ Clearly, this conflict revealed not only the extent to which his religious liberalism separated him from the fundamentalist religion of most blacks, but also his ideological separation from a black institutional world where that religion exerted a powerful shaping influence on reform and uplift activities.

For Douglass, the veteran social reformer, then, the rationalism of positivism overshadowed the intuition of faith. The efficacy of concrete human deeds outshone that of abstract prayers, miracles, and revelations. "The mission of man's improvement," he argued, "has been wholly committed to man himself." God remained content in the background. Because divine power had never been directly exerted to remove evil from the world, "how great soever it may be," Douglass observed, without human will and action social reform was impossible.⁴⁰

Even with God offstage, Douglass's social universe remained bound by a basic and tidy moral mechanism. Although he could no longer speak unequivocally on behalf of the power of Christian faith, prayer, and miracles, now he could speak unequivocally on behalf of a pragmatic religion. His religious perspective on social reform now focused on "the natural moral forces of human society, and their tendency to the noble, the true, and the good." He "spoke only as a reformer, understanding the wisdom of adapting means to ends." The social reformer of necessity believed, Douglass deduced, that "moral, not less than physical, evils are under the control of man."⁴¹ As shown in his mature religious and social reform philosophies, the basis of his characteristic optimism developed a more secular humanistic emphasis as compared to the more Christian and divine emphasis of his earlier optimism.

Douglass reasoned that in light of God's inscrutability and noninterference

in human affairs, the logic and impact of Christian prayer—and, by implication, of Christian faith—was often moot. This belief in the efficacy of prayer he rejected as selfish, sometimes reactionary, and morally ambiguous. The efficacy of moral law had to supersede that of prayer; if not, moral disorder might ensue. “If it is admitted that there are moral laws, but affirmed that the consequence of their violations may be removed by a prayer, a sigh or a tear,” Douglass reasoned, “the result is about the same as if there was no law. Faith, in that case, takes the place of law, and belief, the place of life.” The immutability of moral law and judgment, therefore, was absolutely essential to Douglass’s social ethos. Otherwise, “a man has only to believe himself pure and right, a subject of special divine favor, and he is so.”⁴²

The belief in miracles also contradicted the operation of natural and rational laws which “in all directions” proved “imperative, inexorable, but beneficial withal.” Whereas “true to faith,” miracles were “false to fact.” These “outpourings of enthusiasm” resulted from and reflected “faith rather than . . . science.” Douglass suggested that such beliefs smacked of superstition. As a result, he concluded that they violated the “fundamental principles of all real progress, and ought, by some means or other, to be removed from the minds of men.”⁴³

For Douglass, it was blasphemous and sometimes illusory to credit God with man’s deeds. Fully knowing neither God’s motives nor His deeds, it was wrong to impute to Him those things clearly premeditated and done by man. Douglass noted that it was typical, nonetheless, “for the conquerors to thank God for the victory.” From Douglass’s progressive perspective sympathetic to the underdog, there were two potentially serious problems with this thanksgiving: its ethical arrogance and its very utterance by oppressors who were usually the conquerors at some point. “This thanksgiving,” he contended, “assumes that the heavenly father is always with the strong, against the weak, and with the victors against the vanquished.”⁴⁴ Still worse, Douglass insinuated, the assumption itself—like the contradictory but morally justifiable assumption of God siding with the underdog—was blasphemous. Given God’s noninterference in human affairs, the individual could only speculate or infer what God might do, not state what He might do or unequivocally did. Because the conquerors—generally identified also as the powerful and oppressors—controlled the dominant cultural assumptions and apparatus, they propagated the myth that God was on their side in the inevitable struggle between them and the conquered.

When the oppressed triumphed, they, too, envisioned God as having favored them. The mature Douglass vehemently disagreed. God, he assumed, chose no side; choosing sides among men and for God was a distinctly human

device. Indeed, if God chose a side and stood for anything at all, Douglass reasoned, He sided with and stood for the immutability and efficacy of moral law, regardless of human sophistry. “A finite creature,” Douglass concluded, “has no right to discriminate between the acts of an infinite God.”⁴⁵

The shift to religious liberalism was not the only major development in Douglass’s social reform philosophy. In the early 1850s, he embraced political action as a complement to moral suasion in his general social reform strategy. Previously, as a strict Garrisonian, he had deprecated the usefulness of political action for social reform. Echoing the Garrisonian orthodoxy in an address in Boston before the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society on 26 January 1842, Douglass noted that the major problem with a third party or primarily political approach to abolitionism was that “it disposes men to rely entirely on political, and not on moral action.” He elaborated upon that theme in a speech before the Anti-Slavery Society of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England on 3 August 1846. “We are not dependent on mere political action for the overthrow of slavery,” he asserted, “we are dependent on moral and religious power, that knows no geographical boundaries, that knows no laws, that knows no constitution or forms of government.”⁴⁶

By the middle of 1851, however, Douglass had changed his mind and decided to accept political action as a viable means toward social reform, especially abolition. The major reason for this important development was his carefully considered rejection of the Garrisonian proslavery interpretation of the United States Constitution. It took several years of rigorous study of political abolitionism and the Constitution for Douglass to reach this pivotal decision. Once he reached the conclusion that the Constitution was an antislavery document, he believed it now justifiable to act under it politically as well as morally. He quickly assumed the dual mantle of moral suasion and political action, and began sounding more and more like a veteran proponent of political action. “It is evident,” he editorialized on 10 September 1852, “that all reforms have their beginning with ideas, and that for a time they have to rely solely on the tongue and pen for progress, until they gain a sufficient number of adherents to make themselves felt at the ballot box.”⁴⁷

As a Garrisonian, Douglass had eschewed tactical and philosophical compromise, but as a proponent of political action allied with moral suasion, he became more amenable to it. Social reform through politics necessitated coalitions and compromises. He maintained that a “complete identity of opinion” was naive and unproductive. To demand this unreasonable goal, therefore, rendered “party action, or combined effort impossible.” Allowance had to be made for “those differences which result from location, education, habits

of thought, temperament, and mental development." If not, there existed "no ground for a minority to stand upon." Social reform through political channels often meant tolerating piecemeal and ambiguous political policies and actions. Douglass thus rejected the position of those uncompromising purists dedicated to principle "who would not vote to attain one or more great political blessings, or to remove one or more great political wrongs, because such a vote would not accomplish all that he might desire to have accomplished by his vote."⁴⁸

The politics of compromise and coalition for the achievement of "one great and good end," Douglass determined, did not automatically mean shelving or violating one's moral principles. His rule of thumb was deceptively simple. He maintained: "We ask no man to lose sight of any of his aims and objects. We only ask that they [these aims and objects] be allowed to serve out their natural probation." The problem, of course, was to define and then to establish the "natural probation" of one's "aims and objects." Douglass remained silent on how to accomplish this finesse. Instead, he delineated "our rule of political action": "the voter ought to see to it that his vote shall secure the highest good possible, at the same time that it does no harm." Likewise, he contended, "we can vote for a man who affirms, and will carry out one important truth, even though he should be blind in respect to others that we might deem important, provided, of course, he does not require us to deny any part of the truth which we hold; or, in other words, we can affirm his truths just so far and so long as he does not require us to negative ours."⁴⁹ In the complicated and morally dubious world of politics, Douglass's "rule of political action" was utopian and naive. In light of the dynamic tension between moral and political choice, no one—Douglass included—could strictly heed his "rule of political action."

Even after Douglass adopted political action as a means toward social reform, he still viewed the process of social reform as an essentially moral enterprise. Political action might assume short-term strategic significance, but moral suasion retained its long-term focal significance. Moral progress typically prefaced political and social progress. In mid-1852, Douglass admitted: "I know that political action is necessary only in the rear of public sentiment, and whenever public sentiment is strongly anti-slavery enough, then will be generated a party who will 'crystallize,' as Wendell Phillips said, 'this sentiment into law.'" While Douglass beheld political action "in the rear of public sentiment," he beheld moral suasion in its heart. Cognizant of many of the limitations of political parties as vehicles for social reform, Douglass emphasized the need for a more "faithful" institutional vehicle for social reform that would "apply the principles of truth continually."⁵⁰ Unfortunately, too closely attached to the traditional political parties and the traditional social reform associations, he never found this institutional vehicle.

Because it obscured the dynamic tension between moral suasion and political action, the marriage between them in Douglass's social reform philosophy had serious, sometimes negative, repercussions. Whereas the shift to religious liberalism had primarily philosophical ramifications, the shift to the politics of morality had practical and immediate consequences for social reform activity. First, the decision that political channels offered a viable means toward social reform brought Douglass inexorably into the political mainstream. Through his flirtation with the Free Soil party, his fluctuating allegiance to the Radical Abolition or Liberty party, ending with his political maturation into a full-fledged Republican stalwart and functionary, Douglass completed an about-face from his early position as an ardent Garrisonian opponent of political action. Second, as he became more entrenched in the political mainstream, he became less sensitive to the limitations of political action as a social reform tactic. As a result, his general social reform approach became increasingly defensive, and in some cases, politically conservative.

Third, the marriage of moral suasion and political action united strange bedfellows. Given the diversity of factors influencing political action—including economic, sociological, psychological, and ideological ones—the idealistic force of moral suasion might, and often did, exert limited, if any, overall impact on the union. In the cruel and aggressive political world, moral suasion easily came off as spineless and placable. Finally, the odd coupling of political action and moral suasion further complicated Douglass's race leadership. The alleviation of the awesome race relations dilemma demanded a revolutionary ideology calling for radical and fundamental changes in the status quo. Instead, Douglass adopted a reformist ideology encompassing an unstable and imperfect alliance between moral suasion and political action. This reformist ideology was woefully inadequate to the task of fomenting the necessary changes.

Notwithstanding the important changes in Douglass's philosophy of social reform, several aspects remained constant. His basic strategic assumption throughout remained the imperative and efficacy of agitation. His basic sociological assumption was always that the "jarring inconsistency" of America's race relations nightmare represented its most serious social malady. Similarly, he persisted in his essentially enlightened adherence to a rational and moral universe ordered by natural law. A utilitarian philosophy of history also remained constant in his social reform philosophy. Historical understanding, he stressed, could promote "security, progress, and reform." Indeed, man's ability to exploit history as a guide not only for understanding of the past, but also for contemporary action and planning for the future, he argued, signified "the secret of all progress and reform, the mystery of all revolutions and

changes in human society.” He chided Americans for their nonchalant ignorance of and disdain for the timeless value of history. “Caring little for the dead past,” he remonstrated, “we live in the present, and yet the past is our wisest and best instructor.”⁵¹

The most striking continuity in Douglass’s social reform philosophy was his overwhelming optimism: a central element of his personality and life’s philosophy. He emphasized many reasons for his optimism concerning his country’s present and future, including its ideals, its composite racial and ethnic character, its natural resources, and its divinely inspired mission as the prototypical nation. In addition, its youthfulness constituted a major reason for the social reformer to be optimistic about his crusade, in spite of setbacks and seemingly insurmountable problems. America, he gladly observed, was not yet rigidly set in its ways; “she is still in the impressionable stage of her existence.”⁵²

Wherever it hit, the reform spirit of the youthful American nation between 1830 and 1861 was pervasive and intense. There were many social problems and many reforms designed to solve them. Thomas Wentworth Higginson—Unitarian minister, author, social reformer, and colonel of the first Negro regiment in the Union army during the Civil War—characterized the bewildering plethora of social reform enthusiasms as the “Sisterhood of Reforms.” Social reformers generally embraced several different, yet ultimately related, crusades as integral to social betterment. Douglass supported the movements for free public school education, temperance, universal peace, and land reform; against flogging in the navy and capital punishment; as well as for women’s rights and abolitionism. Exemplifying his deep humanitarianism, Douglass’s social reform philosophy was expansive and generous. “All great reforms go together,” he asserted before a temperance audience in Cork, Ireland on 20 October 1845. “Whatever tends to elevate, whatever tends to exalt humanity in one portion of the world,” he explained, “tends to exalt it in another part; the same feeling that warms the heart of the philanthropist here, animates that of the lover of humanity in every country.”⁵³

Instead of capital punishment for criminals, Douglass, like most contemporary progressives, urged rehabilitation through incarceration. He desired “a thorough reform in our criminal laws—basing them on the truly Christian principles of love and good will towards man,” and a total rejection of “the cold-blooded and barbarous principles of retaliation.” He seemed unaware that incarceration itself signified a form of social retaliation against the criminal. Life was sacred, he maintained, and regardless of the criminal’s transgression, it was wrong for society to deprive him of his God-given right to life. Reflect-

ing his beliefs in man's basic goodness, human perfectibility, and progress, he assumed that the criminal could be forced to quit his evil ways and to cultivate his better—true—nature. The key to this transformation, Douglass contended, was proper institutionalization. Cut off from society, "wasted and emaciated by heavy chains and horrid thoughts, and long confined in a gloomy cell," Douglass noted, the prisoner "is completely transformed, both in temper and spirit." Like most progressive social reformers of his day, Douglass's idealistic conception of criminal rehabilitation through the recent advance of the penitentiary ignored the possibility that incarceration might be retrogressive rather than progressive. Indicative of a sincere belief in environmentalism, these progressives fervently argued that the modern penitentiary would transform the social misfit into the model citizen. Placed in the proper milieu, individual "virtue, honor, . . . and happiness" would supplant individual "sin, disgrace, and misery."⁵⁴

Douglass's support for the land-reform movement grew out of his empathy for the landless and impoverished. As a former slave, he had once been among their number. Still, he viewed "property in man" as infinitely worse than "property in soil." Unlike mere "property in soil" which was central to Western and capitalist tradition, "property in man," he argued, blatantly violated "self-evident truth." Both revealed a conflict between vested interests and progressive social change. He asserted that the central question confronting the land-reform movement was to decide upon the mode of landownership "which best secures the happiness of the whole human family." Even though there were important differences among land reformers and between land reformers and their opponents that Douglass thought merited serious study, he agreed in principle with all who flatly opposed land monopolies as unjust and immoral. "The welfare of the world," he argued, "demands the abrogation of monopolies."⁵⁵

Douglass favored impartial government support for homesteaders and condemned the land giveaways of the government to the railroads. The republican ideology stressing the interdependency of "free soil, free labor, and free men" reflected Douglass's own thinking. He insisted: "Multiply the free homes of the people, let each man have around him the blessed influence of family and home, and the rampant vice and rowdyism of our country will disappear." Land reform, consequently, embodied the moral thrust of both social reform and the rural utopianism of traditional American ideology. Douglass thus questioned the government grants of "millions upon millions of acres of public lands, to aid soulless railroad corporations to get rich." The social interest would be better served, he believed, through low interest and inexpensive land grants or loans to homesteaders.⁵⁶

The gory and inhumane practice of flogging in the navy incurred Douglass's staunch opposition. He could not accept the standard logic for this "cursed and bloody scourge." To him it constituted a barbaric method to discipline and to control the youthful naval force: a method that bred failure. He advocated instead the use of more rational and mature approaches to naval discipline. This hatred of flogging in the navy touched upon an even more basic opposition to the peacetime navy. A strong opponent of aggressive warfare, he implied that a nation at peace did not need the extravagance of an armed navy. He wrote: "Of course we hate the whole naval system, and would sign a petition to have it utterly blotted out of existence." Barring the abolition of the peacetime navy, he called upon social reformers to ensure at least the abolition of flogging in the navy.⁵⁷

In 1846, opponents in the United States and Great Britain charged that Douglass endeavored to incite British animosity toward the United States so as to provoke a British-American war that would free the slaves. He did so, they contended, through his withering criticisms of American institutions—namely slavery and the proslavery religious establishment. The possibility that England and the United States might go to war over the disputed Oregon boundary agitated influential minds on both sides of the Atlantic. Advocates of both abolitionism and universal peace, like Douglass, had to square their commitment to peace with the prospect that an Anglo-American war would free the American slaves. Addressing the London Peace Society on 19 May 1846, he maintained that "such is my regard for the principle of peace—such is my deep, firm conviction that nothing can be attained for liberty universally by war, that were I to be asked the question as to whether I would have my emancipation by the shedding of one single drop of blood, my answer would be in the negative."⁵⁸ By the beginning of the Civil War, however, his answer had changed to the positive.

In 1846, though, he answered no "because I am a believer in Christianity . . . [,] because I am a lover of my race," and because "I am opposed to war."⁵⁹ While Douglass only implied how this opposition to war reflected his love for his people, he clearly stated how it reflected his Christian beliefs. Whereas he opposed a war between slaves and masters as suicidal for the former, he could not argue the same for a British-American war that would incidentally free the slaves. He opposed that prospective war primarily on broad humanitarian grounds that encompassed, yet superseded, the narrow grounds of black liberation. His subordination of abolitionism to peace was brief and reflected mostly his early efforts to grapple with the relationship and priority between Garrisonian concepts of abolitionism and nonresistance. More important, this subordination of race to humanity revealed not only the deep-seated conflict

between them in Douglass's mind, but also his assimilationist tendency—most evident in his early and later social reform career—to question race consciousness.

Douglass maintained that the humanitarian basis for his opposition to war owed to his belief in the altruism of the Christian “spirit of love.” The person who experienced this love could not harm his most inveterate foe, “no matter what his conduct happens to be.” The spirit of war contradicted the “spirit of love.” Because Christian ministers themselves often were not opposed to war, their support and toleration of it constituted a most telling “reproach upon the Christian religion.” Chaplains in the armed forces, for instance, not only vowed to God to promote the “spirit of love,” but they also vowed to the nation to seek blessings for the war effort.⁶⁰

Douglass's actual “spirit of love” differed from its altruistic ideal. Professions of religious meekness to the contrary, he believed in, counseled, and acted upon the natural compulsion to self-defense. Aggression he thoroughly opposed. Self-defense, on the other hand, was wholly justified. Clearly, his “spirit of love” did not lead him to reject the spirit of war that animated justifiable conflicts, like America's role in its war of liberation. Personally speaking, this “spirit of love,” whose origins he dated back to his introduction to northern free society, did not lead him in retrospect to question his battle with Covey, the “Negro Breaker.” Nor did it cause him to question his forceful and often violent battles on behalf of the desegregation of public facilities. Wars—private, public, civil, and international—were thus often both unavoidable and justifiable.

Obviously, Douglass was not a Christian pacifist. He was neither a Garrisonian nonresistant rejecting all force as aggressive nor a Quaker nonresistant abjuring force to the extent of foregoing it even in self-defense. His commitment to universal peace revealed a basic opposition to needless force and bloodshed. War was especially bad because it usually endangered, harmed, and killed the innocent as well as the culpable. As a result of the apocalyptic events leading up to the Civil War, Douglass became more amenable to the likelihood of war as a means toward black liberation. The Civil War, which he interpreted above all else as a war to emancipate the slaves, finally settled one aspect of the ambiguity of his universal peace advocacy. Regardless of its hazards and evils, war, he now believed, was completely justified to protect and to extend human liberty.⁶¹

A deep concern about the negative human impact of alcoholic beverages fueled the influential nineteenth-century American temperance crusade. In the popular mind, “demon alcohol” represented a primary cause and symbol of both innumerable social evils and the general processes of social and moral

decay. Besides drunkenness, such ills as poverty, vice, crime, and familial disintegration were often attributed to the demon alcohol. Furthermore, overindulgence in alcohol, for whatever reason, symbolized sin, eternal damnation, and a serious lack of self-control. The organized temperance movement, as a result, in a sense sought to impose social control and moral order over various problems confronting a rapidly changing nineteenth-century America.⁶²

Upwardly mobile and respectable blacks, as well as whites, were often partisans of the temperance cause. As early as 1788, the Free African Society of Philadelphia would not admit to membership anyone who imbibed alcoholic beverages. Local, state, and national Negro conventions went on record favoring temperance. Like their white cohorts, they, too, linked the consumption of alcohol to social and moral pathology. In fact, temperance was an important aspect of black social reform thought in the nineteenth century, especially in the antebellum period. The black temperance crusade vividly illustrated the emphasis black communities and leaders placed on morality, uplift, and bourgeois respectability. Sobriety symbolized a willing and faithful acceptance of middle-class values. Douglass consistently identified intemperance as a manifestation of bad values, social disorder, and immorality. For him and for his cohorts, temperance constituted a natural extension of black liberation.⁶³

Douglass argued that slavemasters dispensed alcohol among their slaves, typically during holidays and weekends, as a ploy to tighten their reins over them. The strategic dispensation of alcohol, then, was part of the slavemaster's conspiracy to exploit "conductors or safety valves to carry off the explosive elements inseparable from the human mind when reduced to the condition of slavery." A drunken slave could neither plot nor execute either an insurrection or an escape. As with the holidays and weekends of which it constituted a significant ingredient, the slavemaster's encouragement of intemperance among his slaves "became a part and parcel of the gross wrongs and inhumanity of slavery." Rather than representing benevolence, these "free" drunken sprees revealed "a fraud instituted by human selfishness, the better to serve the ends of injustice and oppression." The slavemaster's cunning in this case, Douglass regretted, often proved devastatingly successful. Many a slave, he lamented, came to associate liberty with "brutal drunkenness." Consequently, this inebriated and duped slave was confused, at least for a while, as to what really constituted "virtuous liberty." Like himself for a while, they seemed to feel that "it was about as well to be a slave to master, as to be a slave to whisky and rum."⁶⁴ In large measure because of his negative and unsettling personal experience with intemperance as a slave, Douglass adopted temperance as an important weapon in his social reform arsenal.

Black drunkenness not only perpetuated the image of black shiftlessness and degradation, but it also seemed to support the racist contention of congenital black inferiority. Temperance, therefore, was necessary to promote black dignity and respectability as well as to illustrate black moral integrity. In effect, black sobriety underlined the belief in equality between the races. Temperance, moreover, was important to the liberation struggle. Referring to his enslaved brethren, Douglass remarked that he desired “their emancipation from intemperance, because I believe it would be the means—a great and glorious means—towards helping to break their physical chains and letting them go free.” He excoriated both those ministers and secular leaders who themselves drank and those who refused to take the pledge of total abstinence. Douglass thought it imperative that black leadership take the pledge and set a sterling moral example for other blacks. While visiting the Dublin home of Father Theobald Matthew, Irish temperance advocate, on 22 October 1845, Douglass himself took the pledge. The racism of white temperance organizations, however, impeded his participation in them, and led him to champion temperance primarily within black temperance forums and other social reform conclaves.⁶⁵

An indispensable component of Douglass’s social reformism was his ardent advocacy of free, tax-supported, public school education. The campaign for public schools gathered momentum during the Jacksonian era largely because of that period’s growing democratic emphasis upon an equal common school education for all American children. Americans generally believed that a formal education would lead to a more rewarding and productive life. The social reform of public schools was also construed as vital to the commonweal. Progressive social reformers, like Douglass, envisioned public schools as necessary to provide moral, civic, and intellectual training for America’s youth. Through discipline and instruction, public schools would help to insure the development of the impressionable youth of the present into the virtuous citizens of the future. These institutions would also serve as a key mechanism in the assimilation of America’s various racial and ethnic groups, especially the millions of European immigrants who arrived throughout the nineteenth century, into an American nationality.

Toward these and other ends, Massachusetts first established a system of public schools in 1827. Several northern and midwestern states followed suit, notably between 1850 and 1871. In the South, public schools were a legacy of Reconstruction. Typically, however, the high-flown ideals and goals of nineteenth-century public school education far outstripped its meager reality. Notwithstanding clear progress toward state-supported public schools throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, by 1900 most social reformers advo-

cating such schools would probably have agreed that there were too few students in too few schools generally receiving an education subject to much improvement.⁶⁶

On 24 September 1883 before the Convention of Colored Men meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, Douglass reiterated his support for a federally supported system of public schools. The alarming illiteracy rates of the 1880 national census, he suggested, endangered America's moral, civic, and intellectual fiber. The federal government could no longer afford to wait upon the states to act; now was the time for the national government "to enter vigorously upon the work of universal education." Douglass maintained that for the federal government "to withhold this boon is to neglect the greatest assurance it has had of its own perpetuity." It was indisputable, Douglass insisted, "that in a country governed by the people, like ours, education of the youth of all classes is vital to its welfare, prosperity, and to its existence."⁶⁷

In that same speech, he outlined a dual proposal stipulating a three- to five-year United States Treasury program to pay bounties to black soldiers and sailors. Upon expiration of that program, the second part of his proposal would send the balance of the allotted funds to black colleges. The most money would go to those schools doing the best job in industrial education. A priority of Douglass's advocacy of public school education was always the educational needs of his people. A commitment to education as a necessary, though not sufficient, means to improve their lives was common to all Americans, but especially to blacks. Racial discrimination, however, tended to keep black children out of public schools, or to segregate them in unequal all-black schools. It was not unusual for the children of black taxpaying citizens to be unjustly denied a public school education altogether. In such cases, the education of black schoolchildren might rely upon the philanthropy of the black community or concerned whites. In many cases, even philanthropic support was not enough to overcome the racist opposition. The leading white citizens of New Haven, for instance, successfully opposed the attempt of a group of white philanthropists to establish a Negro manual labor college there in the early 1830s.⁶⁸

Such opposition did not diminish the black desire for and advocacy of education as a means for social and economic elevation. In spite of such opposition, the 1832 National Negro Convention—like the previous and subsequent National Negro Conventions—went on record in favor of establishing a manual labor school in some congenial location. The convention denounced the New Haven decision as a disgraceful submission to prejudice. Still, the convention address reiterated: "We must have colleges and high schools on the Manual Labor system. . . . If we ever expect to see the influence of prejudice

decrease, and ourselves respected, it must be by the blessings of an enlightened education.”⁶⁹

Douglass constantly echoed this need for black mechanical or industrial education. An education, he contended, should prepare black youth for a job. He thought a mechanical education more relevant than a classical education to the needs of a people, like Negroes, struggling to overcome the impact of slavery. In an 1853 letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, he outlined yet another proposal for a black manual labor school. He explained how such an institution fit into the evolutionary processes of social progress and reform. Equating “high schools and colleges” with an education beyond the immediate needs of the black masses, he wrote that “we cannot, and we ought not to hope that, in a single leap from our low condition, we can reach that of Ministers, Lawyers, Doctors, Editors, Merchants, etc. These will, doubtless, be attained by us; but this will only be, when we have patiently and laboriously, and I may add successfully, mastered and passed through the intermediate grades of agriculture and the mechanic arts.” This argument was strikingly similar to that later advanced by Booker T. Washington, the most well-known and influential black advocate of black industrial education.⁷⁰

Douglass apparently never considered the inherent conflict in his dual advocacy of free, tax-supported, public school education for all children, regardless of race, and the special educational needs of black youth. Indeed, the argument for the special educational needs of black youth could quite easily be used to support either the black exclusivist or white racist arguments for the necessity of separate black and white schools. Douglass, on the contrary, was among those social radicals who believed an integrated public school education could alleviate racism and foster human brotherhood. He accepted separate black schools only as a temporary expedient until all schools could be made color-blind. Ironically, Douglass’s blatantly color-conscious call for mechanical training among black youth in particular, by possibly separating them off into a special mechanical education track, contradicted and might have impeded the egalitarian goals of an integrated public school education. It is unclear how the obvious inequality of condition between white and black children, and between whites and blacks generally, could have been balanced under his approach. In fact, such an approach might easily have perpetuated or exacerbated this inequality of condition. Douglass’s failure to examine more fully the fundamental dilemma of how to achieve equality of educational opportunity as a means toward equality of condition represented a well-intentioned example of America’s historic and tragic failure in this regard.

Nevertheless, education remained a central aspect of Douglass’s life phi-

losophy as well as his social reform philosophy. He believed that education was a lifelong and experiential, besides merely intellectual, process aimed at self-realization and social betterment. In a sense, then, the goals of education reflected those of social reform: the liberation of the human spirit and the actualization of human potential. "Education," he observed, "means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the only light by which men can be free. To deny education to any people is one of the greatest crimes against human nature. It is to deny them the means of freedom and the rightful pursuit of happiness, and to defeat the very end of their being. They can neither honor themselves, nor their Creator."⁷¹

Part Three

National Identity, Culture, and Science

There is no disguising the fact that the American people are much interested in and mystified about the mere matter of color as connected with manhood.

— Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*

You and I were not sent into the world to preserve our color, but to be intelligent, upright, industrious, and prosperous men and women—in a word to make the wisest and best possible use of our powers and opportunities. Color will take care of itself now and in times to come.

We are surrounded by a civilization which is the accumulation of ages. . . . It belongs to no people or nation exclusively. It does not belong to the white man. It does not belong to the black man.

— Douglass, “Exordium,” Douglass Papers
(Library of Congress)

8. A Composite American Nationality

Race was an ambiguous, albeit vital, concept in the nineteenth-century Western world. Among other things, it commonly referred to a nationality, a nation-state, an ethnologically distinct people, or simply an exotic and mysterious people. From individual personality to international relations, much of what was important to nineteenth-century Western civilization was understood in the context of race. What environment had been to the preceding century—especially to the enlightened humanist—race, to a large extent, became in the nineteenth century—especially to the romantic nationalist. Race came to function as a necessary, if not wholly sufficient, explanation for almost everything, including Western colonialism and imperialism. Dr. Robert Knox, influential British professor of anatomy, propounded this increasingly popular and powerful outlook. “Race,” he wrote, “is everything: literature, science, art—in a word, civilization depends on it.”¹

Racial thought before and throughout the nineteenth century revealed a complex and sometimes bewildering range of beliefs, attitudes, and ideals, ranging from benign paternalism to vicious racism. During the nineteenth century, however, the study of race assumed a theoretical and scientific mantle of sophistication as scientists, intellectuals, and propagandists endeavored to comprehend it by minimizing its characteristic ambiguity.² Their failure illustrates the disastrous human impact of a potent human myth—race—and the invidious ramifications of its most malignant extreme—racism.

Race in nineteenth-century America clarified the status quo among the various known peoples and underlaid America’s national identity. An acute awareness of racial differences was a critical factor enabling architects of the emerging United States to develop a sense of their own separate racial (Anglo) and national (American) identities which they fused into a single identity—Anglo-American. Benjamin Franklin’s essay, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, published in 1754, graphically captured the emotive vision of the United States as a white country. He asked: why “darken its People? why increase the sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys [Native Americans], of increasing the lovely White . . . ?” Expanding upon that theme during the Civil War, Samuel S. Cox, an Ohio congressman, noted that history revealed this country was “made for white men; that this Government is a Government of white men; that the men who made it never intended by

anything they did to place the black race upon an equality with the white.”³ To wit, the representative American was white; the nonwhite was an interloper who helped define an American through negative example. Not surprisingly, therefore, many influential whites attributed the cultural genius and historic promise of America to its Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic origins.⁴

Each race, nevertheless, possessed its distinctive gifts. Racial heredity, rather than environment, signified the key to human history. For whites who had mastered their environment and achieved historical greatness, the process of continuing racial evolution permitted them to manipulate even further their environment and, thus, to affect the course of their future. For nonwhites still captive to their environment and basically barbarous, the permanently arrested process of racial evolution left them in an ominous state. Extinction appeared possible; genocide seemed reasonable. There was also an alleged “instinctive antipathy among the races.” Nation building, as a result, necessitated racial purity; miscegenation was unnatural; and mulattoes were congenitally weak, immoral, and torn by “confused race instincts.”⁵

The contemporary ascendancy of racism seriously undermined the challenge to this racial orthodoxy. Those like Frederick Douglass who struggled valiantly against that orthodoxy swam against the tide. Douglass, for instance, believed in both racial equality and cultural hierarchy. Although he agreed that each race had its special gifts, he believed human moral and mental endowments to be a function of environment and, consequently, alterable. More so than race and heredity, environment signified the key to history and culture. He saw no “instinctive antipathy among the races.” Racial homogeneity and purity, therefore, were unnecessary for and detrimental to nation building; miscegenation was natural; and mulattoes were congenitally strong, moral, and racially well adjusted.

Indeed, human diversity undergirded human unity and equality in Douglass’s world view. Paradoxically, he also believed in the romantic notion of peculiar racial gifts. His interpretation of these gifts reflected the common belief that each race had a unique genius and, as a result, a particular contribution to make to a comprehensive, though hierarchical, view of human culture and history. He shared, for example, the common nineteenth-century American belief in and admiration for a reputed Anglo-Saxon genius for republican democracy.⁶

Douglass’s belief in both the romantic concept of peculiar racial gifts and the Enlightenment concept of a singular human nature distinctly betrayed both the eclecticism of his thought and its often complex character. While praising Anglo-Saxons for republican democracy, he upbraided them for power madness and its evil consequences. “The love of power,” he contended, “is one of the strongest traits of the Anglo-Saxon race.” Furthermore, this “love of power

and dominion, strengthened by two centuries of irresponsible power” buttressed slavery and racism.⁷ Intellectually, Douglass struggled ingeniously, yet unsuccessfully, to resolve his ambivalence toward Anglo-Saxons and races generally as well as the paradox of peculiar racial gifts amid human unity and equality. The dynamic mechanism of his approach toward both goals was a provocative version of the “melting-pot” theme—a composite American nationality.

Ambivalence typified Douglass’s attitudes toward the various races and Negroes and Caucasians in particular. These two, like all races, simultaneously possessed both good and bad qualities. For example, as Douglass perceived the English, the representative Caucasian race, they exhibited a perplexing duality. It was clear to him that in terms of “mental, moral, and humane civilization,” they were unparalleled. Thus, he fulsomely praised them for abolishing slavery in the British West Indies. The central theme of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *English Traits*—that “England is the best of actual nations”—found an enthusiastic supporter in Douglass. An Anglophile like Emerson, he was especially delighted to find his “own views of the civilization of England supported by one so thoughtful and able as the sage of Concord.”⁸

Nevertheless, in 1871, Douglass criticized English involvement in the slave trade and in the postemancipation “Coolie” trade (immigrant Asian labor), their oppression of the Irish and other subject British peoples, and their aggression and violence in Africa. His restrained response to the socioeconomics of the English “Coolie” trade and English intervention and aggression in Africa vividly exposed his ambivalence toward the liberal and kind, yet harsh and tyrannical, English. In his assessment of the complicated British West Indian capitalist labor economy, he recognized the conflicting perspectives of the immigrants seeking socioeconomic opportunity; the emancipated black West Indians also seeking socioeconomic opportunity, but still economically captive to the British; and the preeminent British capitalists. He also recognized the centrality of property rights, individual liberty, and freedom of choice under British dominion. West Indians, faced with the challenge of an imported Asian labor force, interpreted the dilemma as a British plot to tighten their economic stranglehold over them. Their erstwhile British masters might now displace them as laborers, “doom them to want, and as they owned no land in their own right, possibly to starvation.” While Douglass sympathized with the plight of West Indian freedpeople, apparently he did not see the importation of Asian laborers as a threat to their existence. Instead, he recognized the right of the immigrants to sell their labor and come to the British West Indies to work and of British capitalists to buy their labor and transport them there.⁹

Douglass found the “Coolie” trade a double-edged sword. The Asian jour-

ney to the West Indies too often bore a striking resemblance to the slave trade. On the other hand, as immigrant laborers, Asians (those who survived the journey) often discovered a better life. Douglass thus found it difficult, but not impossible, to reconcile the paradox of a reprehensible “Coolie” trade contributing to British civilization. Except for an ethical admonition to the British to improve the lives of their subject peoples, especially the conditions endured by Asian immigrants, he certainly offered no clear alternative. Faced with the structural inequality of colonialism and capitalist property and labor relations, however, ethical admonition signified essentially an admission of accommodation to the socioeconomic status quo.

Douglass also saw the base and the sublime of the British character revealed by British military and imperial intervention in Africa. Referring to England, he argued: “We may deplore and detest her wars in Africa and in Egypt and declare that she has no business in either—and yet we can never forget or cease to applaud her rich contributions to the cause of justice and philanthropy.”¹⁰ Upon viewing a “fine show” of British troops parading through the streets of Cairo in early March 1887, he acknowledged the Egyptian disdain for the British presence in their country but rationalized that “they are probably much better off with them than they would be without them.”¹¹ Even though the oppressive aspect of British intervention was wrong, the British effort to bring Egypt political peace, social progress, and economic prosperity—not to mention other innumerable “blessings” of English culture—was laudable. The critical English advantage, clearly, was their hegemony.

The Negro’s critical disadvantage, in contrast, was his lack of political and cultural hegemony. Douglass understood political powerlessness, but not cultural powerlessness. In his view, Negro Americans, notably the southern Negro, constituted mostly a landless and oppressed peasantry in need of social, economic, and political opportunity.¹² The major cultural issue, according to Douglass, was Afro-American acculturation to Anglo-American values, norms, and institutions. As with other races, the peasant Negro had to manipulate his situation and character to his advantage. Striking the romantic and outmoded key of farm life as the southern Negro’s salvation in an 1873 speech before an assembly of Tennessee farmers, he argued that it would permit the southern Negro to maximize his best traits and minimize his worst ones. He resigned himself to the thought that “we are just what we are: a laborious, joyous, thoughtless, improvident people, just released from our thralldom, and with just such necessities as agricultural life will secure.” Reaching for candor and an intimate identification with the southern masses of his people, Douglass actually achieved a romantic view of their objective situation, and, in fact, separated himself—certainly thoughtful and provident—in an important sense from them.¹³

Douglass contrasted the “thoughtless” and “improvident” Negro with the thoughtful and provident Jew and German, both of whom had managed to manipulate these positive traits in concert with their racial or ethnic distinctiveness to their advantage. With no need to explain or to discuss the limitations of his evidence, in private correspondence, Douglass openly remarked upon the Negro’s thoughtlessness and improvidence. In a letter to Rosetta, his oldest daughter, commenting upon an incident where her daughter’s aid to a fellow Negro had been thanklessly exploited, he lamented that “gratitude is not a very strong feature of the colored race.” When the Haitian government, which Douglass represented in connection with their pavilion at the Chicago World Columbian Exposition in 1893, was slow to pay its exposition creditors, he wrote that “the government of Haiti, like colored people generally, is behind in its payments to creditors.”¹⁴ He called upon the Negro to emulate the example of the thoughtful and provident Jew and German, as well as his personal example of thoughtfulness and providence.

Notwithstanding his harsh criticism of the Negro’s alleged bad traits, which he acknowledged followed primarily from slavery, Douglass still saw the Negro as belonging to a race with positive traits comparable to those of any other race. The cruelest form of slavery ever known to mankind, he suggested, had only magnified this fact. Seemingly more so than members of other races, the Negro—even as a slave—exhibited an unusual and remarkable tenacity: a “malleable toughness.” The Negro slave’s struggle for freedom and survival epitomized this resiliency. His ultimate psychic and spiritual triumph over slavery, Douglass argued, “only proves to my mind, that though slavery is armed with a thousand stings, it is not able to entirely kill the elastic spirit of the bondmen.” He explained: “That spirit will rise and walk abroad, despite . . . whips and chains, and extract from the cup of nature, occasional drops of joy and gladness.” Similarly, he observed, “there are attributes and qualities of manhood too subtle and vital to be reached and extinguished even by the power of slavery.”¹⁵

He likened the “laborious” and “joyous” Negro to the Arab, whom he described as “erect, strong, lean, and sinewy.” This physical description strongly contrasted with the unflattering descriptions he often painted of the Negro’s physical deformities—such as shuffling gaits, distorted limbs, and battered physiques—owing to past enslavement. As he paternally observed these “sable children of the desert,” he approvingly noted “among them several genuine Negroes and they seemed not a whit behind their fellow workmen either in noise or physical ability.”¹⁶ Excluding those Negroes physically deformed by their slave past, Douglass observed not only a close physical resemblance between the Arab and the Negro, but also a close dispositional resemblance. These Arabs or “half-Negroes” toiled “amid shouts of laughter

and tricks of fun, as if their hard work were the veriest sport.” Likewise, he had observed that “the Negro works best and hardest when it is no longer work, but becomes play with joyous singing.” Summarizing his keen admiration for the Arab laborer, he wrote in a letter to Lewis, his son, that “there is no better physical man living than the Arab.”¹⁷ Both the Negro and his apparent kin, the Arab, were hard working and fun loving.

That the Negro slave had generally favored survival to futile insurrection had shown his keen insight, according to Douglass. The slave tactic of accommodation, he reasoned, “has shown that there is not only more courage and fortitude in submission than in resistance, but more wisdom and larger results.” Indeed, “men are but men, . . . the bravest and proudest . . . will yield to superior force and submit wholly when they cannot resist with success.” Throughout his own life, Douglass adhered to the pragmatic politics of survival. As a result of his people’s and his own experience, he concluded—“without excluding the heroic from human life”—that “real greatness of character” consisted “in the qualities that enable a people to bear and forbear, to submit to wrong for the moment and bide their time for the opportunity and ultimate right, rather than to accept annihilation, wherein all is lost.”¹⁸ As illustrated in his moral victory over and spiritual transcendence of slavery, the Negro, Douglass argued, personified perseverance. Douglass strongly implied that this exemplary perseverance might be traced back to the Negro’s survival of his cruel rupture from Africa—his ancestral homeland.

Douglass’s earliest impressions of Africa went back to his childhood. He remembered as an adult that as a young and impressionable slave child on the Lloyd plantation in the 1820s, several of the elderly slaves could recall both having been taken from Africa and certain mundane realities of their African lives. Other presumably younger slaves had told the young Douglass that their parents had been “stolen from Africa.” So quite early Douglass learned of Africa as a homeland for many other slaves, though not for himself. His homeland at that point was the Lloyd plantation. Nevertheless, he suggested that news of the ancestral ties between many slaves and Africa whetted his curiosity concerning slavery, Africa, and the obvious link between them. This news plus that of runaway slaves, he revealed, “was important knowledge, but not such as to make me feel very easy in my slave condition.”¹⁹

As he grew older, moreover, he noticed that the African-born slaves apparently spoke a pidgin English—“a mixture of Guinea and everything else you please.” As an American-born slave, he found it difficult at first to understand the spoken language of African-born slaves. To show possession, for instance, they did not use an “s,” according to Douglass. As a result, “Captain An-

thony's Tom" became "Cap'n Ant'ny Tom." This difference in spoken language which Douglass detected between American-born slaves like himself and African-born slaves reflected important cultural differences within the slave community. African-born slaves were significantly less acculturated in Euro-American terms than American-born slaves.²⁰

After a while, even young "Mas' Daniel," Douglass's favorite playing companion, and Douglass himself had not only learned to comprehend the spoken language of the African-born slaves, but they had also "measurably adopted their dialect and their ideas."²¹ That whites and blacks in the Americas learned from one another, and that African culture and European culture (as well as Native American culture) influenced each other, in spite of Euro-American dominance, illustrated that cross-cultural contact yielding cultural transmission and change was reciprocal, if not necessarily equal.

Douglass also recalled Sandy, "a genuine African," who worked roots and allegedly possessed magical powers common in Africa and the Far East. Not only did Sandy have a dream which he shared with him, forecasting the failure of his initial runaway scheme, but several years earlier he had used a root that Sandy swore would prevent a whipping from Covey. When the ultimately unsuccessful whipping ensued, Douglass believed that his skepticism regarding such superstition had been confirmed.²² Christianity—a symbol of Western culture—had prevailed over magic—a symbol of African culture. This fateful adolescent impression of Africa as a land of irreligion or superstition would also inform his adult impression of Africa and Africans.

The more Douglass read and learned about Africa the clearer the relationship between Africa and Euro-America became to him. He explored his ideas on the relationship among Europeans, Africans, Euro-Americans, and Afro-Americans in 1854 as part of his ethnological reflections on the unity and equality of mankind. To Douglass the ethnologist, the question of the racial identity of the ancient Egyptians represented a vital issue impinging upon both African and Western identity, culture, and history. Like abolitionists and racial egalitarians generally, Douglass and his black colleagues, including Delany, William Wells Brown, Edward W. Blyden, and Garnet, argued that the ancient Egyptians were primarily a Negroid people. Consequently, the glorious achievements of ancient Egyptian civilization redounded to the Negro's credit. Reflecting that perspective, Blyden described the overpowering emotions that swept over him while viewing the Egyptian pyramids in 1866. "This, thought I, was the work of my African progenitors. . . . Feelings came over me far different from those I have ever felt when looking at the mighty works of European genius. I felt that I had a peculiar heritage in the Great Pyramid built . . . by the enterprising sons of Ham, from which I descended." Douglass, in

an even more mystical vein, wrote that upon looking out over Egypt from the majestic height of the highest pyramid's apex: "there are stirring in the one who beholds it for the first time thoughts and feelings never thought and felt before."²³

Two thousand years ago, Douglass observed, presently preeminent but once struggling Western Europeans had borrowed heavily from formerly preeminent but presently struggling Egyptians. Now, Egypt was borrowing heavily from Western culture. Douglass took note of this process of cultural borrowing during his Egyptian sojourn in early 1887. Looking more closely at the related processes of historical development and cross-cultural transmission, he detected several ironic twists. He was struck upon attending an American Christian missionary settlement in Egypt that in a Moslem country with ties to the early historical development of Christianity, some Egyptians were learning from representatives of a land wholly unknown to Egypt and Europe two thousand years earlier.²⁴ Civilized achievement along with the influence of cross-cultural borrowing throughout history not only evidenced human unity and equality to Douglass, but also the cyclical pattern of the historical rise and fall of civilizations.

In the increasingly racist milieu of nineteenth-century Euro-America, the concept of the ancient Egyptians as a people dominated racially, culturally, and politically by Caucasians, or at worst, a Caucasoid-dominated mixture, carried scholarly and popular favor. Given such a milieu, white racists were unable to reconcile notions of historic Negroid inferiority with a significant Negro role in ancient Egyptian civilization, indubitably a primary contributor to Western culture. The response of American polygenists to the question of Egyptians' racial identity typified this inability. Archaeologist Samuel G. Morton, the most influential polygenist in mid-nineteenth-century America, demonstrated this biased tradition and point of view. Even though Morton admitted that the ancient Egyptians were a mixed people, including among others Negroes and Caucasians, he argued that the Caucasian component predominated.²⁵

Douglass interpreted Morton's clever finesse as "an elaborate argument to prove that the ancient Egyptians were totally distinct from Negroes," for he neglected the clear evidence of resemblance and affinity between the contemporary Negro and the ancient Egyptian. Morton, Douglass noted, described the contemporary Egyptian in a most revealing manner: "Complexion brown. The nose is straight, excepting the end, where it is rounded and wide; the lips are rather thick, and the hair black and curly." Douglass suggested that Morton's refusal to acknowledge the essential Negroness of his contemporary Egyptian portrait and its clear implication of the ancient Egyptian's essential

Negroness was blind and racist. Taking off upon Morton's description of the Copts—the descendants of the ancient Egyptians—as “‘some mixture of Greek, Arabian, and perhaps even Negro blood,’” Douglass sarcastically retorted that Morton's description of the contemporary Egyptian “would certainly seem to make it safe to suppose the presence of ‘even Negro blood.’” He surmised that “a man, in our day, with brown complexion, ‘nose rounded and wide, lips thick, hair black and curly,’ would . . . have no difficulty in getting himself recognized as a Negro.”²⁶

Douglass drew extensively upon the work of James Cowles Prichard (1786–1848), British ethnologist and monogenist, who argued for the resemblance and affinity of both the ancient Egyptians and their Coptic descendants to the Negro. In *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (1813) and *The Natural History of Man* (1845), Prichard relied upon diverse classical and modern accounts of the various races. The physical evidence in these sources for resemblance between the Negro and both the ancient Egyptians and the modern Copt—while largely descriptive and suggestive—was highly persuasive to Douglass. For example, no less an authority than Herodotus, the “father of history,” had claimed that the ancient Egyptians had black skin and woolly hair. Similarly, in *Travels Through Syria and Egypt* (1787), Constantin François de Chasseboeuf, Comte de Volney (1757–1820), the French scholar, portrayed the Egyptian as having “a puffed visage, swollen eyes, flat nose and thick lips” and as bearing “‘much resemblance to mulattoes.’”²⁷

Douglass believed that it was futile, moreover, to try to separate Negroes from “Ethiopians, Abyssinians, Nubians, Carthaginians, Egyptians,” because all Africans were fundamentally one people—“from the once highly civilized Egyptian to the barbarians on the banks of the Niger.” His studies revealed “that the people of Africa have an African character, as well defined and as distinct as . . . the people of Europe, or the people of Asia.” Expanding upon this rudimentary pan-African sensibility, he asserted that “the exceptional differences among them [Africans] afford no ground for supposing a difference of race.” Consequently, he “inferred that the people of Africa constitute one great branch of the human family.”²⁸

By 1854, Douglass had concluded that even though the ancient Egyptians might not have been full-blooded Negroes, they still had been at least largely Negroid. The contemporary Negro, as a result, could rightfully claim “a strong affinity and direct relationship” with the ancient Egyptian. Besides skin color, hair texture, and other physical features, Douglass's case rested upon a reputed affinity among the various African languages throughout the entire continent. Linguistic resemblance between Negro Egypt and the rest of Negro Africa paralleled the physical resemblance between their peoples.²⁹ Ethno-

logical observations during his 1887 visit confirmed his belief in an integral relationship between the Negro and both the ancient Egyptian and the Copt.

Although quite aware of the ambiguity surrounding the issue of the ancient Egyptian's racial identity, Douglass nonetheless suggested that if the contemporary physical appearance of Egyptians had any bearing on the issue of their ancient identity, then they had been essentially Negroid. After carefully watching the Egyptian people for several days, he noted in his diary on February 18: "I do not know of what color and features the ancient Egyptians were [except on ancient authority and artifacts], but the great mass of the people I have yet seen would in America be classed with Negroes." He was careful to add a caveat, however. "This would not be a scientific description, but an American description." The Negro in the United States, Douglass comprehended, might be classified differently in another society. In Latin America, for example, mostly depending upon how white he appeared, he might be classified as a mulatto—an "intermediate caste" between black and white. In the United States, however, "one drop of Negro blood sets aside all sympathy from the whites as completely as if the person were completely black."³⁰

Following the logic of racist ethnology, the non-Egyptian African was a savage Negro, whereas the Egyptian was a civilized non-African Caucasian, or at worst, a non-African Caucasian-dominated hybrid. If this assumption of a critical distinction between a civilized white Egyptian and an uncivilized black African proved true, Douglass insinuated, it would help to justify white enslavement of Negroes as consistent with their reputedly inherent barbarity. Also, the separation of Egypt's ancient glories from Negro Africa would promote the idea of an undistinguished Negro past and fit into racist attempts to validate Negro inferiority. It would be easier in such a context, Douglass argued, "to divest the Negro of all honourable antecedents and to deprive him of the incitements to noble deeds and aspirations which the thought of a noble ancestry is well-fitted to inspire."³¹

Douglass often pointed to the plow as an Egyptian or African invention. He often pointed out, too, that the Egyptians were the world's first great farmers and that shipbuilding and mathematics came from North Africa. In his 1873 speech before an assembly of Tennessee farmers, he interpreted the Egyptian origins of agriculture as a just cause for Negro pride. While North America remained unknown to "civilized men" and "the Briton and Gallic races wandered like beasts of prey in the forests, the people of Egypt and Ethiopia rejoiced in well-cultivated fields and abundance of corn." Hence, Douglass, reiterating the nostalgic vision of ancient Africa common among black intellectuals, told his audience that "if to the race to which we belong mankind can

ascribe any glory, the achievements upon which it is founded stretch far away into the past.”³²

He implied that even though the Negro’s greatest achievements came from a bygone era, the present decline, while lamentable, did not signify sufficient cause for despair. The decline would be reversed, he further implied, as part of an inevitable cyclical process of historical rise and decline. Negro enslavement and its attendant degradation, in this line of thought, evidently had signified a downward though reversible trend in Negro history. With emancipation, therefore, a crucial impediment to race progress had been removed. Now, he believed, the cycle of rise and decline would give way to a future of continuous progress. He suggested that the cycle could be broken if mankind would only dedicate itself to that end.³³

Douglass’s fascination with evidence of Egypt and Africa’s historic greatness and their Negroid people did not blind him to what he saw as several of Egypt’s contemporary problems, such as poverty and suffering, and Africa’s general problem of continuing (though reversible) decline from past greatness. Having only traveled in Egypt, he never personally observed other African countries and, consequently, never broke through his North African or Mediterranean approach to Africa. It seemed that as a mulatto and a Westerner, he found it easier to identify with North Africa, where the people more closely resembled mulattoes and the gap between Western and African cultures seemed smaller and less significant. Douglass’s tendency to view all of Africa through North Africa, in addition to his use of the distinction between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, belied his rudimentary pan-African sensibility.³⁴

Whereas ancient African achievement, like the Egyptian discovery and development of agriculture, constituted a reason for Negro pride in themselves as Negroes and in their African heritage, the bulk of the contemporary African scene represented a startlingly different matter, Douglass surmised. Although he hoped for African regeneration as expounded in the often-quoted Biblical prophecy—“Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God”—he was neither actively committed to nor directly involved in its realization. Notwithstanding his ethnological and historical interest in Africans and Africa, notably Egyptians and Egypt, Douglass’s attitudes toward Africans and Africa were often quite negative. Such attitudes largely reflected the Western perception of Africa as the “dark continent.” For Douglass, sub-Saharan Africa symbolized this mythical dark continent. Quite common among articulate blacks like Douglass, negative Western ideas toward Africa and Africans had serious repercussions for the problems of Negro American identity generally and Douglass’s identity as a Negro American specifically.³⁵

It has been difficult, if not impossible, for Western blacks, like Western whites, to escape widespread anti-African images. This partial black imprisonment within a racist Euro-American world view has illustrated the injurious self-effacement of the Negro's Anglo-Americanization. At its worst, this deracination has meant not only uprooting the Negro's past, but also vilifying it. Both the Negro's partial entrapment within an anti-African Western world view and the corollary of Negro deracination or Anglo-Americanization, therefore, have contributed to Negro problems with their African roots as well as their Negroness. Thus, even when Douglass spoke glowingly of Africans—he referred to the Sudanese, “genuine Negroes,” as a “fine race of people . . . intelligent and brave”—he might undercut the tribute, as he did in this instance, with his glaring inability to see them in their own light. He tended to view them in a light at best refracted through and, at worst, wholly cast by a Western lens. Thus, he arrogantly noted, assuming it to be a compliment to the Sudanese, that the English preferred them to the Egyptians as soldiers.³⁶

Much of his discussion of Africa transpired in the context of his lifelong opposition to the emigration of United States blacks to Africa, or African colonization and repatriation. Why go to Africa, he asked African emigrationists in 1858, when “we have an African nation on our bodies?” In an editorial in his *New National Era* on 19 December 1872, he repeated his opposition to African emigration. “There is nothing in reason,” he wrote, “why anyone should leave this land of progress and enlightenment and seek a home amid the death-dealing malaria of a barbarous continent.” From the perspective of Western ideas of civilization and progress, Douglass—and most of his generation—argued that Africa lagged far behind Europe. “That Africa is behind Europe in the pathway of improvement,” he noted in 1849, “it is madness, if nothing worse, to pretend to doubt.”³⁷

In many instances, Douglass exploited debasing Western stereotypes of Africans, displaying the typical Western insensitivity to sociocultural differences between the West and Africa. As a result, he helped, wittingly and unwittingly, to perpetuate these degrading African stereotypes. He often contrasted “the splendors of Europe” with “the wilds of Africa.” Attempting to illustrate just how carefree and mindless much of the slave child's early life might be, and often was, he likened such idleness to that of “any little heathen under the palm trees of Africa.” In like manner, he chose to illustrate the serious want of clothing among slave children by suggesting that they were “as destitute of clothing as any little heathen on the west coast of Africa.”³⁸ Irreligion, relative nakedness, and idleness, Douglass suggested, seemed common among West African children, and by extension, all West Africans.

The image of the lazy African loomed especially large in Douglass's mind.

It appeared that an overly hospitable environment had conspired with the African character to yield laziness as one of the causes of the comparative underdevelopment or “backwardness” of Africa to Euro-America. Even though Douglass implied that this constitutional trait was primarily environmentally induced, he also implied that it was heritable. Touching upon the Western stereotype of the lazy African, ironically in a speech on “Self-Made Men,” Douglass contended that “under the palms of Africa man finds, without effort, food, raiment and shelter. For him, there, Nature has done all and he has done nothing. The result is that the glory of Africa is in her palms, not in her men.”³⁹ African men, according to this negative and uninformed argument, represented the antithesis of “Self-Made Men.” They were wholly at the whim of fate and environment; they were men whose will was indiscernible.

An African milieu evocative of paradise—in terms of provision for basic human needs—appeared to stifle manly initiative and achievement. These slaps at Africans both reflected and contributed to Western ignorance about them. Also, they unfortunately helped to promote Euro-American exploitation of Africa in the guise of fostering civilization. Given the apparent backwardness of Africans, Douglass insinuated that African regeneration necessitated Western intervention. Such notions supported the dubious perception of European colonialism and imperialism in Africa as humanitarian.

The Western image of Africans as savage grew out of European ethnocentrism and racism. The Euro-American perception of vast differences between themselves and Africans underpinned this image. Western accounts of Euro-American involvement in the Atlantic slave trade along with foreign travel reports and commentaries on African societies typically embellished and, therefore, perpetuated this image. From a Western perspective, the stereotype of the uncivilized African gave meaning to its opposite: the stereotypical self-concept of the civilized Euro-American. Douglass often drew upon this aspect of his Western heritage and identity when discussing Africans. In a speech on the history and meaning of slavery, he maintained that because Africans were savage, their emotion dominated their reason. Their instincts and bodies controlled their minds. The slave trade, he argued, had “acted upon the passions of the African savage like a blast from hell. It excited his passions.” He suggested that these uncivilized Africans experienced some sadistic pleasure from selling fellow Africans into slavery. Regrettably prey to the overwhelming compulsion of emotion and instinct, the uncivilized African—in contrast to the civilized Westerner—seemed quite animalistic and immoral to Douglass and most Westerners.⁴⁰

Douglass’s manipulation of anti-African images could sometimes be seen in his use of negative examples to buttress a point in an argument. In a speech

before a group of farmers and mechanics, he tried to illustrate the absurdity of a certain plan by arguing that “such economy is unworthy of the sense of a Hottentot or a bushman.” Similarly, Douglass was outraged that the “ignorant” Dahomeyans rather than the cultivated American Negro had been invited to the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He alleged that the rationale behind this move was “to shame the Negro” and to “increase American contempt for the Negro intellect” by showcasing before the world the Negro “as a repulsive savage.”⁴¹

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Negro American had problems identifying with Africa, his ancestral homeland. Most Americans possessed little, if any, accurate information on Africa. It is not surprising, then, that most Afro-Americans viewed Africa with ambivalence at best and, at worst, shame. Racialism or race pride might yield a positive or at least sympathetic identification with Africa. Partially confined within Euro-American images of Africa as uncivilized and Africans as inferior, however, they often sought to separate themselves from these demeaning images by simultaneously minimizing their African ties and maximizing their American ties. J. H. Smyth, a black former minister to Liberia, insightfully summarized various reasons for this dilemma before a missionary “Congress on Africa” in December 1895. Negro Americans, he contended,

as a class . . . are averse to the discussion of Africa, when their relationship with that ancient and mysterious land and its races is made the subject of discourse or reflection. The remoteness of Africa from America may be a reason for such feeling; the current opinion in the minds of Caucasians, whence the American Negro’s opinions are derived, that the African is by nature an inferior man, may be a reason. The illiteracy, poverty, and degradation of the Negro, pure and simple, as known in the Christian lands, may be a reason in connection with the partially true and partially false impression that the Negroes, or Africans, are pagan and heathen as a whole, and as a [con]sequence hopelessly degraded beings.⁴²

Yet, no matter how hard a Negro American might try to dissociate himself from his African roots, it was impossible to do so wholly. Indeed, by definition an American identity was essentially hyphenated: an elaborate reworking of a previous national identity into a new one encompassing, but submerging within itself, the old one. When a Negro American endeavored to estrange himself from his African past, he not only went against a vital aspect of his American identity, but he also denied the inescapable importance of his past

for his present and future. Being “a child of Africa” born into American slavery led Douglass to consider the African and American components of his Negro American identity.⁴³ Although he suggested that the Negro American could not and should not deny his African past, its present significance, and its future implications, he downplayed the notion of current cultural and political ties between Africans and Negro Americans.

Notwithstanding his basically Western perspective on Africa, Douglass, echoing other blacks, perceived that the European intrusion into Africa undoubtedly signified a major cause of African underdevelopment. At least once, he evinced sympathy for the right of Africans to develop along indigenous lines. Consistent with his classically liberal rhetoric, he remarked on the eve of emancipation that “the Negro should have been let alone in Africa.”⁴⁴

Douglass’s bitter denunciation of the slave trade and slavery, furthermore, encompassed their deleterious effects on Africans and Europeans in the New and Old World. His strong declaration that the African “should have been let alone in Africa” was ironic in light of his commonly held belief in “the civilizing mission” of European colonialism and imperialism. In 1847 in response to a proslavery and pro-African colonizationist speech by Henry Clay, however, Douglass condemned Euro-American intervention in Africa. “For three hundred years Christian nations, among whom we are foremost, have looked on Africa only as a place for the gratification of their lust and love of power, and every means have been adopted to stay the onward march of civilization in that unhappy land.”⁴⁵

Even though Douglass occasionally appeared to sympathize with the necessity for autonomous African development and progress, as a rule he did not. He was too Western and too caught up in the missionary and cultural imperialism of worldwide Western expansion, fueled by arrogance and reckless power, to comprehend fully an outside or African perspective on the situation. Thus, for Afro-Americans and implicitly for Africans, he rationalized the Euro-American exploitation of Africa’s human resources as an inhumane, yet ultimately beneficial, manifestation of historical progress. Oddly enough, he agreed with racists, colonizationists, and proslavery advocates “that the condition of our race has been improved by their situation as slaves, since it has brought them into contact with a superior people, and afforded them facilities for acquiring knowledge.” A major reason why Negro American colonization, emigration, and separatism were abhorrent, he argued, was that “contact with the white race, even under the many unjust and painful restrictions to which we are subjected, does more toward our elevation and improvement, than the mere circumstance of being separated from them could do.”⁴⁶

Similarly, many blacks, including historian George Washington Williams,

Maria W. Stewart, and Alexander Crummell, interpreted slavery as part of God's providential design for Africa as well as punishment for her heathenism. Through slavery, God paradoxically blessed Africans in America with democracy and Christianity. The civilization and Christianization of Africa itself would likewise derive in part from missionary work and the destruction of the slave trade in addition to slavery. Rather than viewing slavery as solely and primarily the result of God's will and displeasure with African paganism, they chose to view it more importantly as an integral dimension of America's divinely inspired historic role—the worldwide dissemination of democracy and Christianity. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, black and white Americans have typically adhered to the notion of America's providential mission.⁴⁷ It represented a central feature of Douglass's vision for America.

Elaborating upon his lifelong opposition to African colonization schemes, he argued in 1894 “that the American Negro owes no more to the Negroes in Africa than he owes to the Negroes in America. There are millions of needy people over there, but there are also millions of needy people over here as well, and the millions in America need intelligent men of their number to help them, as much as intelligent men are needed in Africa to help her people.” For Douglass, nonetheless, talk of a reciprocal bond between Africans and Afro-Americans was usually implicit and tenuous. His priority was always America. Afro-American responsibility for African regeneration remained secondary. To him, the Negro American freedom struggle epitomized the “fight for the redemption of the whole race.” Consequently, “a blow struck successfully for the Negro in America, is a blow struck for the Negro in Africa.” This chauvinism obscured the significance of Africa as a logical focus of liberation for the entire Negro race. Yet, Edward Blyden, articulating a minority point of view, argued that the destiny of African peoples would eventually be resolved in Africa. “Until the Negro is respected in America,” Douglass countered, “he need not expect consideration elsewhere.” In addition, he claimed, the Negro American was to a large extent a mixed race which could only rightfully lay claim to its New World home.⁴⁸

Douglass concluded that “all this native land talk” concerning the Negro American's relationship to Africa was “nonsense.” Without a doubt, he insisted, “the native land of the American Negro is America. His bones, his muscles, his sinews, are all American.” Neglecting the recent and undeniable African ancestry of innumerable Negro Americans—so as to reiterate the Negro's Americanness—he argued that their “ancestors for two hundred and seventy years have lived and laboured and died, on American soil, and millions of [their] . . . posterity have inherited Caucasian blood.”⁴⁹ Douglass

suppressed his African roots as a means toward strengthening his American roots. In the process, though, he alienated not only part of his racial identity as a Negro, but also part of his national identity as an Afro-American. Indeed, his understanding of the Negro American's attachment to America vividly betrayed the extent of his commitment to both an Anglo-American vision of America and a like standard of civilization and progress. On the one hand, this perspective raised serious doubts about the necessity of an Afro-American perspective and Afro-American race pride. On the other, the racist and dominant reality of this Anglo-American perspective made both an Afro-American perspective and Afro-American race pride essential to a positive black self-concept. Douglass's assimilationism embodied this pivotal conflict.

Douglass empathized with the plight of oppressed peoples throughout the world, but he was especially concerned about the plight of oppressed non-Negroid peoples of color in the Americas: in particular, Native Americans, Mexicans, Chinese, and Indians (Asian). As a person of color himself, he fully understood that the same rationale for the oppression of blacks operated in the case of the oppression of other colored peoples at the hands of whites. They, too, were alleged to be innately inferior. White racism, therefore, was supposedly not only rational and just, but natural. Douglass rejected this defense of racism as the despicable product of ignorance and a host of other factors encompassing selfishness, arrogance, aggression, and greed.⁵⁰

In the name of white supremacy, labor was extorted from each of these colored peoples; land was stolen from Native Americans and Mexicans; Africans were torn from their homeland, which, in time, various European nations colonized; India was colonized by Britain; and, Native Americans were decimated. Although Douglass righteously denounced these wrongs, his Americanism, assimilationism, and race consciousness tended to impede his comprehension of the perspectives of other colored peoples. Ultimately, he could see beyond neither the window of his own biases nor that of the dominant Anglo-American cultural paradigm which he essentially accepted, though he rejected its racism. Colored peoples clearly assumed the roles of outsider, target of assimilation, and most important, inferior in this paradigm.

Douglass depicted the Native American as stoic and proud: an unfortunate, yet inevitable, victim of Western progress. "The plundering of the Indian," he wrote in 1847, "is a crime to which no honest man can look with any degree of satisfaction." The genocidal American actions toward Native Americans, he explained in 1873, represented "a reproach to our religion and civilization." Speaking in praise of President Grant's Native American policy of peace, assimilation, and reservations as a new and hopeful departure, Douglass exco-

riated the past approach as “an unbroken chain of treachery, outrage and cruelty of every description.”⁵¹

The Native American’s fierce pride and independence set against the white American’s equally fierce pride and aggression, Douglass suggested, necessitated an apocalyptic battle between them for territory and control in America. He conceded that the Native Americans had been here long before either whites or blacks and, thus, possessed a natural birthright to America. Power, however, signified the key factor in the struggle between whites and Native Americans for territorial control, according to Douglass, and in that arena, whites proved superior. Although unquestionably opposed to the oppression of Native Americans, Douglass—caught up in the ideal of the United States’ territorial “manifest destiny”—could not reconcile these warring trends. He and most black Americans, like the vast majority of white Americans, were here to stay, Native Americans or no Native Americans. There was no possibility of any significant policy of territorial or even financial reparations, both of which implied an acceptance of guilt and responsibility for the situation of Native Americans (which most Americans rejected). Even Douglass’s implicit support for some kind of repentance and assistance was ambiguous.

Consistent with his view of the inevitability of violent conflict between whites and Native Americans for territorial control of America, and of the Native American’s comparative lack of power, the latter’s defeat loomed certain. The futile situation of the Native American was worse than that of the Negro, Douglass believed. The Native American sat poised between the African and the European in America. It was unfortunate, then, that the Native American remained “too proud to claim fraternity with either” the African or European because he was obviously too weak “to withstand the power of either.”⁵² Douglass had difficulty understanding the Native American’s unwillingness to compromise with European domination in America and to adopt the white man’s ways.

Notwithstanding his empathy for oppressed Native Americans, he was unable to fathom the substance of their various societies. His understanding reflected his own Euro-American cultural predilections. The predominant image of the Native American in Douglass’s mind was neither the good nor noble Native American, but the savage Native American: “intemperate and uncivilized.” Before emancipation, he heartily encouraged “the poor wild Indians” as “the voice of the . . . savage world” to support the slave’s freedom struggle and to oppose the slaveholder.⁵³

The “savage” Native American, nevertheless, had his good points, Douglass believed. Besides independence, pride, and courage, he seemed to demonstrate less anti-Negro prejudice, even toward Negro slaves, than the civil-

ized white American. Aiming to show the absurdity of the notion that the slaves' freedom struggles wronged the kind slavemaster, Douglass contrasted the paradoxes of the Native American's savage kindness and the white American's civilized brutality (symbolized by the kind slavemaster) toward the Negro slave. Indirectly contradicting his assertion that the Negro was better off as a slave in a civilized society like the United States than a free person in an uncivilized setting like Africa, he suggested that the slave was better off with the Native American than the white American. Indeed, the slave, given a choice, would prefer to work under the Native American. Scrupulous Christian religiosity among slavemasters only reinforced their brutality toward the Negro slave. Even in a state of savagery implicitly comparable to that of "the bear" and "wolves," Native Americans treated Negro slaves more humanely than did cultured white Americans. It was understandable, consequently, why the Negro slave's plunge toward freedom might embrace an escape from white civilization along with an accommodation to Native American savagery. Even life amid "the paws of the bear" or within "the haunts of wolves" was better than chattel slavery.⁵⁴

On the other hand, Douglass argued that unlike the Native American, the Negro American adopted the white man's ideas of civilization. Douglass, of course, was a prime example. "The black man—unlike the Indian—loves civilization," Douglass explained. "He does not make very great progress in civilization himself, but he likes to be in the midst of it, and prefers to share its most galling evils, to encountering barbarism." This argument obscured both why the Negro's progress in a white-dominated civilization was slow, if indeed given the obstacles he endured it was, and that he adapted to this civilization primarily out of survival and only secondarily out of some love for it. The choice was tough: adapt and possibly survive, or resist and possibly perish. In Douglass's view, Anglo-American civilization apparently killed the Native American, but not the Negro American. The latter's adaptability and perseverance in contrast to the former's intransigence and virtual extinction were especially striking. Douglass marveled that Afro-Americans were able to withstand "the ten thousand horrors of slavery," while Native Americans died under "the flashing glance of the Anglo-Saxon."⁵⁵

The Native Americans' refusal to assimilate white civilization, and not congenital or environmentally induced physical weakness, represented the major reason for their inability to withstand the white onslaught, according to Douglass. They were, after all, brave and peerless warriors, but that was not enough. As he emphasized, European technological superiority worked against Native American survival. He apparently did not understand that the Native Americans' lack of immunity to several devastating Euro-African dis-

eases was the primary cause of their massive depopulation. Moreover, his constant emphasis upon the Native American's refusal to assimilate white civilization clouded Euro-American responsibility for the brutalization and virtual extermination of the Native American. Douglass implied that had the Native American chosen to assimilate, he might not now face extinction. In light of European technological superiority, Native American susceptibility to various Euro-African diseases, and Euro-American racism, this implication lacked sensitivity and certainty. In fact, Native American assimilation into Euro-America constituted a self-deprecatory and exceedingly problematic choice because both Native American and Euro-American cultural imperatives as well as Euro-American racism worked against it.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Douglass envisioned the Native American eventually becoming a United States citizen. Ironically, the Native American had to "do his full share towards the civilization of our composite nation." Douglass, then, disagreed with the common American assumption that Native Americans were impossible to civilize.⁵⁷ In his mind, they were assimilable.

The Mexican, too, demonstrated the capacity for assimilating Euro-American civilization, according to Douglass. The "disgraceful, cruel, and iniquitous war" of the United States against Mexico between 1846 and 1848 gave him evidence of Mexican bravery and pride. In early June 1849, he lambasted the Mexican-American War as a blatant example of aggression, expansionism, and racism. Mexico, Douglass asserted, was the victim of "Anglo-Saxon cupidity and love of dominion." The war was unjust, immoral, and a slap in the face of freedom and the interests of the working classes. Worst of all to Douglass, it reeked of a proslavery as well as racist odor. In 1845, he had lamented that while "Mexico with all her barbarism and darkness had wiped away the stain of slavery from her dominions," formerly including Texas, "the enlightened, Christian United States had stained again what was washed."⁵⁸

Even though Douglass perceived Mexicans as capable of assimilating Anglo-American culture, he regretted what he viewed as their slow progress in developing both respect for law and a republican democracy. In an 1871 editorial entitled "Our Southern Sister Republic," he urged the United States to be sympathetic to Mexico's predicament and not "to commit the error of judging them from our own standpoint, making ourselves the standard, without duly taking into account the disadvantages and drawbacks under which they are laboring." The Mexican problem, politically speaking, was not a lack of devotion to republican principles, but "simply that they have not yet learned to manage them." He praised the efforts of Mexican President Benito Pablo Juarez—"originally an illiterate Indian"—to bring much-needed political stability and liberal reforms to his country. If Juarez succeeded in Mexico,

Douglass implied that his success might establish a precedent for progress in the rest of Latin America.⁵⁹

Douglass compared Mexicans to United States Americans in spite of his admonition to his compatriots not to do so. It seemed impossible for him, a colored American, to rise above the limitations of a narrow perspective in which the Mexican, another colored American, was culturally inferior. There was also the suggestion of Mexican racial inferiority. Analyzing the causes for Mexico's political underdevelopment, he wrote that "their comparatively low state of civilization, the demoralizing influence of long continued Spanish tyranny, and *perhaps a deficiency inherent to the Latin races* [my emphasis] have been . . . drawbacks to the full comprehension of the principles of republicanism."⁶⁰ This blatant racialism reflected Douglass's inability to comprehend and to empathize with Mexican culture and an indigenous Mexican point of view. This failure of perspective, as in the case of his response to Native American cultures and perspectives, derived not only from his racial chauvinism, but also his Americanism and his assimilationism. That Douglass saw Mexicans (Latins) as a separate nationality bordering on, yet outside, the United States heightened his perception of them as different. While ideally open to Mexican immigration to and assimilation into the United States, apparently these were not live issues in his mind. Mexicans were more foreign to him than either Native Americans or Asian immigrants to the United States, but less so than the East Indians in the British West Indies.

Douglass's attitudes toward Asian immigrants, notably the Chinese, were more flattering than those he evinced toward Native Americans and Mexicans. The Chinese immigrants came from a culture in many ways comparable and perhaps superior in past achievement to Western culture. Chinese technology included gunpowder, printing, and the compass. Douglass's realization of rough cultural comparability between China and the West must have buttressed his generally positive attitudes toward Chinese immigration. Whereas the virtue and work habits of Native Americans and Mexicans were subject to question, those of the Chinese more closely adhered to the Protestant work ethic. Douglass commented that the Chinese immigrants were "industrious, docile, clean, frugal." They were "dextrous of hand, patient of toil, marvelously gifted in the power of imitation, and have but few wants." Similarly, he described them as "gentle and inoffensive."⁶¹ Although "secretive" and in many ways culturally different and less advanced in Douglass's mind, the Chinese still seemed less different in crucial ways than Native Americans and Mexicans. As a result, they were more palatable to his American tastes.

Douglass did not share the obsessive revulsion of many of his contemporaries to a purported "Yellow Peril" or "Yellow Menace." To him, these racist

fears sounded too much like the “Black Peril” or “Black Menace,” which he likewise rejected out of hand. He did not believe that immigrant Chinese labor posed a serious threat to either free labor or republican institutions. He thought it highly improbable, moreover, that Chinese labor would replace southern black labor. Because of his peculiar suitability for the southern clime, the Negro, Douglass argued, would continue to dominate the southern labor market, regardless of Chinese immigration. He strongly opposed the successful drive to restrict Chinese immigration. In 1870, he wrote that notwithstanding the clash between immigrant Chinese labor and American labor, to restrict the influx of the former would stultify the American nation.⁶²

Douglass remained optimistic that in spite of increasing prejudice and discrimination against them, the Chinese would eventually be welcomed into the American fold. A large Chinese-American population, he believed, loomed on the horizon. In 1887, he predicted that one day the Chinese would overrun the United States and usurp the place of the Negro in the popular American mind. Though presently victimized as immigrant laborers, the Chinese—Douglass suggested—could cope with their trying circumstances and would in the future rise above them. Once Americans realized how much like them the Chinese in fact were, it would be easier to accept them into the American family. “They come to us in their weakness,” Douglass wrote, “and meet us in our strength.”⁶³ Given socioeconomic opportunity, the Chinese could elevate themselves and contribute to America’s promise of continued progress and greatness. The relationship between America and the Chinese immigrant, then, would be mutually beneficial.

If, as Douglass contended, “nature and necessity” made the United States the best home for these Asian immigrants, then their willingness to assimilate and their assimilability would enhance their American experience.⁶⁴ These factors buttressed his positive attitudes toward Chinese immigrants. On the other hand, the Native American’s unwillingness to assimilate, the mootness of Mexican assimilation in Douglass’s mind, and the fact that both lacked “civilization” reinforced his less flattering characterizations of them.

Similar to other colored minorities, the East Indians were forced by circumstances to deal with white racism. These British subjects, like the Africans earlier, had been shipped to the New World to satisfy a labor demand. Douglass castigated “the Coolie Trade” as “marked by all the horrible and infernal characteristics of the slave trade.” Soon after the British abolished slavery in the British West Indies in 1833, they imported “Coolie” laborers to lower the wages of and to gain greater control over the recently freed black labor force.⁶⁵

Contrasting the victimization of the East Indian immigrants to that of the Jamaican freedpeople, Douglass observed during a Jamaican visit that even

though both suffered immeasurably, the expatriate Indians—"genuine Hindus"—looked much worse. They had "an expression which might be worn by convicts serving out a sentence in a penal colony, while the Negroes seemed at home and happy."⁶⁶ Douglass's empathy for the uprooted East Indians revealed a generally positive and reassuring attitude toward them, similar to that he expressed toward the Chinese immigrants. In spite of the Indian's travail, he would certainly elevate himself and help overall West Indian development, given his apparent industriousness and amiability.

Given the egalitarian and the melting-pot dynamic of his vision of a composite American nationality, Douglass could not exclude from that mythic nationality any group of people, no matter how difficult it might have been in reality to include them. Contrary to the romanticism of his composite American nationality and its potential for delusion, the bitter and inescapable fact of white racism promoted realism. This racism impeded the assimilation of those colored peoples who, according to Douglass, most desired to assimilate: Africans and Asians. It reinforced the refusal of Native Americans to assimilate. It heightened the cultural ambiguity of immigrant East Indians in the black British West Indies. It complicated contact between Mexicans and white Americans. Nonetheless, Douglass persisted in his belief that white Americans would eventually see the error of their racist ways, repent, and gladly help to lead the evolution toward a composite American nationality.

Douglass's ideal nation-state, society, and culture would have been raceless. Even if different races had coexisted in this utopia, it would have been raceless in the sense that race would not have been an issue. In reality, however, race rather than racelessness was omnipresent and determinative. Theoretically, race, like religion and national origin, could be partially overcome through assimilation. Still, the process of assimilation was not a panacea for the American dilemma of race, Douglass maintained. He consistently reiterated, regardless, his strong commitment to assimilation as a key factor in a possible solution. "There is but one destiny, it seems to me, left for us," he reminded his people in 1883, "and that is to make ourselves and be made by others a part of the American people in every sense of the word." He concluded, therefore, that "assimilation and not isolation is our true policy and our natural destiny. Unification for us is life; separation is death."⁶⁷ Assimilation, unfortunately, meant cultural absorption into a white America: an implicit cultural rejection of a black America.

Besides its Anglo-American cultural framework, Douglass's assimilationism was thoroughly integrationist. He rejected Negro separatism, Negro colonization outside and within the continental United States, African repatriation

schemes, and social and institutional segregation. Separate black institutions and communities he viewed as necessary but temporary expedients: a black means toward a humanist, yet culturally Anglo-American, end. As early as 1848, he maintained paradoxically that “we shall undoubtedly for many years be compelled to have institutions of a complexional character in order to attain . . . human brotherhood.” Regarding the future of black institutions, he advised his people “to occupy memberships and stations among white persons, and in white institutions, just so fast as our rights are secured to us.”⁶⁸

Douglass unequivocally advocated total Negro assimilation into the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant-dominated political culture. In June 1863 amid the Civil War and much concern as to what to do with the recently freed Negro, and by implication the free Negro, he called for their complete assimilation into the political mainstream. This represented “the only solid and final solution” to the question of the Negro’s salvation in the United States. “Save the Negro,” Douglass explained, “and you save the nation, destroy the Negro and you destroy the nation.”⁶⁹

The most controversial and revealing aspect of Douglass’s assimilationism was his belief in miscegenation. He prophesied in 1886 that in the future the Negro “will be absorbed, assimilated, and will only appear finally, as the Phoenicians now appear . . . , in the features of a blended race.” The primary evidence for this provocative forecast was the increasing number of mulattoes in the general population. He observed that “two hundred years ago there were two distinct and separate streams of human life running through this country. They stood at opposite extremes of ethnological classification: all black on the one side, all white on the other. Now, between these two extremes, an intermediate race has arisen, which is neither white nor black, neither Caucasian nor Ethiopian, and this intermediate race is constantly increasing.”⁷⁰

Noting in another context that miscegenation had begun under Negro slavery, he proposed that now under the more propitious circumstances of Negro freedom, it would naturally increase. Full of hope and idealism, he argued that increasing miscegenation signified that “the tendency of the age is unification, not isolation; not to clans and classes; but to human brotherhood.”⁷¹ Perhaps. The reality of racial strife, however, contradicted this interpretation.

Miscegenation inevitably evoked the specter of interracial marriage. Both represented a radical departure from the taboo against intimate contact between the races. Douglass’s own interracial marriage attested to the depth of his commitment to miscegenation. In an ironic and misleading explanation, especially in light of his interracial marriage, he once contended that he neither advocated nor opposed interracial marriage and miscegenation.⁷² This alleged neutrality was an unsuccessful attempt to avoid identification with the advo-

cacy of two social heresies that offended black race pride in addition to white racism. Douglass's unavoidable association with these social heresies lent credence among many to the criticism that his race pride was suspect.

Consistent with his egalitarian humanism, Douglass believed that assimilation, miscegenation, and interracial marriage constituted progressive developments. The hysterical American opposition to them, therefore, he construed as illogical and unfounded. Given his vision of the inevitability of full racial assimilationism in conjunction with America's rational bent, he believed that this bitter American prejudice against racial assimilationism would ultimately be overcome. Americans, he maintained, "easily adapt themselves to inevitable conditions, and all their tendency is to progress, enlightenment, and to the universal." In particular, black opposition to racial assimilationism, he maintained, reflected "the merest affectation and will never form an impassable barrier to the union of the two varieties."⁷³ Nevertheless, the forces of progress, enlightenment, and universalism paradoxically left rational America's racial irrationality fundamentally intact. Once again, Douglass's utopian vision obscured the serious dislocations of his own age.

Notwithstanding his belief in a racially assimilationist utopia, Douglass understood that neither assimilation, nor miscegenation, nor interracial marriage either separately or in some combination had in the past solved the problem of race in America. The future promise of these approaches as possible solutions in and of themselves even looked dim. The archetypal anomaly of the tragic mulatto—"neither white nor black," despised by whites and spurned by blacks—vividly personified for Douglass the crucial limitations of racial assimilationism as a panacea for America's racial dilemma. The mulatto symbolized the gulf between the appearance and fact of a composite American nationality.

When asked in 1883 by a news reporter if amalgamation represented a desirable solution to the race problem, he not only deftly answered no, but he also criticized the question as "the child of mental and moral confusion" which "has its motives and mainspring in a vulgar prejudice of race." The pivotal issue of the Negro's relationship to America, he contended, was more moral and political than racial. Although racial amalgamation was natural, it could not resolve the central problem of white racism. He argued that even asserting that it might, given the staunch white opposition to it, constituted a cruel hoax calculated to provoke a racist backlash.⁷⁴ The advocacy of racial amalgamation in the highly charged American racial milieu, then, was counterproductive and unnecessary if, as he believed, a composite American nationality was inevitable.

The centerpiece of Douglass's grandiose racially assimilationist vision was

his conceptualization of the United States as a composite nationality: “or cosmopolitan nation, the grandest and most comprehensive illustration of the human race.” By blurring the distinction between the ideal and the reality of a composite nationality, he tried to enhance its viability while downplaying its utopian character. A racially diverse country like the United States, Douglass believed, necessitated a composite or mixed national identity. Rejecting the racist present, Douglass argued that the challenge to the future remained clear, though very difficult. “Can the white and colored people of this country,” he asked, “be blended into a common nationality, and enjoy together, in the same country, under the same flag, the inestimable blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, as neighborly citizens of a common country?” His response, in spite of significant countervailing evidence, was yes. This striking hope and idealism was wedded to a profound commitment to republican democracy. “Our Composite Nationality,” consequently, represented “the broadest and most liberal ground in regard to government of the people and by the people” for the people.⁷⁵

The vision of the United States as a composite nationality also captured the essence of Douglass’s Enlightenment and romantic humanism: his natural rights and spiritual philosophy of human equality, unity, and progress. “A powerful argument in favor of the oneness of the human family,” he argued, “is . . . that nations [races], however dissimilar, may be united in one social state, not only without detriment to each other, but most clearly, to the advancement of human welfare, progress and perfection.” An essential part of America’s divine and historic mission, he thought, was to bring about a composite nationality in order “to make us the most perfect national illustration of the unity and dignity of the human family that the world has ever seen.” God and circumstances had chosen America as the laboratory for the “faithful application of the principle of perfect civil equality to the people of all races.” For Douglass, the proof of divine and historical sanction for his vision of a composite American nationality was evident in America’s “organic structures,” her “revolutionary antecedents,” and the “genius of our people.”⁷⁶

A composite American nationality exemplified in Douglass’s mind an advance in sociocultural as well as biological evolution. As the mulatto represented the best of two races, a composite nationality represented the best in sociocultural and political relations. Douglass suggested that the marginal mulatto symbolized not only, paradoxically, a biological advance, but also the incongruence between race and a composite American nationality. Given that four-fifths of the world’s people were nonwhite and the fact of America’s racial diversity, a composite American nationality was an ethical as well as ethnological issue. Indeed, for Douglass, the evolution toward a composite nation-

ality constituted more of a moral issue than an ethnological one; it was a matter of the unavoidable triumph of right as against the temporary and illusory triumph of race.⁷⁷

The notion of a composite American nationality embraced cultural assimilation or acculturation. It symbolized for Douglass a variant of the “melting pot” notion of an American culture. In 1782, M.-G. Jean de Crèvecoeur, a French-born American farmer and writer, graphically depicted the melting pot in classic Euro-American terms. Responding to the query, “What is the American, this new man?” he wrote:

He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.⁷⁸

Equally engaging and romantic, but lacking the European bias of Crèvecoeur, Ralph Waldo Emerson offered a more cosmopolitan portrait of the American melting pot. Describing it in terms resembling Douglass’s composite nationality, Emerson, drawing upon the fact that “man is the most composite of all creatures,” argued that “in this continent,—asylum of all nations,—the energy of Irish, Germans, Swedes, Poles, and Cossacks, and all the European tribes,—of the Africans, and of the Polynesians will construct a new race, a new religion, a new state, a new literature, which will be as vigorous as the new Europe which came out of the melting pot of the Dark Ages.”⁷⁹ Douglass and Emerson, like many of their idealistic contemporaries, believed the melting pot to be both a source of America’s strength and the dynamic mechanism of Americanization: the crucible of a composite American nationality.

The process of Americanization, according to Douglass, compelled the various racial components of America “to lose, in a common character, all traces of their former distinctive national peculiarities.” He believed that racial purity and isolation bred national retrogression; interracial mingling and assimilationism bred national progression. He completely agreed with Dr. James McCune Smith, his black colleague, that “our great nation, so distinguished

for industry and enterprise, is largely indebted to its composite character.”⁸⁰ Although the mulatto symbolized the ideal of a composite American racial character drawing upon America’s component races, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant symbolized the dominant and conflicting perception of a narrow American cultural character drawing principally upon the Anglo-European heritage. The facts of dominant white American cultural provincialism and white racism contradicted the ideal of American racial cosmopolitanism. Douglass’s theoretical distinction between cultural hierarchy and racial equality did represent an attack upon racism, but his adherence to white cultural hegemony undercut the attack.

Douglass certainly had no trouble distinguishing between the ideal and the reality of the United States as a composite nationality. He clearly perceived that his country was no racially assimilationist haven. Ideologically, however, he could not separate the interdependent ideal and reality of a composite American nationality because his vision of Americans transcended race and encompassed humanity. He sensed, however, that his notion of a composite American nationality would not resonate among Americans as an ideal without some basis in reality. Consequently, he glossed over the discordant and continuing reality of racial and ethnic diversity with the assimilationist paradigm of a singular American race. In the process, he obscured America’s cultural pluralism.

Taking into consideration Douglass’s Anglo-European cultural bias, the fundamental flaw of his composite American nationality from the perspective of nonwhites, especially blacks, was the heavy cost it entailed. As Blyden, Douglass’s pan-Africanist contemporary, observed, assimilation placed the oppressed Negro in the anomalous position of identifying with and blending biologically with the white oppressor.⁸¹ Jumping into the melting pot to conform to Anglo-European cultural norms, as Douglass advocated, signified self-denial from Blyden’s perspective as a full-blooded Negro and partial self-discovery from Douglass’s as a mulatto. Most important in his vision of a composite nationality, Douglass endeavored through assimilation to resolve the deep-seated tension between Negroness and Americanness—the Negro’s sense of “twoness”—in favor of the latter.

9. Ethnology and Equality

In 1887 during a European honeymoon tour with Helen, Douglass, acting upon a gnawing compulsion, decided to visit Egypt. His motivation was at once personal, ideological, and scholarly. “I had a theory for which I wanted the support of facts in the range of my own knowledge.” He wanted to use his observations of contemporary Egyptian society and culture and the remains of its past to decide whether the ancient Egyptians were primarily Negroid. He had assumed as much at least since the 1850s. If his findings supported this assumption, the knowledge could be used to fight “American prejudice against the darker colored races of mankind, and at the same time to raise colored people somewhat in their own estimation and thus stimulate them to higher endeavors.” Essentially, therefore, the trip was designed to serve “an ethnological purpose.”¹

From Paris in November 1886, Douglass had explained: “I have long been interested in Ethnology—especially of the North African races. I have wanted the evidence of greatness under a colored skin to meet and beat back the charge of natural, original, and permanent inferiority of the colored races of men.”² Rather than a disinterested empirical or scientific inquiry, for Douglass, ethnology was an interpretation of historical and sociocultural data reflecting his own biases. Indeed, he never labored under the delusions of detachment or objectivity. More important to him than mere ethnological data and interpretation were the moral, religious, humanist, ideological, and political bases and ramifications of ethnology and, especially, their consistent use to support white racism. Douglass’s ethnological thought, then, formed an integral component of his continuing commitment to struggle both for black freedom and equality and against white racism. When considered together, nineteenth-century ethnology and Douglass’s ethnological thought prove mutually illuminating.

Nineteenth-century ethnology, a key predecessor of twentieth-century anthropology, was the comparative study of human cultural variation, change, and development.³ Because ethnology typically assumed an inextricable relationship between both cultural and historical development, it also constituted a form of cultural history. Practitioners of a broad and allegedly scientific discipline, ethnologists in the nineteenth century attempted to uncover the stages and meanings of human developments primarily in cultural and related physical terms and secondarily in historical terms. Nineteenth-century eth-

nology, moreover, was preeminently the laymen's science; it required little if any formal training. Although a scientific background might prove immensely valuable, almost anyone interested in cultural and human differences might claim to be an ethnologist.⁴

The major ethnological controversy in nineteenth-century America prior to Darwinism involved whether there had been one human creation or several: monogenism or polygenism. Clearly an inflammatory idea in the 1840s and 1850s, the years of its greatest notoriety, polygenism violated the traditional consensus. Yet, even after the rise of Darwinism, which seemed to verify monogenism, polygenist thought persisted. Some ethnologists, for instance, thought Darwinism quite consistent with polygenism.⁵

Much more important was the integral relationship of polygenist thought with the increasing persistence of racist thought. Douglass maintained that the crucial issue of the origins controversy, in spite of its alleged scientific concerns, was not the essentially unverifiable speculation about plural or singular human origins. Rather, it remained how to use data on the origin and persistence of human racial differences to buttress the racial status quo. He saw this debate primarily as an attempt to come to grips with the haunting specter of racial differences which the ultimately moot controversy between polygenism and monogenism only clouded. Viewed in a context combining the polygenist minority and the monogenist majority, Douglass's monogenist thought reveals that the critical issue of the origins controversy was indeed race and that the debate's significance was ideological and political as well as social and biological.⁶

The so-called American school of ethnology was the major proponent of polygenesis during its brief heyday in the middle of the nineteenth century. Samuel G. Morton, Josiah S. Nott, surgeon, George R. Gliddon, businessman-Egyptologist, and Louis Agassiz, naturalist, were the most important advocates of this view.⁷ The most influential work of Morton, the school's founding father, was in craniology: the measurement and comparison of human skulls as a means to classify races. In *Crania Americana* (1839), he argued the larger the cranium, the larger the brain, the greater the intelligence. Because, according to his measurements, Caucasians had larger crania than other races, most notably Negroes, they were inherently more intelligent. Although his *Crania Aegyptica* (1844) acknowledged that the ancient Egyptians were a Negroid, Caucasoid, Semitic, and Austral-Egyptian mixture, consistent with his view of Caucasoid phylogenetic superiority, it suggested that ancient Egypt's greatness derived from the Caucasian admixture. Like their enslaved contemporaries in the United States, as well as Negroes throughout history, the Negroes of ancient Egypt had been an innately inferior and servile race.⁸

In “The Mulatto a Hybrid—Probable Extermination of the Two Races if the Whites and Blacks are Allowed to Intermarry” (1843), Nott contended that the Caucasian admixture made mulattoes more intelligent than full-blooded Negroes. Yet, as mulattoes represented the relatively infertile hybrid offspring of separate racial species, they were weaker and more short-lived than either whites or blacks. Mulatto degenerationism meant that interbreeding between blacks or whites and mulattoes, as well as interbreeding between whites and blacks, produced a more feeble offspring than intraracial or intraspecific breeding. It also meant that interracial or interspecific breeding proved less prolific than intraracial breeding. Mulatto inbreeding, as a result, proved even less prolific and produced an even more feeble offspring. Mulattoes—the undesirable product of hybrid degenerationism—were obviously doomed to extinction within several generations.⁹ Because mulattoes were Negroes, too, mulatto degenerationism represented a racist and scientific attack on miscegenation between blacks and whites with eugenic implications.

In *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races* (1844), Nott argued an integral relationship between white phylogenetic superiority and white historical supremacy in perhaps the first public espousal of polygenism in the United States. Dr. Charles Caldwell, a medical doctor, in *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* (1830) and Richard H. Colfax, a proslavery advocate, in *Evidence Against the Views of the Abolitionists* (1833) had previously published polygenist arguments. Nott, however, enthusiastically aired his polygenist views on public platforms as well as in writing. Like Morton, Nott touted the Negro’s phylogenetic inferiority as the reason for both his historical subordination and the Caucasoid origins of ancient Egyptian civilization.¹⁰

Gliddon also went public with his polygenism. He was well known for flashy Egyptian lectures replete with superlative showmanship and intriguing artifacts. In *Ancient Egypt* (1844), he contended that the ancient Egyptians had been Caucasians and not Negroes. This theory differed from that of Nott who claimed the ancient Egyptians had included both races and that of Morton who claimed they were a mixture of various races, including Caucasians and Negroes. Nevertheless, Gliddon reiterated the polygenist consensus that ancient Egyptian greatness owed to Caucasian dominance and that historically the Negro had always been inferior and servile to whites.¹¹ Nott and Gliddon collaborated on *Types of Mankind* (1854), a compendium of polygenist arguments that variously addressed the central theme of white phylogenetic superiority as the explanation for white historical and cultural superiority. This work included Agassiz’s “Sketch of the Natural Provinces of the Animal World and Their Relation to the Different Types of Man.” Here, he argued that differences within the human (racial) and animal kingdoms, like differences within

the plant kingdom, were primordial and owed to separate creations demanded by the geographic and climatic variations in different regions of the world. Racial phylogenetic differences had thus ensured white supremacy throughout history. With his support of polygenism, the Swiss-born and Swiss and German educated Agassiz, the most celebrated American naturalist of his day, gave intellectual credibility to both the doctrine, notwithstanding its limited appeal and acceptance, and its racist assumptions. His advocacy of polygenism exemplified the growing respectability of racism within scientific and academic establishments throughout the nineteenth century.¹²

The most important early American proponent of monogenesis was the Reverend Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith, professor of moral philosophy and later president of the College of New Jersey. His *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* was first published in 1787 and republished and expanded in an 1810 edition. A vigorous environmentalist defense of monogenesis and a classic formulation of that prevailing eighteenth-century view, Smith's work was an important ethnological statement, one that commanded respect in Europe as well as the United States. Yet, Smith was not a racial egalitarian. He believed that Negroes, like other non-Caucasians, constituted a human variation due to degeneration from the Caucasian original.¹³

The major contemporary American critic of the "American school" of ethnology's polygenist consensus was John Bachman, a South Carolinian clergyman and naturalist. In *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race Examined on the Principles of Science* (1850), he opposed, in particular, the theory of mulatto degeneration and the theory of separate human origins due to geographic and climatic variety. Rather than feeble, unprolific, and endangered hybrids, mulattoes—as he viewed them—were healthy, prolific, and unendangered offspring. Adhering to biblical monogenism, he maintained all races derived from the same creation. Yet, consistent with the biological racism endemic to mainstream monogenism, he believed that the Negro constituted a degenerate variety of the human species whose inferiority had become irreversible.¹⁴

Monogenists, as well as polygenists, generally posited phylogenetic Negro inferiority as the major explanation for alleged contemporary and historical Negro inferiority and subordination. The primary American challenge to this ethnological consensus came first from Negroes themselves and second from their radical allies, notably the more egalitarian abolitionists.¹⁵ Douglass exemplified both streams. Most of his abolitionist colleagues professed racial equality and opposed polygenism, but they did not enter into the formal ethnological controversy surrounding human origins. Douglass, however,

both championed the embattled and increasingly unpopular idea of racial equality and immersed himself in the origins debate. As an ethnologist as well as an abolitionist, he espoused an egalitarian humanism that demanded human rights and an equal opportunity for everyone to develop fully his abilities.¹⁶

Inevitably torn by doubts and ambivalence concerning black equality arising from their racist roots, the blacks' radical white monogenist allies characteristically mounted a more ambiguous and compromising antiracist challenge. Nevertheless, like John Brown, they were often indispensable and occasionally impressive allies because even though they benefited from racial privilege, they fought against it. As whites, moreover, they received a larger audience and more respectful hearing than blacks.

The crucial contemporary and historical significance of nineteenth-century black monogenism—exemplified in the ethnological thought of Douglass—lies in its vigorous antiracist humanism. Douglass formally entered the debate with the polygenists of the American school of ethnology in 1854 when he delivered a carefully prepared address, “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered,” before a literary society at Western Reserve College in Hudson, Ohio. The address was published that same year. In subsequent years, the same message reappeared in various speeches, including “The Races of Men” and “The Negro as a Man.” Douglass’s desire to present a formal ethnological address on monogenism had been sparked by his memory of Prichard’s *Natural History of Man*. He had read parts of this book while in England almost a decade earlier, finding it “marvelously calm and philosophical in its discussion of the science of the origin of the races, and . . . thus in the line of my then convictions.”¹⁷

Due to his lack of formal education, Douglass was initially uneasy about delivering a commencement address before a college audience. He was persuaded to accept the invitation, however, by Dr. M. B. Anderson, president of Rochester University, and Professor Henry Wayland. Not only were they friends, but as established scholars they were able to reassure him and to offer him substantive suggestions. Dr. Anderson, in addition, gave him a copy of *Man and His Migrations*, a monogenist statement by R. G. Latham, an English naturalist, and loaned him the works of Morton, Nott, and Gliddon. Douglass found much to disagree with in the polygenist works of Morton, Nott, and Gliddon, and he later recalled that the work of the latter two particularly had been “written evidently to degrade the Negro and support the then prevalent Calhoun doctrine of the rightfulness of slavery.”¹⁸

The researching and writing of a formal scholarly text was a novel experience for Douglass, one of the foremost orators of his generation. He had

heretofore relied more upon his “unsystematized knowledge and the inspiration of the hour and the occasion” rather than a written text in his public presentations. The discipline and skill he gained from the preparation of this particular speech aided him immeasurably in subsequent lectures. This training proved especially useful in the preparation and delivery of the numerous postwar lectures he gave on a wide variety of topics, from abolitionism to William the Conqueror.¹⁹

Twenty-seven years later, in an extremely self-critical and harsh assessment, he labeled the speech “a very defective production.” For one thing, the failure of his prepared remarks to arouse his audience, as his extemporaneous remarks had done, apparently compounded his anxiety as a self-educated, black former slave speaking before a white college audience. It must be reiterated, moreover, that this address was his very first, and thus understandably imperfect, attempt to prepare a scholarly text. In a letter to some friends back home written in 1886 from Paris, even prior to his revelatory trip to Egypt, he acknowledged: “Could I have seen forty years ago what I have now seen I should have been better fortified to meet the Notts and the Gliddons of America in their arguments against the Negro as a part of the great African race.” He lamented, furthermore, that “knowledge on this subject comes to me late, but I hope not too late to be of some service, for the battle at this point is not yet fought out and the victory is not yet won.”²⁰

Douglass’s harsh retrospective assessment of his speech did not appear to be a judgment of its substance. In fact, more data and the impress of Darwinism were the only major substantive differences in his subsequent ethnological thought. By and large, his perspective, assumptions, arguments, and conclusions remained the same. The logical starting point for an analysis of his ethnological thought, therefore, is “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered.”

In that text, Douglass aimed to explore the central ethnological arguments concerning human origins and Negro equality in a clear and cogent, “though not scientific,” manner. He addressed his remarks principally to ethnologists and scholars involved in the debate over the all-important questions of racial equality and human justice signified by the human origins controversy. Their position was important because “the future public opinion of the land, whether anti-slavery or pro-slavery, whether magnanimous or mean, must redound to the honor of the Scholars of the country or cover them with shame.”²¹ Speaking to this powerful intellectual elite from a perspective in which racial equality and human justice were inseparable, he offered two interrelated “claims” or assumptions which he endeavored to prove: first, the Negro’s humanity; second, human monogenesis. There were six sections of argument,

evidence, or proof plus an introduction setting forth and a conclusion reiterating his claims. In "The Bearings of the Question," he treated religious, political, and ideological ramifications. In "Ethnological Unfairness Towards the Negro"; "Authorities as to the Resemblance of the Egyptians to Negroes"; "Superficial Objections"; and "The African Race But One People," he looked at the relationships among ancient Egyptians, Africans, and Negroes and their contemporary and historical significance. In "The Effect of Circumstances Upon the Physical Man," he outlined an environmentalist monogenism in the tradition of Smith, Bachman, Prichard, and Latham.

Douglass developed the intertwined cases for monogenesis, black humanity, and human equality by attacking head-on the polygenist notion that Negroes were not human beings like whites, but an inherently, thus permanently, inferior and brutish separate human species. The Negro, Douglass countered, shared with all mankind the exact physical, mental, behavioral, and ethical makeup. These distinctly human characteristics, he maintained, separated humans from brutes. He contended that even though similar in some surface respects, humans and brutes differed innately and widely. "Men instinctively distinguish between man and brutes. Common sense itself is scarcely needed to detect the absence of manhood in a monkey, or to recognize its presence in a Negro. His speech, his reason, his power to acquire and to retain knowledge, his heaven-erected face, his habitudes, his hopes, his fears, his aspirations, his prophecies, plant between him and brute creation, a distinction as eternal as it is palpable."²² Strongly implicit in Douglass's categorical distinction between human and brute species, moreover, was a ringing rejection of the racist implication of attempts to relate the Negro to brutes.

He suggested that efforts to relate Negroes to brutes seemed to verify notions of the alleged differences between whites and blacks, the races as inherently separate species, and blacks as a brutish and obviously inferior species. Most significant and invidious, such efforts apparently rationalized the continued oppression of blacks. Evolutionary schemes like the Great Chain of Being he rejected out of hand because they typically assumed Negroes to be less evolved than whites and thus closer to brutes. Negroes were often assumed to be even closer to brutes than to whites. Some adherents of the Great Chain of Being went so far as to speculate that the Negro represented the missing evolutionary link between the ape and the Caucasian. Douglass deplored such speculative nonsense. "Away . . . with all the scientific moonshine that would connect men with monkeys; that would have the world believe that humanity instead of resting on its own characteristic pedestal—gloriously independent—is a sort of sliding scale, making one extreme brother to the orang-ou-tang, and the other to angels, and all the rest intermediaries."²³

Although Douglass later embraced Darwinism, apparently without its argument for an evolutionary link between man and ape, he consistently rejected the persistent and racist notion that blacks were less evolved than whites. Congruent with his antiracist and egalitarian humanism, he believed that as human equals, blacks and whites were necessarily evolutionary equals.

A most disturbing aspect of the human origins debate for Douglass was its ethical bearing. In his mind, polygenesis clearly countenanced immorality and amorality. This was especially so if blacks might, through some intellectual or scientific flight of fancy, be construed as a separate human species. Douglass contended that following the logic of polygenesis, the Christian moral imperative to “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” could be interpreted as irrelevant to the treatment of blacks, thereby justifying their systematic oppression. Likewise, the Christian moral injunction for the more fortunate, the whites, to be kind and charitable toward the less fortunate, the blacks, was equally irrelevant. Douglass thus concluded that clannishness, inequality, and injustice—like racism, slavery, and oppression—followed logically from polygenesis which lacked the moral imperative basic to monogenism as he conceived it.²⁴

For Douglass, polygenesis epitomized the paradox of moral retrogression in an age of progress. It pointed to a striking discontinuity between ethical and scientific progress. He maintained that polygenism represented proof “that the moral growth of a nation, or an age, does not always keep pace with the increase of knowledge and suggests the necessity of means to increase human love with human learning.”²⁵ Sound ethical and humanistic values, Douglass argued, should fully inform scientific inquiry. Furthermore, he contended, progress in one sphere, like the moral, should be paralleled in other spheres, like the scientific. Progress, consequently, should be consistent and uniform. This idealism was predicated upon the belief that to qualify as progressive, historical development should be both moral and humanistic.

According to Douglass, polygenism was wrong and monogenism was right; polygenism signified evil, monogenism good. “When any theory can be shown to be in harmony with the welfare, happiness, and perfection of the race—when it can be said to directly promote these conditions, mankind have been willing to admit its reasonableness and truth.” Monogenism qualified as such a theory because “it naturally leads to the exercise of benevolence. It tends to order. It prompts to all manner of good offices. It represses violence, and defends the weak, the poor, and the needy.” He argued, furthermore, that monogenism assisted social virtue by promoting “equal rights, natural protection, reciprocal benefits, general welfare, common wants, common destiny. It makes the rights and interests of any the rights and interests of all.”²⁶ Whereas

he saw the ethics of cooperative democracy in monogenism, in polygenism he saw the immorality of social tyranny. Morally speaking, then, there remained only one choice: monogenism.

Closely related to Douglass's humanist and moral arguments for monogenism was his religious argument for it. Like the overwhelming majority of Christians, he firmly believed in a monogenist biblical interpretation of human creation. As Saint Paul had stated in his sermon to the Athenians at Mars Hill: God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth." Yet given the ambiguity of the Bible on the origins of different peoples, it is not surprising that polygenists, too, claimed biblical authority for their interpretation of human origins. In light of the force of traditional religious authority before and throughout the nineteenth century, however, the plural origins thesis represented doctrinal heresy for orthodox Christians. In fact, much, if not most, of the popular and scientific opposition to polygenism derived from this religious opposition. Thus speaking to the point of chromatic and racial diversity within the human species, Douglass acknowledged God's guiding influence. God had "endowed mankind with organizations capable of countless variations in form, feature, and color," Douglass observed, "without having it necessary to begin a new creation for every new variety."²⁷

The concepts of a universal human nature and a shared human destiny, the latter inevitably following from the former, were central to Douglass's ethnological thought. They flowed naturally from his religious beliefs—one God having created one people—and his catholic humanism. Separately and together, these concepts revealed a humanism rooted in natural rights philosophy and Christian theology. They encompassed the many bonds uniting all people and exemplified the universal social community. Douglass's belief in a universal human nature and a shared human destiny even exceeded his commitment to monogenism. "A diverse origin," he concluded, "does not disprove a common nature, nor does it disprove a united destiny."²⁸

The most important corollary of these humanist, moral, and religious concepts for Douglass, besides their support of social virtue, was their related support for universal human rights. This concept, like those of a common human nature and a shared human destiny, was consistent with, and in part derived from, his beliefs in human unity, equality, and sameness. "Human rights," he maintained, "stand upon a common basis; and by all the reason they are supported, maintained, and defended, for one variety of the human family, they are supported, maintained, and defended for all the human family; because all mankind have the same wants, arising out of a common nature. . . . The essential characteristics of humanity are everywhere the same."²⁹ Conse-

quently, the denial of universal human rights, which slavery epitomized, was unconscionable.

Prior to emancipation, Douglass's monogenism was inextricably tied to his abolitionism. Like most abolitionists, he viewed polygenism as a blatant proslavery tool. It neatly jibed with the larger racist conspiracy to make black slavery "respectable and plausible" and "to read the Negro out of the human family." Both proslavery and polygenist thought amounted to a reactionary gloss for a racist and stratified status quo. Once acknowledged, Douglass argued, that the various races are "of multitudinous origin, naturally different in their moral, physical, and intellectual capacities, and at once you make plausible a demand for classes, grades, and conditions, for different methods of culture, different moral, political, and religious institutions, and a chance is left for slavery as a necessary institution."³⁰ That most proslavery supporters rejected polygenism as irreligious and thus erroneous was ultimately irrelevant, Douglass implied, for they operated out of the same racist contempt for blacks as the polygenists.

Consistent with his egalitarian humanism, Douglass firmly believed in the concept of the psychic unity of mankind: "the instinctive consciousness of the common brotherhood of man." This major assumption of nineteenth-century ethnology had originated in the natural or impressionistic history of the previous century. Douglass's "instinctive consciousness of the common brotherhood of man" signified a mental, biological, philosophical as well as symbolic basis for the whole of his monogenism. It reflected, moreover, the Enlightenment ideal of reason and especially morality as instinctive and "the same in all men and equally possessed by all." Indeed, more than most ethnologists, Douglass strictly adhered to the logic of the ethnological axiom that posited a uniform human nature as central to the uniformity of sociocultural development.³¹

The polygenist assumption of primordial racial differences, notably mental, as basic to differences in human physical, cultural, and historical evolution contradicted the ethnological assumption of the psychic unity of mankind. Whereas a perception of both psychic unity and diversity are critical to an understanding of human evolution, an exaggerated and perverse emphasis upon diversity—as in the case of polygenism—has typically been manipulated on behalf of racism. The proslavery argument, like polygenism, rested upon what Douglass termed the untenable notion of vast and immutable distinctions between the races. Without these false distinctions, he contended, neither polygenism, its proslavery ramifications, nor the proslavery argument itself had any substance.³²

Douglass criticized two of the major theoretical claims of polygenism: mulatto degenerationism and racial acclimation patterns as unique and inherent. As a mulatto, he found the theory of mulatto degenerationism personally insulting, and he saw the insult extending to Negroes in general. Nott, for example, wrote that even though Douglass was “the most brilliant mulatto now before the public, . . . he is nothing more than what St. Paul calls a ‘pestilent fellow.’” Speaking of Douglass’s intelligence, Nott claimed that “he has just brains enough to talk fluently about matters he does not comprehend, and to spit out the venom of a blackguard.” Likewise, WJ McGee, anthropologist and geologist, noted that Douglass, Senator Blanche K. Bruce from Mississippi, Booker T. Washington, and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar were fine, yet unusual, mulatto specimens.³³

Douglass blasted mulatto degenerationism as absurd and racist. It simply belied common sense and empirical observation. Rather than decreasing in numbers as the theory and equally dubious census returns might suggest, mulattoes, Douglass saw, were actually increasing numerically. In terms of physical constitution, industry, intelligence, and morals, moreover, mulattoes were like everyone else. Douglass took special exception to the typical ethnological view of mulatto intelligence as inferior to white intelligence due to the Negro admixture, while conversely superior to Negro intelligence due to the Caucasian admixture. Evidence of mulatto intelligence, accordingly, owed to white, notably male, ancestry. “An intelligent black man,” Douglass noted, “is always supposed to have derived his intelligence from his connection with the white race.” As a result, “to be intelligent is to have one’s Negro blood ignored.”³⁴

Douglass, on the other hand, contended that “intellect is uniformly derived from the maternal side.” Thus, as “mulattoes, in this country, may almost wholly boast of Anglo-Saxon male ancestry,” mulatto intelligence derived from Negro mothers. Its logical dubiousness aside, the notion of the inheritance of intelligence from the maternal side reflected Douglass’s race consciousness as well as his strong maternal and feminist sympathies. Neither sex nor race, he suggested, impinged upon intellectual equality. Furthermore, in terms of his own identity as a Negro primarily and a mulatto secondarily, it was important to Douglass that the link between him and his Negro mother be fortified, while that between him and his white father be weakened. The theory of intelligence as inherited from the maternal side helped to satisfy this apparent need. Using “love of letters” as a measure of intelligence, in his final autobiography he attributed his own “love of letters” to “the native genius of my sable, unprotected, and uncultivated mother” rather than “my presumed

Anglo-Saxon paternity.” He added that his mother “belonged to a race whose mental endowments are still disparaged and despised.”³⁵

Although Douglass accepted the idea of racial acclimation to specific climatic and geographical areas over time, he argued that the process was environmental and not primordial. For instance, he adhered to the traditional environmentalist and monogenist explanation of skin color differences among various races as group adaptations to specific regions which had become relatively fixed over time. Racial inbreeding, accordingly, furthered this process. Douglass disagreed with the position of Agassiz and his polygenist cohorts who maintained that skin color was primordial and part of a race’s inherent adaptation to its natural habitat. Notwithstanding skin color differences among various races and the conflicting explanations of their principal causes and meanings, Douglass asserted that all humanity was equipped to weather the demands of the earth’s various environments. “Man is emphatically a migratory animal and by virtue of the possession of reason, he is master of all latitudes, longitudes, and altitudes. He can guard himself against nearly all the extremes of heat and cold and other vicissitudes of climate. The Negro in common with all other men possesses this divine faculty and therefore can live anywhere in common with other men.”³⁶ It was wrong, consequently, to use the questionable theory of inherent racial suitability for certain environments as an excuse to suppress and to deny the humanity of anyone. Douglass believed it unacceptable to manipulate any scientific theory to justify stifling any individual’s or group’s opportunities and abilities.

In line with his belief in comparative racial suitability for specific environments because of acclimatization enhanced by inbreeding, Douglass maintained that blacks found warmer regions more tolerable than whites who, conversely, found cooler regions more tolerable than blacks. This espousal of relative environmental—as distinct from inherent—racial acclimation impinged upon his attitudes toward a variety of issues, notably black colonization, black migration, and alleged black climatic suitability for southern slavery—all of which he opposed for reasons besides climate. He generally cast this opposition in terms of the necessity to realize human freedom, justice, and equality. He also expressed it in nationalist terms: the Negro as an inextricable part of the United States and its national identity. Responding to Representative Henry Blair’s proposal during the Civil War to colonize blacks in some part of Central America, Douglass retorted: “The idea of confining different varieties of men to different belts of the earth’s surface, with a view to keeping them separate and distinct, is chimerical in the extreme, and is ridiculously out of joint with this age of progress and practical science.”³⁷

He cast his opposition to the Exoduster migration from the deep South to

Kansas in the late 1870s in similar terms. Yet, this opposition revealed an ambiguous environmentalism that not only strained and perhaps contradicted his belief in human adaptability, but also, paradoxically, bordered perilously close to a hereditarian analysis. Thus, he argued that southern Negroes should remain in the South because only the Negro could successfully withstand the southern heat and, therefore, labor successfully in the southern fields. He suggested that this capacity had been acquired due to environment and passed on to subsequent generations. As described by Douglass, though, it appeared that at present only the Negro was capable of and had developed this ability to withstand and toil in the southern heat. It was a "firm, unassailed and unassailable" fact, he asserted, that "as a southern laborer, there is no competitor or substitute" for the Negro.

The thought of filling his place by any other variety of the human family will be found utterly impractical. Neither Chinaman, German, Norwegian nor Swede can drive him from the sugar and cotton fields of Louisiana and Mississippi. They would certainly perish in the black bottoms of these states if they could be induced, which they cannot, to try the experiment. . . . Besides being dependent upon the roughest and flintiest kind of labor, the climate of the South makes such labor uninviting and harshly repulsive to the white man. He dreads it, shrinks from it and refuses it. . . . On the contrary, the Negro walks, labors, or sleeps in the sunlight unharmed.³⁸

Superior climatic suitability, then, allegedly both ensured the Negro's present dominance in the southern labor market and superseded all arguments in favor of the Exoduster movement. Although Douglass did not state explicitly that this Negro dominance in the southern labor market would necessarily continue in the future, he strongly implied that it would.

Douglass's failure to acknowledge even the future possibility of other races adapting to the southern clime as the Negro had done much earlier vividly betrayed his racialistic bias. Consequently, the Negro's alleged superior suitability for the southern clime could only rebound to his favor, especially as a free laborer. This ability certainly did not mean that blacks were better fitted than others to labor as southern slaves; but it did mean, as evidenced by the fruits of their postemancipation labors in their own fields, that they were better fitted than others to be free southern laborers. This overstated and misleading line of argument clearly ignored and contradicted obvious points of which Douglass was quite aware. His personal experience as well as that of innumerable other blacks demonstrated that, like whites, they were equally at home in the southern and northern climates. Indeed, southern whites before and during

his time toiled under the southern sun, sometimes alongside blacks, with no discernible ill effects. Douglass apparently sacrificed his belief in human adaptability on the ideological altar of an initially rigid and excessive opposition to the Exoduster migration. By seeming to deny whites an adaptive capacity to develop an ability to withstand the southern heat at least equal to that of the Negro, his line of argument also appeared to contradict the notions of organic change and evolution.

To slight or misconstrue certain obvious realities in a polemical debate, like that surrounding the Exoduster migration, is understandable and perhaps excusable. To argue, as Douglass did, the superiority of blacks as southern laborers is similarly understandable as overcompensation for the many racist attacks against free black laborers. Nonetheless, the conclusion is inescapable: this racialistic and dubious line of argument violated the essence of his monogenism—a common human nature and destiny. If blacks and whites were to coexist as equals in the same country, as Douglass contended throughout his life, both had to be able to adapt to regional variations in climate.

In light of the rampant Negrophobia in the United States during the nineteenth century, the concurrent respectability of scientific racism is not at all astonishing. Nor is it surprising that the dissenting antiracist voices, like Douglass's, received a cursory and generally hostile reception at best. Many scientists sought to provide an intellectual rationale and an ethical justification for the assumption of innate Negro inferiority. As a result, they helped to legitimize white racism. The intellectual triumph of scientific racism often included, paradoxically, even those sympathetic, liberal, and educated whites who saw themselves as untainted by antiblack prejudice.³⁹

Like most perceptive blacks of his time, Douglass clearly detected the racism in the works of most white scholars and scientists touching upon race. This bias, he maintained, invalidated their claims of objectivity. He argued that prior to emancipation, slavery's tremendous economic clout had been a critical factor promoting this nonobjectivity. "This immense capital invested in the souls and sinews of the Negro is able to command science, art, and philosophy to crush the Negro when he assumes personality instead of remaining quietly as property." He further explained that "it is the province of prejudice to blind and scientific writers, not less than others, write to please as well as to instruct, and even unconsciously to themselves, sacrifice what is true to what is popular."⁴⁰

To demonstrate his contention that the objectivity and motivation of polygenists were suspect, Douglass assessed several examples of the evidence and logic in Charles Hamilton Smith's polygenist volume, *Natural History of the*

Human Species. While he saw Nott and Gliddon's *Types of Mankind* as "the most compendious and barefaced" effort to "brand the Negro with natural inferiority," Douglass apparently limited his extended criticisms primarily to Smith's work because it was more conducive to a single lecture critique. Like Nott and Gliddon's work, Smith's was "quite false in many of its facts, and as mischievous as false."⁴¹

Specifically, Smith argued that the Negro's head shape and density were connected to his "erect gait" as well as his practice of "carrying burdens and light weights" on his head. He similarly maintained that this practice constituted evidence of innate physical difference between Negroes and Caucasians. Douglass deemed both notions absurd. Not only, he noted, did Europeans carry weights on their heads, but the practice itself was "as old as Oriental Society." Douglass scoffed: "the man writes himself a blockhead who attempts to find in the custom a proof of original difference" between blacks and whites.⁴²

But the lengths to which racist ethnologists, notably polygenists, went "to dehumanize the Negro" were as unconscionable as they were unbelievable. Smith, for example, wrote that the "voice of the Negroes is feeble and hoarse in the male sex." Obviously, he had never heard Douglass and comparable black orators, like Martin Robison Delany, Henry Highland Garnet, and William Wells Brown. Douglass also pointed out that Smith's logic reflected an equally erroneous assumption: the equation of a sometimes quiet and subservient black male vocal style with inherent vocal feebleness and hoarseness. The proper approach to understanding why black men or any oppressed group spoke as they did, Douglass countered, was to analyze the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor. This was necessary because "an oppressed people, in addressing their superiors—. . . their oppressors—usually assume a minor tone, as less likely to provoke the charge of intrusiveness."⁴³ Smith's notion of a congenital weakness in the Negro male's voice, therefore, was not only ridiculous, wrong, and racist, but it also displayed a woeful ignorance of the influence of social environment in shaping the Negro's personality and behavior.

Douglass's last argument with Smith centered on his contention that "the typical woolly haired races have never discovered an alphabet, framed a grammatical language, nor made the least step in science or art"—the common cant of racist ethnology. Given Douglass's perception of a kinship between Egypt and the Negro, he necessarily found these assertions spurious and contemptible. Indeed, a key aspect of his ethnology remained to demonstrate that the former greatness of Africa, especially ancient Egypt, redounded to the Negro's favor. He also took special notice of a Mandingo alphabet and a grammar of

the Mpongwo language spoken in and around the Gabon River to illustrate Smith's racial bias, intellectual irresponsibility, and appalling ignorance of African societies.⁴⁴

Douglass also deplored the polygenists' misuse of the comparative method. He maintained that a proper historical, cultural, or physical comparison between blacks and whites must take into account their relative environments. The comparison only worked, he suggested, if the individuals or groups being compared came from like environments. Therefore, it made no sense to compare the degraded Negro with the favored white to prove anything other than the galling disparity between their relative circumstances. Human unity and equality superseded circumstantial differences between whites and blacks. Yet, ethnologists in general and polygenists in particular typically made essentially incongruous and fatuous racial comparisons. Douglass railed against the tendency of the Negro's "ethnological detractors" to compare the untutored Negro unfavorably with the likes of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, or John C. Calhoun. He observed that "the fact that these intellects, so powerful and so controlling, are almost, if not quite as exceptional to the general rule of humanity, in one direction, as the specimen Negroes are in the other, is quite overlooked."⁴⁵

The sketchy and inconclusive data base of much nineteenth-century ethnology contributed to the speculative and questionable nature of many of its assumptions and arguments. Two methodological problems in particular further complicated the reliability of ethnological fact and analysis. First, ethnologists, including Douglass, tended to overstate and to confuse the use of both the analogy and the intrinsic relationship between cultural and physical data as ethnological evidence. This cultural-physical ambiguity often proceeded to the point where the physical and the cultural seemed either indistinguishable or interchangeable; sometimes, they became one and the same phenomenon. It was not unusual, for example, to define human traits as essentially biological, thereby omitting or neglecting what is today understood, and what some like Douglass recognized then, as its sociocultural component. As shown by his concept of the inheritance of intelligence from the mother, on the other hand, the biological component of human mental evolution generally greatly overshadowed what is now recognized as its sociocultural component.⁴⁶

The second methodological problem impinging upon the reliability of ethnological fact and analysis derived from the reliance on the comparative method of "conjectural, theoretical, or natural history" of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. From today's perspective, the comparative method itself has serious methodological limitations both as history and as a comparative approach. Ethnological use of the comparative method further exposed

and exacerbated these limitations. By today's anthropological standards, at least three faulty assumptions infused the comparative method of natural history central to nineteenth-century ethnology: the belief that civilization represented the highest stage of human development proceeding sequentially from barbarism (which proceeded from savagery); the belief that the study of contemporary savage, barbarian, and civilized peoples would enable one to understand their past as well as concurrent parallels, even without all the historical evidence; and the belief that individual human development recapitulated the development of the individual's race. Ironically, a nineteenth-century critique of the comparative method was implicit, though not developed, in the antievolutionary ethnological theory of degenerationism. But it is the cultural relativism of Franz Boas, which gained respectability in the first half of this century, that constitutes the true starting point for the modern critique of the comparative method.⁴⁷

Even by nineteenth-century standards, the comparative method of natural history was notoriously ahistorical. Transformed into ethnology, it often misrepresented the compared peoples or races, usually nonwhite, non-Western, and non-Christian, as uncivilized. In the same vein, it postulated an ethnocentric and dubious developmental typology as the basis for the evaluation and comparison of past and contemporary societies. Furthermore, its approach to individual and group development grossly exaggerated the significance of race.⁴⁸ Except for the critical lack of a theory of cultural relativism, much of the modernist critique of nineteenth-century ethnology is evident several decades before Boas in the ethnological thought of Frederick Douglass and his cohorts. These ideas unfortunately found meager contemporary circulation and reception.

Douglass and others argued, for example, that the endemic ethnological exploitation of comparative anthropometric measurements between blacks and whites to demonstrate black inferiority and white superiority was not only racist, but also logically and methodologically fatuous. Nevertheless, the exploitation of this data persisted long after the practice of formal anthropometric measurements fell into disrepute and was discontinued. In fact, its impact extended far beyond the nineteenth century and, to an alarming degree, is still being felt today in various modes of modern scientific and pseudo-scientific racism.⁴⁹

On its face, the comparative method, though flawed, was necessarily neither ethnocentric nor racist. It basically reflected the Enlightenment's quest for clocklike, organic order and regularity. Nevertheless, a vigorous environmentalism in conjunction with beliefs in human perfectibility and progress undercut, but did not diminish, Enlightenment racism. The comparative method,

consequently, was an essentially Eurocentric search, projected onto other cultures, for “the sequence of social forms which followed inevitably from the uniformity of the laws of nature and of human nature unimpeded by local or accidental circumstance.” History, thus, represented “a single evolutionary development through a series of stages . . . savagery, barbarism, and civilization.” Evolution, moreover, meant progress and strongly implied the possibility of human perfectibility. Yet, as Boas and his followers have shown, critical weaknesses of the comparative method as adopted by ethnology (and earlier developed in natural history) were the unilinear and evolutionary biases of the ethnocentric notion of culture as Western civilization. For Boas and his followers, there was no one culture, but equally valid cultures—notably non-Western, nonwhite, non-Christian as well as Western, white, Christian. Cross-cultural differences and changes are relative and thus necessarily neither unilinear nor evolutionary.⁵⁰

The unilinear evolutionary approach of a singular definition of culture constituted a vital link in the relationship between the methodological and the racial (ethnic) biases of ethnology. Lacking either a theory of cultural plurality or relativity—or some other nonhierarchical and nonevaluative theory of culture—ethnologists typically fell prey to their own racial (ethnic) and cultural biases. Ethnologists hitched the comparative method to a racialistic (ethnocentric) understanding of history as well as culture. At their best, these biases said something about the ethnologist, his own culture, and, perhaps in some way, those he dealt with outside his own culture. At their worst, they degenerated into blatant ethnocentrism and racism.

In nineteenth-century America, Anglo-American culture was the only recognized culture. It clearly defined both the cultural norm and the pinnacle of the evolutionary hierarchy. Commonly viewed by ethnologists as deviating widely from white cultural norms and at or near the bottom of the evolutionary hierarchy, blacks seemed to validate the white perception of vast differences between the races. This perception likewise appeared to validate the white cultural norms and evolutionary hierarchy. In essence, culture, according to this view, became a heritable racial trait. The racism of ethnology, therefore, grew out of nineteenth-century cultural and biological racism. Both kinds of racism, like the discipline of ethnology itself, were important in the early histories of physical and cultural anthropology.⁵¹

Although Douglass remained extremely critical of ethnological racism, he unconsciously undermined the effectiveness of his assault against it by failing to attack the assumption of Euro-American cultural superiority endemic to the Euro-American bias of ethnology. For Douglass, as for most of his contemporaries, black and white, Euro-American culture signified the pinnacle of cul-

tural evolution. In contrast, Afro-American culture was inferior, if acknowledged at all. Douglass seemed to accept the idea of Afro-American cultural inferiority while disassociating it from his commitment to human equality. Whereas cultural inferiority was relative and mutable, human equality was incommensurable and immutable. The paradox of Afro-American cultural inferiority amid human equality unwittingly, but seriously, weakened his antiracism. It suggested that the Negroes' oppression was in part reciprocally related to their cultural backwardness. The delusion of Anglo-Americanization would appear to be the Negro's last and best hope.

A related and similarly glaring weakness of Douglass's ethnology was the tendency toward environmental and evolutionary determinism and a corresponding neglect of human adaptability. It appeared at times that the various races merely fulfilled fated ethnological roles and that responsibility for their lives ultimately rested beyond their control. Thus, even though Douglass stressed human adaptability, the force of his overweening environmentalism and evolutionism often prevailed. His traditional, though racialistic, ideas about comparative racial climatic suitability demonstrated this problem. While blacks had evolved the suitability for and consequently could adjust to all climates, whites had evolved the suitability for and consequently could adjust primarily to cooler climates. Black adaptability seemed to outstrip white adaptability. The latter seemed more clearly subject to environment and an implicitly inferior evolutionary capacity.

On the contrary, blacks, too, seemed overwhelmingly subject to environmental and evolutionary forces in negative ways. Douglass's exaggerated rhetorical emphasis upon the negative and constraining influences of the Negro's past and present environment, for instance, often overshadowed the Negro's ability to adjust to and transcend these limitations. This was especially evident in his consciously overdrawn portraits of black degradation that were meant not only to inform, but also to promote widespread sympathy and support for the black freedom struggle.

Because he accepted monogenesis and human equality as axiomatic, he ultimately found the debate surrounding them vexatious and ridiculous. For blacks to have to argue their humanity and equality with whites as part of the origins debate, he contended, was insulting. In fact, he argued that the major justification for blacks engaging in the controversy was to ensure a better international and domestic ethnological judgment of themselves.⁵²

Douglass freely acknowledged that the psychology of racist oppression prejudiced the ethnological perspectives of whites and blacks, especially with respect to the origins-equality dilemma. If for blacks monogenism signified equality between black and white, for whites either monogenism or poly-

genism signified white superiority. If blacks embraced monogenism out of no more than wish fulfillment, whites embraced monogenism or polygenism out of defensive rationalization—"pride of race and position." If, Douglass reasoned, "the desire to rise though strong—is not stronger than the desire to keep down the Negro, and if a desire to rise be a disqualification for uttering sound views on the one hand, equally is the desire to oppress and keep down the Negro a disqualification on the other."⁵³ In the context of racist oppression, therefore, neither blacks nor whites were exempt from a bias in perspective.

In spite of his belief that monogenesis and equality were beyond dispute, Douglass clearly understood why many, notably the polygenists, disagreed. He admitted that the fragmentary and inconclusive state of knowledge concerning human origins rendered either point of view debatable. Because it was impossible to go back far enough in time to speak with absolute assurance about human origins, Douglass admitted that the truth—traditional religious adherence to monogenism aside—was ultimately unfathomable.⁵⁴ For him, however, both its logic and his interpretation of the evidence made monogenism the more cogent theory.

As ethnologists with scientific pretensions, both monogenists and polygenists were subject to common faults: factual loopholes and inaccuracies, dubious and erroneous logic, a priori conclusions. Monogenism, polygenism, and ethnology in general—like all racial thought in the nineteenth century—rested on an extremely dubious, if not fundamentally indefensible, scientific and intellectual basis. Even today, scientists and intellectuals are struggling with what one anthropologist refers to as "the phantasmic notion of race as the basis for establishing research samples."⁵⁵ In his own time, nevertheless, Douglass's monogenism exemplified a more insightful and viable approach to the dilemma of human origins and its egalitarian implications than either the polygenism of the American school of ethnology or mainstream, thus racist, monogenism. Paradoxically, however, in twentieth-century America, the very science that had promoted the preceding century's characteristic racism largely reversed itself and helped to lead the antiracist assault. This critical shift vindicated the thrust of Douglass's ethnology toward a humanistic social science.

Reflecting the age-old nature versus nurture controversy, ethnological analyses like Douglass's monogenism usually proceeded in either of two distinct, yet related, directions: environmental or hereditarian. Environmentalists, like Douglass, maintained that the key to human evolution—historical, cultural, and physical—was the interaction between the individual and his total surroundings. Hereditarians, like the ethnologists of the American school, how-

ever, stressed the individual's biological or physical inheritance. Throughout the nineteenth century, hereditarianism increasingly overshadowed environmentalism as the more acceptable ethnological interpretation. This trend, for example, was manifest in the popular cultural nationalism of unique racial gifts. Johann Gottfried von Herder, German philosopher of the late eighteenth century, had championed this notion of inherent racial genius that nineteenth-century romanticism elaborated upon.⁵⁶

Although Douglass's environmentalism encompassed the individual's or group's total milieu, he tended to emphasize the most readily identifiable environmental elements: climate, social circumstances, and geography. More important, he recognized an organic and reciprocal relationship between the individual and his environment. In an analysis of the interaction between the worker and his work environment, he noted: "A man is worked upon by what he works on." An individual, he continued, "may carve out his circumstances, but his circumstances will carve him out as well." Thus, human racial differences—whether physical, cultural, or historical—essentially expressed the dynamic interaction between the individual and his "circumstances." The widespread ethnological preoccupation with the measurement and interpretation of alleged anatomical and physiological differences among the races was extremely dubious, Douglass argued, because such differences were environmental as well as hereditary in origin.⁵⁷

Douglass generally avoided merely racial explanations for complex phenomena, in spite of his perdurable, though understandable, preoccupation with race and its myriad ramifications. In fact, hereditarianism was more amenable to merely racial analyses with its biological and physiological support for inbred qualities. Although Douglass apparently agreed with the romantic cultural nationalism of inbred and distinctive racial qualities, as shown by his views of relative racial climatic suitability, he did not agree fully with its hereditarianism. Rather, he opted for a determinative melange of heredity and environment.

The dominant theme of Douglass's ethnology generally and monogenism specifically, nonetheless, remained a powerful environmentalism superseded by divine will and possibly matched and superseded by human adaptability. It was not unusual for environment aided by human oppression to overwhelm the latter, however. He contended that this was particularly evident among the poorest and most exploited classes. He observed, for instance, that what many authorities on human morphology attributed to innate racial peculiarities, he thought clearly related to environment, especially class. That individuals and groups from different racial stocks exposed to similar socioeconomic conditions strikingly resembled one another physically intrigued Douglass. The

physical resemblance represented a direct product primarily of neither coincidence nor race, but environment.

His observations among the Irish poor in particular revealed that their generally deplorable physical appearance and condition paralleled that of the destitute free and slave Negro. Socioeconomic exploitation had scarred the poor Irish, like the destitute Negro, with “the open, uneducated mouth—the long, gaunt arm—the badly formed foot and ankle—the shuffling gait—the retreating forehead and vacant expression—and their petty quarrels and fights.” Poverty and degradation, therefore, exacted a common human toll. This fact cogently demolished the racist and hereditarian idea that the oppression and degradation of the poor was natural and racial, thus inevitable and desirable. Aside from the significant differential impact of prejudice on poor Irish as opposed to poor Negroes, both endured comparable problems because of a similarly enervating socioeconomic environment.⁵⁸

Douglass suggested that even though the Negro’s degradation was neither innately racial nor desirable, but primarily environmental, it was, in a sense, physically and culturally heritable. The impact of a consistently racist and oppressive environment was such, he implied, that certain negative consequences for the exploited individual and group might, and often did, become inherited. The past left a harsh, though eradicable, print on the future. “The woes of the slave mother,” Douglass lamented in 1883, “can be read today on the faces of her children. Slavery has twisted their legs, flattened their feet, and imparted a depressed and cowardly aspect to their features.” Physical and cultural heredity, then, both revealed and transmitted the ill effects of a bad environment.⁵⁹

Another postemancipation example of a bad environment interacting with the negative hereditary effects of the Negro’s slave past, Douglass argued, was the deplorably high incidence of black crime, especially black theft. Having dealt with innumerable blacks accused and convicted of crime in the District of Columbia while he served as its United States marshal between 1877 and 1880, he spoke sympathetically on their behalf.

Two hundred and fifty years of grinding slavery has done its work upon them. They stand before you today physically and mentally maimed and mutilated men. Many of their mothers and grandmothers were lashed to agony before their birth by cruel overseers, and the children have inherited in their faces the anguish and resentment felt by their parents. Many of these poor creatures have not been free long enough to outgrow the marks of the lash on their backs, and the deeper marks on their souls. No, no! It is not nature that has erred in making the Negro. That shame rests with slavery.⁶⁰

Consistent with his reformism, he believed that a better milieu would help to alleviate black social problems. Equally important, it would remake black wrongdoers into responsible persons, thereby enhancing the life chances of their progeny.

The theme of the dehumanizing and lingering impact of slavery on whites as well as blacks runs throughout Douglass's speeches and writings. It was central to his humanist and moral opposition to oppression and injustice in general as well as slavery in particular. It also perhaps best illustrated his belief that environmentalism operated, for better or worse, irrespective of race. For instance, Douglass attributed the meanness of Aaron Anthony, his former master, to the debilitating context of slavery. "Had he been brought up in a free state, surrounded by the full restraints of civilized society—restraints which are necessary to the freedom of all its members, alike and equally—Captain Anthony might have been as humane a man as are members of such society generally. A man's character," he concluded, "always takes its hue, more or less, from the form and color of things about him."⁶¹ Slavery had also caused the abrupt shift from kind guidance to vigilant repression by Sophia, his former mistress. Soon after her husband informed her that teaching a young slave like "Freddy" to read would only "unfit" him to be a slave, she developed a staunch opposition to his learning to read that surpassed her husband's. Hence, the inevitable blight of slavery turned Sophia, once "a model of tenderness and affection," callous.⁶²

The environment of slavery poisoned race relations before, during, and after emancipation. As Douglass so often stressed, neither the mentality of servility and inferiority nor that of mastery and superiority was easy to overcome. He saw throughout the immediate postwar period the continuing impact of slavery in the racist oppression hounding all blacks, freed as well as nominally free. He characterized the atmosphere of violence and terror endemic to southern "Ku-Kluxism" as "only another form of the same old slavery rebellion . . . against the Union." The increasing numbers of black lynchings in the 1880s and 1890s also reflected the lingering taint of slavery. In his fiery 1894 address—"Why is the Negro Lynched?"—Douglass thundered that "the defeat of emancipation" was "not the work of the spirit of liberty, but the work of the spirit of bondage. It comes of the determination of slavery to perpetuate itself, if not under one form, then under another. It is due to the folly of endeavoring to put the new wine of liberty in the old bottles of slavery."⁶³ In line with postwar "Bloody Shirt" and Republican party rhetoric, Douglass likewise contrasted the Republican party, the party of freedom and the Union, with the Democratic party, the party of slavery and slaveholding rebellion against the Union.⁶⁴

As Douglass's successful life illustrated, however, environment is not ev-

everything, for it is sometimes possible for the able and highly motivated individual to rise above environmental constrictions, no matter how severe. Douglass understood this all too well. His keen comprehension of human adaptability, survival, and transcendence fueled an equally keen optimism concerning the human condition. An important aspect of this optimism remained a deep and abiding belief in the inevitability and desirability of progressive, organic change and development.

Whether environmentalist or hereditarian, evolutionary ethnologists like Douglass generally drew upon Lamarckianism and Darwinism: the two major nineteenth-century pregenetic models of evolution. Lamarckianism explained physical evolution—as well as cultural and historical evolution—as the direct result of the inheritance of characteristics acquired through environmental modification. Darwinism, on the other hand, explained evolution as the direct result of the inheritance of characteristics due to natural selection from among competing variations or adaptations: “the survival of the fittest.” In each case, the relationship between physical evolution and both cultural and historical evolution signified a demonstrable fact in addition to a conceptual analogy.⁶⁵

Although Darwinism offered a more viable view of the origin and development of human characteristics and the process of evolutionary change than the simplistic reductionism of Lamarckianism, neither adequately addressed the mechanism of inheritance. Nevertheless, both were adaptable to either environmentalism, hereditarianism, or a synthesis of the two. Given the growing dominance of hereditarianism, however, environmentalism and the environmental-hereditarian synthesis correspondingly found fewer supporters. Lamarckianism, moreover, was under serious scientific attack from its inception during the early years of the nineteenth century to the 1859 appearance of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and beyond. Yet Lamarckianism curiously survived, its dwindling popularity notwithstanding, sometimes alone, but quite often, paradoxically, alongside Darwinism.⁶⁶

Prior to the rise of Darwinism, Douglass’s evolutionism was basically Lamarckian. His commonly held notion of the congeniality between blacks and hotter climates and whites and colder climates clearly illustrated this Lamarckianism. Similarly illustrative was his environmentalist argument of the crucial impact of climate on physical features. Consequently, “on the mountains on the North of Africa, where water freezes in winter at times, branches of the same people who are black in the valley are white on the mountains. The Nubian, with his beautiful curly hair, finds it becoming frizzled, crisped, even wooly, as he approaches the great Sahara. The Portuguese, white in Europe, is brown in Asia. The Jews, who are to be found in all countries, never intermarrying, are white in Europe, brown in Asia, and black in Africa.”⁶⁷

In spite of its characteristic Lamarckianism, Douglass's pre-Darwinian evolutionism also betrayed a variety of hybrid evolutionism: the progressive development of humanity through miscegenation. He believed that assimilation, racial amalgamation, or the realization of the melting pot ideal, his "composite nationality," was desirable, progressive, and becoming increasingly prevalent. In a society increasingly opposed to miscegenation and leery of its offspring, Douglass's belief in human hybrid vigor or human heterosis was unusual. Regardless, this hybrid American, symbolized by the mulatto, personified his "composite nationality" ideal as well as a superior human type. Like the classic formulation of the immigrant's Americanization in Israel Zangwill's *The Melting Pot* (1908), though, Douglass's comparable hopeful and romantic vision of a "composite nationality" obscured the persistence and complexity of racial (ethnic) and cultural pluralism.⁶⁸

The postwar ascendancy of biological and social Darwinism deeply influenced Douglass's evolutionism notwithstanding the persistence of Lamarckian and hybridization elements. He eschewed biological Darwinism, apparently preferring to stress social Darwinism. In so doing, he generally evaded the conflict between his interpretation of human evolution as distinctly human and the Darwinian interpretation of the likelihood of nonhuman links in early human evolution. Echoing instead the social Darwinian voice heard so often during his latter years, he spoke more and more of the Negro's "race of life," the Negro's and other nonwhites' struggle for civilization, and the social conflict between nonwhites and whites: a struggle in which the "fittest"—nonwhite as well as white—would triumph.

Speaking of the freed blacks' "race of life," he argued that if they proved unable to adjust to the demands of American civilization, the prospect was ominous but inevitable. They would "be treated in the end as cucumbers . . . , and will in due season perish from the earth." It was therefore imperative that freed blacks embrace American civilization and subdue its challenges. "Civilization," he noted, "is all love and tenderness toward whatever accords and cooperates with it, but implacable, cruel, and remorseless to all obstacles."⁶⁹ An inveterate optimist, notably concerning Negro prospects, Douglass sincerely believed that the freed Negro would meet successfully the exigencies of American civilization.

Contrary to his optimistic and progressive vision of cultural and historical evolutionism, however, Douglass's general theory of culture and history was cyclical and utilitarian. Although nations would indeed continue to rise and fall culturally and historically as they had in the past, he implied that the cycle could be averted. This was possible if nations would learn from both past mistakes, like the inevitable moral decay of a slave society, and past achieve-

ments, like the instances of a composite nationality. Emphasizing the achievement of a composite nationality, he noted that England “has only risen from barbarism to its present lofty eminence through successive invasions and alliances with her people.” Once, likewise, together “the Medes and Persians constituted one of the mightiest empires that ever rocked the globe.” Today, he continued, Germany, “the most terrible nation which now threatens the peace of the world, to make its will the law of Europe, is a grand piece of Mosaic work, in which almost every [mainland European] nation has its characteristic feature, from the wild Tartar to the refined Pole.”⁷⁰ National cultural and historical evolution, consequently, derived in part from the nation’s ability to assimilate its various peoples into a composite nationality.

Part Four

The Autobiographical Douglass

It is too late now to do much to improve my relation to the public. I shall never get beyond Frederick Douglass the self-educated fugitive slave.

— Douglass to James Redpath, 29 July 1871

When a man raises himself from the lowest condition in society to the highest, mankind pays him the tribute of their admiration; when he accomplishes this elevation by native energy, guided by prudence and wisdom, their admiration is increased; but when his course, onward and upward, excellent in itself, furthermore proves a possible, what had hitherto been regarded as an impossible, reform, then he becomes a burning and a shining light, on which the aged may look with gladness, the young with hope, and the down-trodden, as a representative of what they may themselves become.

—James McCune Smith, Introduction to Douglass,
My Bondage and My Freedom

10. Self-made Man, Self-conscious Hero

In many ways, Frederick Douglass remains the prototypical black American hero: a peerless self-made man and symbol of success; a fearless and tireless spokesman; a thoroughgoing humanist. The most striking and enduring aspect of Douglass's heroic legacy in his day—its classic, even archetypal aura—has persisted down to the present. Although often viewed and used differently by others, the heroic and legendary Douglass clearly personifies the American success ethic. The key to his eminently evocative essence is twofold. First, he, like the American nation itself and its most enduring folk heroes, rose above seemingly overwhelming odds to achieve historical distinction. Second, he represents a model self-made man: an exemplary black version of uncommon achievement primarily through the agency of a resolute will and hard toil aided by moral law and divine providence. Not only did he succeed, but he did so in terms signifying mythic greatness: the uniquely gifted individual rising above anonymity and adversity to renown and good fortune largely through the force of superlative character and indefatigable effort. Douglass's life story exemplifies both the romance and the reality of heroic greatness.

Notwithstanding its universal appeal, Douglass's heroic and symbolic viability has had special meaning for black Americans. In 1908, Kelly Miller, Howard University sociologist and mathematician, gave his view of Douglass's particular importance for black Americans. "Frederick Douglass is the one commanding historic character of the colored race in America. He is the model of emulation of those who are struggling up through the trials and difficulties which he himself suffered and subdued. He is illustrative and exemplary of what they might become—the first fruit of promise of a dormant race. To the aspiring colored youth of this land Mr. Douglass is, at once, the inspiration of their hopes and the justification of their claims." While one may reasonably argue, especially today, with Miller's claim of Douglass's singular historical eminence, his claim for Douglass's prototypical heroic and symbolic preeminence is more cogent. Perhaps better than any other nineteenth-century black American, Douglass personified the travail and triumph of his people. A heroic and symbolic view of Douglass continues to be meaningful because his life struggle so vividly represented his people's struggle. In 1853, he remarked that "mine has been the experience of the colored people of America, both slave and free."¹ Douglass saw himself and wanted to be seen as an example and an inspiration to all people, but especially to blacks.

Douglass's perception of his own stature is implicit throughout his thinking on self-made men and heroes. These reflections on their uncommon greatness revealed not only his sociocultural and psychological acuity, but also a thinly veiled and insightful autobiographical study. When Douglass analyzed self-made men, heroism, and greatness, he tacitly and, to an extent, unwittingly engaged in self-analysis. This constituted an effort to isolate and to assess those factors that helped to make him the paragon of self-reliance, self-cultivation, self-made success he fully recognized himself to be. Douglass's discussion of self-made men, therefore, was ultimately as much about himself, even though he never explicitly referred to himself, as it was about self-made men in general. To awaken "a sense of the dignity of labor or the value of manhood" and to encourage "self-improvement and higher usefulness" were always his goals when he spoke on self-made men.² As he so clearly and thoroughly embodied these goals himself, he firmly believed that they had undoubtedly contributed to his own rise to greatness and thus could do the same for others as well.

As a land of unparalleled freedom and opportunity, America was the ideal breeding ground for self-made men. The American dream of success encouraged hard work toward self-cultivation and individual material prosperity: boons to the common as well as the individual's socioeconomic welfare. Self-improvement and economic success, then, were basic to the American ideal of the self-made man. No eighteenth-century American better personified the self-made man than Benjamin Franklin. In addition to personifying the tradition and ideal of self-made men, Franklin implored his brethren to follow the maxims for self-improvement and economic success detailed in his writings, notably his *Memoirs* and his *Poor Richard's Almanac*.³

Besides Franklin and his sundry admonitions, there were many inspirations and guides for potential self-made men. The most important of these was the Protestant work ethic. Franklin's gospel of self-improvement and economic success represented a secularized version of it. Cotton Mather, the Puritan divine, explained the religious version in 1701. The Christian had a dual calling: a "General Calling" to serve his religious beliefs and a "Personal Calling"—"a certain Particular Employment, by which his Usefulness, in his Neighborhood, is distinguished." The self-made man fulfilled exceptionally well not only his personal (and social) responsibility but also his Christian responsibility. Mather plainly perceived the integral relationship between personal (and social) as well as Christian duties. "God hath made man a Sociable Creature. We expect benefits from Humane Society. It is but equal, that Humane Society should receive Benefits from Us. We are Beneficial to Hu-

mane Society by the Works of that Special Occupation, in which we are to be employed, according to the order of God.”⁴

Alongside diligence at one’s “Personal Calling,” the Protestant work ethic also stressed religiosity, morality, and thriftiness as criteria for success. It was typically socially conservative and thus emphasized social hierarchy and social order. Ironically, though, self-improvement and self-made success inevitably contradicted strict social conservatism. Much of the controversy surrounding the massive social changes America experienced throughout the nineteenth century, especially increasing mobility, flowed from the conflict between a conservative social ethos and a dynamic social reality. The self-made man clearly embodied this conflict.

The nineteenth-century American ideals of self-improvement, material success, and the self-made man had a fiercely competitive economic basis, capitalism, as well as a related and paradoxical philanthropic basis, Protestantism. The justice of success defined as economic profit sometimes sullied self-made achievements. The true self-made man, however, transcended such notoriety. Clearly, his economic success, as Mather argued, was moral. Indeed, a humanist view of self-improvement and self-made triumph stressed “individual fulfillment and social progress rather than . . . wealth or status.”⁵ This view was socially liberal and expressed more support for social equality than the Protestant work ethic.

Franklin, like Thomas Jefferson, believed in a “natural elite of talent and virtue” that plainly exemplified self-made success as a natural alliance between social advancement and personal fulfillment. Whereas Jefferson believed that this elite should assume political leadership, Franklin believed it should assume social leadership. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “philosophy of self-culture and self-reliance” likewise suggested the natural alliance between happiness and advancement on both personal and social levels in a liberal and democratic American culture.⁶

Frederick Douglass’s view of the self-made man drew upon the religious, economic, and combined personal and social aspects of self-improvement and success in America. He stressed, in order of relative importance: first, the personal and social aspect; second, the economic; and third, the religious. Reflecting his belief in human will and action as against divine providence and religious faith as the primary agent of social change, his interpretation of the self-made man was intensely secular. Thoroughly American, his philosophy of self-betterment and attainment, personified by the self-made man, was obviously influenced by and wholly consonant with the hardworking and industrializing spirit of his times. It drew directly upon the ethos “of self-culture and self-reliance” espoused by Emerson, the egalitarianism and belief in human

perfectibility of both Enlightenment and reform thought, and the common man ideology of Jacksonianism. Douglass's philosophy of the self-made man most clearly and directly reflected his deep-seated belief in the Protestant-capitalist work ethic.

He gave accounts of his standard speech on "Self-Made Men" often, especially during his lecture career amid the rampant industrialization and secularization of Gilded Age America. Indeed, the triumphs of capitalism and self-made men coalesced in the Horatio Alger myth of late nineteenth-century American fortune: from rags to riches primarily through the individual's own virtuous character and diligence at work. Andrew Carnegie's *Autobiography* exemplified this myth. Douglass's standard speech on "Self-Made Men," however, accentuated the morality of success rather than its economics. It was apparently his most popular lecture. A Philadelphia newspaper correspondent once described it as "noble and eloquent" and replete with "richness of thought and manly sentiment."⁷

The widespread appeal of Douglass's reflections on self-made men owed to their projection of commonly held ideas about self-improvement and self-made success. His preoccupation with the morality of success included the crucial idea that economic success could be and often was a manifestation of a more important ethical triumph. Though a critic of the crass materialism and inhumane exploitation so prevalent in industrializing America, Douglass's vision of success, albeit essentially moral, was also very much economic. By linking moral success and economic success, often unwittingly, Douglass, like his contemporaries, confounded the conflict between them.

Douglass's characterization of self-made men accented his deep belief in laissez-faire liberalism: the pioneering and heady individualism so fundamental to American concepts of self-elevation and achievement. Unlike Franklin and Jefferson's "natural elite of talent and virtue," these were virtuous men of common ability who through uncommon character and indefatigable labor raised themselves "by their own bootstraps," often in the face of extreme adversity, from obscurity to respectability. They were principally responsible for their own extraordinary accomplishments. They

are the men who owe little or nothing to birth, relationship, friendly surroundings; to wealth inherited or to early approved means of education; who are what they are, without the aid of any of the favoring conditions by which other men usually rise in the world and achieve great results. In fact they are the men who are not brought up but who are obliged to come up, not only without the voluntary assistance or friendly co-operation of society, but often in open and derisive defiance of all the

efforts of society and the tendency of circumstances to repress, retard, and keep them down.

Personal experience and observation, moreover, generally substituted and partially compensated for lack of formal education. Douglass's self-made man was a mythical folk hero out of Jacksonian America and national mythology. Like Davy Crockett, the legendary frontiersman, Douglass's self-made man had succeeded in a valiant struggle for achievement and respectability. This momentous struggle inevitably left rough-hewn traces of a humble past, resulting in imperfect refinement.⁸

Douglass's self-made man exuded self-respect and dignity: prerequisites for self-elevation. His self-esteem, moreover, influenced how others felt and acted toward him. "He who does not think himself worth saving from poverty and ignorance, by his own efforts," Douglass maintained, "will hardly be thought worth the efforts of anybody else." Self-concern and initiative thus invited social concern and assistance for the individual. Douglass sincerely adhered to the Christian belief that "God helps those who help themselves."⁹

The major source of individual initiative, he asserted, was self-reliance. This quality had to be carefully nurtured in order to develop fully and well. "Personal independence," he contended, "is the soul out of which comes the sturdiest manhood." Similarly, he maintained that "there can be no independence without a large share of self-dependence, and this virtue cannot be bestowed. It must be developed from within." Philosophically, though, Douglass was not a solipsist. For him, the self had no existence apart from its social context. He argued that "properly speaking, there are . . . no such men as self-made men" if the notion implied "an individual independence of the past and present which can never exist." The supreme irony of the self-made man concept, therefore, was the inevitability and necessity of human interdependence.¹⁰

Douglass saw the widespread and growing American fascination with self-made men in his lifetime as irrefutable evidence of man's innate and irrepressible humanism. The hold of the self-made man on the American mind reflected, in part, the deep-seated human desire to know as much as possible about man. It signified the universal truth that "the proper study of mankind is man." It represented a universal curiosity about "manhood . . . in its broadest and most comprehensive sense." Douglass observed that "the pleasure we derive from any depth of knowledge is largely due to the glimpse which it gives to us of our own nature."¹¹ The inexorable fascination of potential and unusual achievement, notably in the area of knowledge about man, was central to the culture of the self-made man.

Douglass's ideology of the self-made man reflected his religious liberalism as well as his anthropocentric and humanitarian biases. He thus rejected the idea that the self-made man's fortunes resulted from "supernatural intervention." He viewed man, rather than God, as essentially responsible for his own destiny. Douglass's self-made man did not rely on either *deus ex machina* or chance. In a very real sense, his self-made man created his own luck. Douglass explained that the "accident or good luck theory of self-made man" was highly dubious because "it divorces a man from his own achievements, contemplates him as a being of chance and leaves him without will, motive, ambition and aspiration." He reasoned that the widespread popularity of that theory derived from the unpredictability of self-made success. Also, the accident theory humbled the self-made man.¹²

This popular belief in the agency of chance as the major reason for the self-made man's success reeked of envy. "We are stingy in our praise to merit," Douglass insisted, "but generous in our praise to chance." Conversely, the notion of bad luck represented both a jealous slap at good luck, and by implication the self-made man, and an excuse for personal failure. The good-luck theory also revealed not only the actual distinctions between regular men and self-made men, but also the tendency to want to level those distinctions. Most important, it revealed the ordinary individual's admiration for and emulation of the self-made man.¹³

Douglass's major objection to the "accident or good luck theory of self-made men" remained that it obscured the primacy of human action. The theory was too inclusive: "it is made to explain too much." He noted that "it is apt to take no cognizance of the very different uses to which different men put their circumstances and chances." Even given the opportunity, there was no guarantee that the ordinary individual would exploit it toward becoming a self-made man. Douglass conceded that "opportunity is important." He added, nonetheless, that "exertion is indispensable." He concluded metaphorically, quoting Shakespeare, that "'there is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken at its flood, leads on to fortune'; but it must be taken at its flood."¹⁴

Besides the "supernatural intervention" and good luck theories, Douglass also rejected the theory of "superior mental endowments" as an explanation for the self-made man's success. This theory, he argued, could not explain why certain mental heavyweights withered and certain mental lightweights flowered. Expanding upon this image, he observed that "we cannot have fruit without flowers, but we often have flowers without fruit." In other words, accomplishment required potential, but potential often went unrealized. Furthermore, he explained, the superior intelligence hypothesis of the self-made

man's success was a depressant rather than a stimulant to initiative and industry among the masses because most people were obviously of average intelligence.¹⁵

He emphasized that greatness and success, like genius, could originate almost anywhere. That genius ensured neither success nor greatness, moreover, signified in part the natural process of human leveling—a mechanism of the egalitarian principle. More pointedly, unrealized genius in a sense signified for mass society a boon: “a compensation in disappointment and in the contradiction of ends and promise to performance.” Otherwise stated, this mechanism suggested “a constant effort on the part of nature to hold the balance evenly between all her children and to bring success within the reach of the humblest as well as the most exalted.”¹⁶

For Douglass, the question of the roots of the self-made man's success vividly reflected the complexity of human nature. Notwithstanding “the natural laws for the government, well-being and progress of mankind” which “seem to be equal and are equal,” he noted that “the subjects of these laws abound in inequalities, discords and contrasts.” These differences betrayed the diversity basic to both individuality and the overriding concept of equality. The self-made man's extraordinary character and success, Douglass suggested, starkly exposed the inherent tension between the reality of inequality and the ideal of equality among individuals.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the self-made man's triumph was preeminently moral and just. More important to that triumph than “sound bodily health and mental faculties unimpaired” was “the health and strength of the soul.” The “principles of honor, integrity and affection” animated the self-made man's soul. “When the soul is lost,” Douglass conceded, “all is lost.” He explained that “all human experience proves over and over again, that any success which comes through meanness, trickery, fraud and dishonor, is but emptiness and will only be a torment to its possessor.” Consistent with this ethic of spiritual righteousness, Douglass argued that the self-made man's success represented the triumph of civilization's “spiritual power” over barbarism's “physical force.”¹⁸

“My idea, my observation and my experience of the chief agent in the success of self-made men,” Douglass explained, “is well directed, honest toil.” Self-made men were “men of work” who personified the dignity of labor.¹⁹ Not only did assiduous industry enhance the dignity of labor, but “happily for mankind,” Douglass asserted, “it increases its own resources and improves, sharpens and strengthens its own instruments.” The more work one did, the

more work one was capable of doing. "The primary condition upon which men have and retain power and skill," Douglass insisted, "is exertion." He pointed out that "every organ of the body and mind has its use and improves by use."²⁰

Douglass defined labor in spiritual, moral, and mental as well as physical terms. Diligent labor in either one or a combination of these modes was requisite for success, notwithstanding opportunity and ability. Most important, such effort was inevitably directed toward a larger goal: "a commanding object and a sense of its importance." Certainly, "the vigor of the action," Douglass remarked, "depends upon the power of the motive."²¹

Douglass disdained working "for amusement and pleasure alone." Instead, the work motive had to be serious. By fostering irresponsibility, a lackadaisical work motive, he contended, yielded limited social and individual good. "Such exertion lacks the element attached to duty." Consequently, "the growing tendency to sport and pleasure" rather than hard work disturbed him. Too much "sport and pleasure," he suggested, meant both a decline in dedication to the work ethic and a corresponding decay of the social fiber. An excessive commitment to the leisure ethic engendered excessive preoccupation with luxury, which inevitably bred immorality and decline. Paradoxically, Douglass argued that "they know most of pleasure who seek it least and they least who seek it most." The apex of pleasure, accordingly, came from the thrill of demanding yet rewarding work.²²

As "the true miracle worker," sedulous exertion enabled the self-made man to overcome adversity. With self-made men, Douglass noted, even "detraction paves the way for the very perfections which it doubts and denies." Douglass used "examples of successful self-culture and self-help under great difficulties and discouragement" as evidence for his labor "theory of success." He pointed to such often-mentioned self-made men as Hugh Miller, stonemason and geologist; Elihu Burritt, "the learned Blacksmith" (linguist) and social reformer (peace advocate); Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian "patriot, scholar and statesman"; and Abraham Lincoln, "the King of American self-made men."²³

Douglass also pointed to "equally worthy and inspiring" Negro self-made men, such as Benjamin Banneker, former slave, mathematician, and surveyor. Banneker had sent a copy of his almanac to Thomas Jefferson who, notwithstanding his belief in the Negro's mental inferiority, was greatly impressed with Banneker's achievement. Douglass regretted, nonetheless, that Banneker had not been a full-blooded black "because in the United States, the slightest infusion of Teutonic blood is thought to be sufficient to account for any considerable degree of intelligence found under any possible color of the skin."²⁴ As a mulatto and self-made man himself, Douglass faced the same charge without regret and attributed his intelligence to his Negro ancestry.

For examples of full-blooded and, thus, indisputable black self-made men, Douglass turned to William Dietz of Albany, New York, little-known architect and inventor, and to “the hero of Santo Domingo,” the incomparable Toussaint L’Ouverture. Dietz, Douglass reiterated, “was positively and perfectly black; not partially, but WHOLLY black.” He had not only designed the railroad bridge that spanned the Hudson River where it flowed past Albany, but he had also submitted a well-received plan for an elevated railway for New York City’s Broadway. Douglass observed that as published in and commended by the editor of *Scientific American*, Dietz’s plan did not suggest “the American idea of color,” which likewise, “the hero of Santo Domingo” contradicted. Douglass noted that Toussaint L’Ouverture had been a slave for the first fifteen years of his life. Like Dietz, moreover, “he was black and showed no trace of Caucasian admixture.” Most important, “history hands him down to us as a brave and generous soldier, a wise and powerful statesman, an ardent patriot and a successful liberator of his people and of his country.”²⁵

America, however, was “preeminently the home and patron of self-made men.” The major reason for so many American self-made men, Douglass contended, was “the general respectability of labor” there. He chauvinistically singled out America as the nation with the most successful work ethic in the world.

Search where you will, there is no country on the globe where labor is so respected and the laborer so honored, as in this country. The conditions in which American society originated; the free spirit which framed its independence and created its government based upon the will of the people, exalted both labor and laborer. The strife between capital and labor is, here, comparatively equal. The one is not the haughty and powerful master and the other the weak and abject slave as is the case in some parts of Europe. Here, the man of toil is not bowed, but erect and strong. He feels that capital is not more indispensable than labor, and he can therefore meet the capitalist as the representative of an equal power.²⁶

In spite of “the general respectability of labor” and Douglass’s romanticization of the American laborer, the actual relation between labor and capital in America hardly achieved the utopia he described. Capital and labor were not equal partners; the conflict between them was significant; and, neither the astute capitalist nor laborer perceived them as equals and the inherent conflict between them as inconsiderable. Capital undeniably dominated.

Douglass’s idealization of the work ethic masked the serious weakness in his argument that work was the secret of the self-made man’s success. Not only

was the laborer's plight often dehumanizing, but also there was no assurance that work, along with good character, high morals, and lofty goals, would produce success, not to mention self-made success. Given the interaction of innumerable factors that contributed to the self-made man's success, it was exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to isolate a single factor as most important. Douglass's work ethic explanation understandably reflected his own experiences and life philosophy. More specifically, it reflected his deep-rooted commitment to both capitalism and the Protestant work ethic.

Douglass realized, though, that work alone would not yield a self-made man. In fact, he viewed the American meritocratic ideal as even more important for self-made success. "A more subtle and powerful influence" than "the general respectability of labor," he argued, was "the principle of measuring and valuing men according to their respective merits and without regard to their antecedents." Both equality of opportunity and the reward of earnest achievement, like social equality and mobility, bred self-made success. "Equality of rights," he contended, "brings equality of positions and dignities."²⁷ Lacking the rigid class divisions of Europe, America offered the individual an untrammelled environment particularly conducive to fashioning his own status and success.

America was a youthful nation brimming with challenges and optimism. Douglass suggested that the elusive national character helped to produce self-made men. Besides its labor and meritocratic ideals, the United States' egalitarianism and composite racial and ethnic makeup also contributed to the increasing proliferation of self-made men. Comparing the restlessness of American society to that of the sea, he remarked: "If we resemble the sea in its troubles, we also resemble the sea in its power and grandeur, and in the equalities of its particles." Similarly, he spoke of the leveling tendencies in America as promoting universal suffrage and as impeding an oligarchy of "either wealth, knowledge or power." In addition, immigrants from around the world were welcomed to become members of the United States' composite nationality and to partake of its apparently limitless bounty.²⁸ They, too, could better themselves and possibly become self-made men. Human perfection even seemed plausible in America.

Douglass never believed or suggested that self-made men were actually perfect. On the contrary, he admitted that in spite of his deep admiration for them, he did not see them as "the best made men. Their symmetry is often marred by the effects of their extra exertion." He explained that "the hot rays of the sun and the long and rugged road over which they have been compelled to travel, have left their marks, sometimes quite visibly and unpleasantly, upon them." Another problem was that "the self-made man is also liable to be full of

contrarities.” That is: “He may be large, but at the same time awkward; swift, but ungraceful; a man of power, but deficient in the polish and amiable proportions of the affluent and regularly educated man.” In fact, Douglass believed that a formal education would have benefited any self-made man. Hence, he labeled “quite ridiculous” the contempt among certain self-made men for formal education.²⁹

In addition to their lack of well-rounded personalities, the egotism among certain self-made men likewise incurred Douglass’s disfavor. Their arrogance often constituted a social liability, according to Douglass, who offered two explanations for it. First, he suggested that a reason for this “self-assertion” might be “the strong resistance which such men meet in maintaining their claim” as self-made men. Thus, the doubts, hostilities, and jealousies of others called forth by his own status might lead the self-made man to betray glimpses of defensiveness. Second, and even more plausible, was Douglass’s suggestion that “a man indebted for himself to himself, may naturally think well of himself.” Douglass observed: “It was said of Horace Greeley that he was a self-made man and worshiped his maker.” An anonymous observer similarly noted that “the trouble with some self-made men is that they worship their creator.”³⁰

For Douglass and most nineteenth-century Americans, the saga of the self-made man was unquestionably heroic. Self-made men personified uncommon greatness; they represented the apotheosis of individual achievement. Their story excited and inspired others. Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked in his essay on “Uses of Great Men” that “the search after the great is the dream of youth, and the most serious occupation of manhood.” Douglass agreed. He also concurred with Emerson’s view that “the essence of greatness is the perception that virtue is enough.” As Douglass interpreted heroism, it demonstrated some of man’s most virtuous qualities: unparalleled achievement, moral excellence, exemplary character, and social inspiration. The heroism of self-made men, Douglass suggested, distinctly evidenced these qualities.³¹

True self-made men were heroic, whether they or their contemporaries recognized them as such. Self-made men, Douglass maintained, “are entitled to a certain measure of respect for their success and for proving to the world the grandest possibilities of human nature.” Like heroes, they inspired human effort and achievement. Of the self-made man, Douglass noted:

There is genuine heroism in his struggle and something of sublimity and glory in his triumph. Every instance of such success is an example and a help to humanity. It, better than any assertion, gives us assurance of the latent powers and resources of simple and unaided manhood. It dignifies

labor, honors application, lessens pain and depression, dispels gloom from the brow of the destitute and weariness from the heart of him about to faint, and enables man to take hold of the roughest and flintiest hardships incident to the battle of life, with a lighter heart, with higher hopes and a larger courage.³²

Both Emerson and Douglass agreed that the hero, self-made or not, was indispensable to civilization. The hero, or great man, helped to fashion history. "Great men exist," Emerson maintained, "that there may be greater men." Similarly, he contended, "the key to the power of the greatest men" resided in the diffusion of their spirit among their contemporaries. The hero, paradoxically, was both uncommon and common. The extraordinariness of the great man clearly set him apart from his contemporaries. "I count him as a great man," Emerson wrote, "who inhabits a higher sphere of thought, into which other men rise with labor and difficulty; he has but to open his eyes to see things in a true light, and in large relations; whilst they must make painful corrections, and keep a vigilant eye on many sources of error." Emerson concluded: "He is great who is what he is from nature, and who never reminds us of others." Douglass's vision of the hero was strikingly similar. His archetypal great man also naturally exuded uncommon ability and insight and demonstrated the arduous path "between the luminous points in the progress of mankind." This unusual individual juxtaposed against his contemporaries showed indisputably, Douglass contended, that "the few think, the many feel. The few comprehend a principle, the many require illustration. The few lead, the many follow."³³ A dynamic and elite few, great men came as close as humanly possible to perfection.

Emerson argued that "it is natural to believe in great men." Although Douglass claimed to be uncertain about the naturalness of the belief in great men, he admitted not only that "we do believe in them and worship them," but also that he himself was a natural hero-worshiper. Hence, analyzing his initial adoration of William Lloyd Garrison, he subsequently explained: "Something of a hero-worshiper by nature, here was one to excite my admiration and reverence."³⁴

Natural or not, the common belief in great men revealed an intrinsic bond between ordinary and extraordinary lives. While the unusual achievements and eminence of heroes set them apart from their regular contemporaries, the common humanity of each inextricably bound them together. Emerson noted that "like can only be known by like." As "the visible God of the New Testament is revealed to us as a man of like passions with ourselves," Douglass reasoned, so is the hero. We glorify "our wisest and best men," he argued, not because they are "essentially different from us," but because of their "identifi-

cation with us.” The great man “is our best representative and reflects on a colossal scale, the scale to which we would aspire, our highest aims, objects, powers, and possibilities.” Douglass added, on the other hand, that this glorification of heroes, if excessive, could possibly delude and degenerate into a misguided and disastrous adulation for evil imposters. The deluded thus might mistake “a wicked ruler for a righteous one, a false prophet for a true one, a corrupt preacher for a pure one, a man of war for a man of peace, and a distorted and vengeful image of God for an image of justice and mercy.” The glorification of heroes had to consist of a balanced zeal.³⁵

Douglass believed that great men were passionately good men. In his thoughts on great men, Kelly Miller noted their distinctive “altruistic enthusiasm,” their humanitarian ardor. “All great natures,” he maintained, “are characterized by a passionate enthusiasm for some altruistic principle.” Miller’s model hero and exponent of humanist enthusiasm, not surprisingly, was Douglass.³⁶

In his lecture on William the Silent, the illustrious sixteenth-century Dutch nationalist, Douglass maintained that a truly great man “must not merely be abreast with his times, but in advance of them, and often opposed to them.”³⁷ Three heroes who exemplified his humanitarian and vanguard criteria for greatness were Abraham Lincoln, John Brown, and Toussaint L’Ouverture. Champions of black liberation in their distinctive and crucial ways, these heroes also epitomized the struggle for human dignity. Interestingly enough, all three men were martyrs: a circumstance, Douglass observed, that immeasurably enhanced the quality of their heroism. Lincoln and L’Ouverture, moreover, were two of Douglass’s representative self-made men. Douglass’s reflections on the unique heroism of each man illustrated his profound admiration for them in addition to his self-conscious vision of heroism.

Douglass was merely one among the legion who eulogized Abraham Lincoln. Douglass praised his leadership, patriotism, wisdom, philanthropy, honesty, and, most of all, his courage. Lincoln, of course, signified the archetypal American self-made man. He also personified as well as any one American could the exemplary character of the American nation. “He was a better representative of American Institutions than were the men who made them,” Douglass declared, “because he was the natural child of those institutions.” Indeed, Lincoln epitomized America’s idealized self-image. Douglass explained that Lincoln was “the architect of his own fortune, and the American people, indebted to themselves for themselves, saw in him, a full length portrait of themselves. In him they saw their better qualities represented, incarnated and glorified—and as such they loved him.”³⁸ It was only natural that Americans—themselves, in a collective sense, a self-made and heroic

people—would idolize the prototypical American self-made man as the prototypical American hero.

Emerson had argued that “true genius will not impoverish, but will liberate, and add new senses.” Of Lincoln, Douglass observed that “he acted upon me as truly great men act upon their fellow men, as a Liberator.” For Douglass, as for black people generally, Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and his subsequent efforts on behalf of the Thirteenth Amendment represented the pinnacle of his heroic legacy: the substance of his image as the Great Emancipator. This image, Douglass noted, was somewhat exaggerated. Although Lincoln had been an indispensable agent in the black liberation drama, he had done so only fitfully and out of primary concern for the Union. Still, Douglass insisted, blacks revered Lincoln and had maintained their faith in him throughout his presidency. They saw him, in spite of his shortcomings, as a vital agent in an inexorable set of circumstances that would result in the total abolition of slavery.³⁹

Douglass suggested that Lincoln had been a president to blacks as well as whites. Besides the saving of the Union and the emancipation of the slaves, under Lincoln’s leadership the United States government first extended diplomatic recognition to the black republics of Haiti and Liberia. In another blow against anti-Negro prejudice, Lincoln held several White House meetings with Douglass where they discussed personal and various national issues, including the war.

Interestingly enough, although Douglass perceived that Lincoln shared to an extent the anti-Negro prejudices of his white contemporaries, he failed to detect this prejudice in their private conversations. In fact, Douglass eulogized Lincoln as “one of the very few white Americans who could converse with a Negro without anything like condescension, and without in anywise reminding him of the unpopularity of his color.” Douglass even claimed that Lincoln finally “outgrew his colonization ideas and schemes and came to look upon the black man as an American citizen.”⁴⁰

Lincoln’s colonization ideas, whether he finally changed them or not, reflected an essentially racist attitude toward blacks. Douglass clearly perceived the paradox of Lincoln’s image as the Great Emancipator. As was so common among antislavery Republicans like Lincoln, anti-Negro prejudice and anti-slavery beliefs often coexisted. Indeed, Lincoln’s keen sensitivity to this prejudice in part helped him to galvanize white support for his war goals. Douglass reasoned that, given this prejudice, had Lincoln put “the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible.”⁴¹

In his “Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln” given on 14 April 1876 at the unveiling of the Freedmen’s Memorial Monument in Washington, D.C., Douglass offered a candid view of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency. Lincoln’s greatness, he observed, was beyond cavil. His martyrdom had “filled the country with a deeper abhorrence of slavery and a deeper love for the great emancipator.” Still, Douglass saw Lincoln as primarily pro-Union and pro-white and only unwittingly problack. “Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model,” Douglass insisted. “In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thoughts, and in his prejudices, he was a white man.” As president, he was “entirely devoted to the welfare of white men.” White Americans were “the children of Abraham Lincoln.” Black Americans were “at best only his . . . children by forces of circumstance and necessity.”⁴² Lincoln thus personified a heroism that, according to Douglass, divided along the color line.

In Douglass’s mind, the greatness of Lincoln, the cautious and reluctant liberator, paled in comparison to that of Brown, the zealous liberator. Although Brown’s apocalyptic slave liberation raid on Harpers Ferry, 16 October 1859, proved unsuccessful, in the short run it paved the way for the Civil War and Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation and Thirteenth Amendment. Unlike Lincoln, whose interest in black liberation remained tangential and whose egalitarianism extended to whites only, Brown’s interest in black liberation was central and his egalitarianism extended to blacks as well as whites. For countless numbers of admirers—but especially for many blacks—Brown, notwithstanding his wrongs and imperfections, represented a more sublime and, thus, greater hero than Lincoln. In spite of Brown’s involvement in the cold-blooded killings of five proslavery men at Pottawatomie Creek in “Bleeding Kansas” in 1856, his sympathizers preferred to judge him by his lofty humanitarianism, rather than his excesses.⁴³

Similarly, Brown’s defenders usually disregarded his faults, including his self-righteousness and his dictatorial leadership style. It was more important, Douglass insinuated, that “John Brown saw slavery through no mist or cloud, but in a light of infinite wisdom, which left no one of its ten thousand horrors concealed.” Brown’s clairvoyant vision of slavery’s unconscionable evilness reflected his godly insight. Ten months after Brown’s raid, Douglass depicted him as “a human soul illuminated with divine qualities.” Douglass insisted that the essence of all religion could be no more divine than Brown’s martyrdom. “History,” he contended, “has no better illustration of pure disinterested benevolence.”⁴⁴

Douglass found “moral greatness” in Brown’s selfless dedication to equality

and liberty. He suggested that Brown's most heinous offense was his shocking frontal assault against the seemingly impregnable phalanx of white racism. Rather than merely violating or condemning the perverse race relations orthodoxy, Brown righteously and courageously attacked it. For blacks like Douglass, Brown's lack of racial prejudice demonstrated the sincerity and depth of his humanitarianism. Not only did he interact socially on an equal basis with Negroes, but he also professed a revolutionary commitment to total black emancipation. As a white, his egalitarianism and dedication to black liberation were refreshingly unique and indisputably heroic. Not even the heroism of the white Revolutionary patriots, Douglass alleged, could compare with Brown's. Whereas Patrick Henry, for instance, "loved liberty for himself," Brown "loved liberty for all men."⁴⁵

Brown's martyrdom clearly represented the most striking and poignant symbol of his paradoxical success in defeat. Douglass saw his willingness to sacrifice himself for the slave as "the key to the whole life and career of the man." He concluded that "with John Brown, as with every other man fit to die for a cause, the hour of his physical weakness was the hour of his moral strength—the hour of his defeat was the hour of his triumph—the moment of his capture [and certain death] was the crowning victory of his life." It was obvious, moreover, that "the crown of martyrdom is high, far beyond the reach of ordinary mortals." Brown's heroic legacy, nonetheless, remained secure because "no special greatness or superior moral excellence is necessary to discern and in some measure appreciate a truly great soul."⁴⁶

Comparing Brown's dedication to black liberation with his own, Douglass judged Brown's superior largely because of his glorious martyrdom. He remarked: "His zeal in the cause of my race was far greater than mine, it was as the burning sun to my taper light—mine was bounded by time, his stretched away to the boundless shores of eternity." In spite of his self-deprecation, both Douglass's opposition to Brown's plans for the raid and his consequent decision not to accompany him demonstrated a deep moral courage akin to that which Brown epitomized.⁴⁷

Brown's fanaticism alarmed the proslavery and southern consciences, while it thrilled abolitionists and large sectors of the northern conscience. As Miller noted in his reflections on heroism, "human relations are so diverse and human interests and feelings so antagonistic that the names which command even a fanatical following among one class may be despised and rejected by another."⁴⁸ Brown's apocalyptic raid exacerbated the increasingly irrepressible sectional tensions owing chiefly to the inherent conflict between southern slavery and northern freedom.

If Lincoln embodied the ambiguous hero, Brown embodied the controver-

sial hero. A central charge leveled against Brown by his detractors alleged that he was insane. Eulogists like Douglass denounced these slanderous efforts to defame Brown's sacred memory. Douglass implied that this despicable tactic reeked of racist white reaction to a fellow white man who rejected racial privilege. "Heaven help us," he lamented, "when our loftiest types of patriotism, our sublimest historical ideal of philanthropy, come to be treated as evidence of moon-struck madness." Undoubtedly, "it is an effeminate and cowardly age," he charged. It "is too gross and sensual to appreciate his deeds."⁴⁹ Clearly, the attempt to desecrate Brown's legacy by labeling him insane only further reinforced a saintly memory of him among his supporters.

Brown's deep religiosity underscored the messianic quality of his heroism. Still, it was not unusual for heroes of his caliber, like Socrates and Jesus, to be misunderstood and misrepresented in their own time, Douglass remarked. He predicted that "the future will write his epitaph upon the hearts of a people freed from slavery because he struck the first effectual blow." Douglass remained equally certain, moreover, that "this our noblest American hero must wait the polishing wheels of aftercoming centuries to make his glory manifest, and his worth more generally acknowledged."⁵⁰

Like Brown, the blacks in Douglass's pantheon of heroes personified the black liberation struggle specifically and the human liberation struggle generally. His black heroes included Toussaint L'Ouverture, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Joseph Cinque, and Madison Washington, all of whom had been slaves whose overwhelming desire for liberty compelled them to lead revolutionary insurrections. Whereas Cinque (1839) and Washington (1841) led liberating mutinies aboard slave ships, L'Ouverture led the Haitian Revolution (1794–1804), Turner led the Southampton, Virginia, uprising (1831), and Vesey led the ill-fated Charleston insurrection conspiracy (1822). In 1853, Douglass memorialized Washington's achievement in fiction—a short story aptly entitled, "The Heroic Slave." During the early months of the Civil War, William Tillman, a Negro steward, led the recapture of a Union schooner from its Confederate captors. Douglass used the occasion to heap praise upon "A Black Hero," to evoke the glorious tradition of black heroism, and to excoriate white Americans for their persistent disparagement of Negroes and Negro heroes. He claimed that "we cannot fail to perceive in Tillman a degree of personal valor and presence of mind equal to those displayed by the boldest deeds recorded in history."⁵¹

Douglass clearly perceived the importance of heroes to tradition, achievement, and a people's sense of pride and dignity. The white refusal to acknowledge black heroes, he implied, fit into their racist conspiracy to portray blacks as inferior and to convince them and others of allegedly innate and immutable

black inferiority. In the racist world view, heroes were unquestionably white; blacks were the antithesis of heroism—subordinates and slaves. Douglass thus asserted that “when prejudice cannot deny the black man’s ability, it denies his race, and claims him as a white man.” In his analysis of “The Color Line,” he elaborated upon this point.

We are not, as a race, even permitted to appropriate the virtues and achievements of our individual representatives. Manliness, capacity, learning, laudable ambition, heroic service, by any of our number, are easily placed to the credit of the superior race. One drop of Teutonic blood is enough to account for all good and great qualities occasionally coupled with a colored skin; and on the other hand, one drop of Negro blood, though in the veins of a man of Teutonic whiteness, is enough on which to predicate all offensive and ignoble qualities.

Even when confronted with an undeniably full-blooded black hero, the prejudiced mind revolts and “affirms that if he is not exactly white, he ought to be.” Douglass dismissed out of hand the absurd notion that for a Negro to be intelligent, great, or heroic, he either had to be partially white or at least influenced by whites.⁵²

The racist purview wherein black pathology was normal and black greatness abnormal incensed Douglass. Most black as well as white Americans, for example, were aware of neither the Civil War heroism of Robert Smalls and William Tillman nor “the eloquence and learning” of James McCune Smith, George B. Vashon, Charles L. Reason, Henry Highland Garnet, Charles L. Remond, J. Sella Martin, John S. Rock, and Alexander Crummell—not to mention Banneker’s “genius and learning” and L’Ouverture’s “wisdom and heroism.” Douglass claimed that “the public, with the mass of ignorance—notwithstanding that ignorance has been enforced and compelled among our people, hitherto—has sternly denied the representative character of our distinguished men.” Instead, “they are treated as exceptions, individual cases and the like.” Douglass, of course, saw distinguished blacks as representative of the race’s potential. After denying the representativeness of “our distinguished men,” the misguided public concludes, Douglass argued, that the Negro lacks such men: “the subjective original elemental condition for a high self-originating and self-sustaining civilization.” Douglass suggested, however, that great blacks as well as great whites were clearly integral to American civilization.⁵³

Douglass scorned what he termed “an ethnological standard based upon race and color” as a measurement for heroism. He noted that whereas Benjamin Franklin’s discoveries “could redeem, in the eyes of scientific Europe, the mental mediocrity of our young white Republic,” comparable achievements by

blacks, notably Banneker, could not dispel the charge of Negro inferiority. Similarly, George Washington, “a moral hero,” rated as “a model of manhood and a paragon of greatness.” On the contrary, L’Ouvverture, “a moral monster,” rated as “a savage insurgent and a villainous cut-throat.” This dual and perverse measure of heroism, Douglass insisted, reflected a blatantly racist bias: the noble and praiseworthy white liberator versus the ignoble and execrable black liberator. As with the heroism of John Brown, that of radical blacks alarmed the race relations orthodoxy. Ruminating on the public response to black liberation heroes, including Brown, Douglass noted that “if these men had struck for the freedom of white men held in slavery, their act would have immortalized them as benefactors, the nobles of mankind.” He concluded that “color and race make all the difference.”⁵⁴

That some blacks were either ignorant of, paid too little homage to, or even disparaged black heroes distressed Douglass. He regretted that Toussaint L’Ouvverture, for instance, was not as highly venerated in his own country as he should have been. This tendency to neglect and thereby obscure black heroes unfortunately served to perpetuate ignorance and misinformation about them. It also allowed more time and space for the negative images of black men and thereby reinforced the slanderous assaults against them and black people in general. The debasing images of blacks so ubiquitous in American culture often deluded blacks, as well as whites, about blacks. Douglass viewed this self-effacing process to be mostly a function of the impact of white racism on blacks. He maintained that American blacks existed “under a moral and intellectual cloud.” Consequently, “it is the misfortune of men of the African race, that they are neither seen clearly by themselves nor by others.”⁵⁵

Douglass, nevertheless, saw Toussaint L’Ouvverture and his indisputable greatness quite vividly. L’Ouvverture represented Douglass’s archetypal black hero: unquestionably black, a supreme embodiment of manhood, an ardent egalitarian and libertarian, a prototypical self-made man. He was obviously an example and inspiration fully worthy of emulation. Because “no part of his greatness can be ascribed to blood relationship with the white race,” Douglass declared, L’Ouvverture demonstrated “beyond cavil or doubt the possibilities of the Negro race.” He thus personified the ideal of black manhood. Being in addition the personification of Haitian liberation, he “taught slaveholders of whatever land and colour, the danger of goading to madness, the energy that slumbers in the black man’s arm.”⁵⁶

As Abraham Lincoln symbolized the preeminent white self-made man, Toussaint L’Ouvverture symbolized the preeminent black self-made man. Douglass suggested that L’Ouvverture’s rise to greatness was more amazing than Lincoln’s because he had come from farther down—the abyss of slavery.

L'Ouverture triumphed over racial proscription; Lincoln enjoyed racial privilege. L'Ouverture's heroism was clear; Lincoln's ambiguous. It was virtually impossible, therefore, to compare meaningfully L'Ouverture to Lincoln or to any other modern hero because "his work was peculiar and his character unique. Both his task and the material with which he had to work were of an uncommon kind. In fact he is without example and stands alone." For Douglass, Toussaint L'Ouverture's most impressive achievement was that he, more than any other single individual, instigated and symbolized the modern black liberation movement: a vital part of the continuing democratic and human rights struggles. L'Ouverture, Douglass reiterated, brilliantly personified human freedom and equality.⁵⁷

Certainly, the paramount embodiment of Douglass's philosophy of self-made men and his related vision of heroic greatness, then as now, was Douglass himself. Abolitionist Henry Wilson wrote of him:

In him not only did the colored race but manhood itself find a worthy representative and advocate; one who was a signal illustration, not only of self-culture and success under the most adverse circumstances, but of the fact that talent and genius are "color-blind," and above the accidents of complexion and birth. . . . As few of the world's great men have ever had so checkered and diversified a career, so it may be at least plausibly claimed that no man represents in himself more conflicting ideas and interests. His life is in itself an epic which finds few to equal it in the realms of either romance or reality.

Reflecting upon Douglass's historical significance, Kelly Miller maintained that "it is only when we understand the personal circumstances of his early environment that we can appreciate the pathos and power with which he was wont to insist upon the true measure of the progress of the American Negro, not only by the height already attained, but by the depth from which he came."⁵⁸

In his three autobiographies—*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845); *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855); and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881 and 1892 revised edition)—Douglass carefully delineated his self-image. It betrayed a conscious and unconscious elaboration of his idealized self—a self-conscious hero complex. Notwithstanding the differences among these autobiographies, each reveals his strong compulsion to play a determinative role in the design and construction of history's heroic vision of himself. All three biographies thus demonstrate his imaginative and creative genius and his flair for self-

dramatization as well as his lifelong heroic fantasies. They served not only to present Douglass to the world as he desired to be seen, but they also revealed his profound need to grapple with his originally humble and obscure identity, recasting and invigorating it in the heroic mold. The autobiographical Douglass, the central thread in the protean tapestry of the heroic and symbolic Douglass, is an indispensable clue to the inner Douglass.⁵⁹

Autobiography is a difficult literary art. It represents the individual's conscious effort to impress his own vision of himself upon history. To do so successfully, the autobiographer must use his evolving self-awareness to illuminate the essence of both his life and life in general.⁶⁰ Though not a trained metaphysician, Douglass, as manifest in his deep-seated humanism, viewed the issue of life's ultimate meaning as pivotal. His three autobiographies revealed a soul in search of its inner self. To understand his odyssey of self-realization, it is necessary to assess his heroic self-image and its impact on his life and legend.

Douglass's autobiographies demonstrate the major features of a mythical heroic self-image: the heroic child as father to the heroic man; the child hero's extraordinary insight and prescience; the aura of divine favor; and youthful heroic endeavor and achievement. Perhaps the most striking feature of the childhood Douglass in the autobiographies is the projection of an adult vision onto a child. Although over time he matures in knowledge and understanding, he begins early conscious deliberation with an astonishing degree of intellectual sophistication for a mere child. This blurring of the distinction between child and adult perception establishes and reinforces the notion of the child hero: the uncommon seed of an uncommon flower. He consciously prepares the stage for his dramatic entrance. In the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, the protagonist states that his early decision to run away to liberty had first been promoted by the successful escape of his Aunt Jennie and Uncle Noah. He explained: "I could not have been more than seven or eight years old at the time of this occurrence, but young as I was, I was already, in spirit and purpose, a fugitive from slavery."⁶¹

Douglass, the child hero, displayed a phenomenally deep sensitivity and reflectiveness. The daily torments of his slave existence overwhelmed him. Increasing maturity only aggravated his extreme distress. "As I grew older and more thoughtful," he wrote, "I became more and more filled with a sense of my wretchedness." The child hero, in addition, displayed a sophisticated intellectual curiosity allegedly not at all unusual among children. As an adult, Douglass maintained that "there are thoughtful days in the lives of children—at least there were in mine—when they grapple with the great primary subjects of knowledge, and reach in a moment conclusions which no subsequent

experience can shake. I was just as well aware of the unjust, unnatural, and murderous character of slavery, when nine years old as I am now.”⁶²

“Every increase of knowledge,” Douglass remembered, exacerbated “the intolerable burden” of being “a slave for life.” In *The Columbian Orator*’s dialogue between slave and master, however, Douglass, at age thirteen, discovered in the slave who confronted his master with an eloquent and convincing rationale for his emancipation—and thus gained it—a model hero who articulated young Douglass’s libertarian ideals. The book also contained several speeches by various eighteenth-century British politicians: Richard Sheridan (a dramatist as well); William Pitt, first Earl of Chatham; William Pitt, the latter’s son; and Charles James Fox. These heroic figures also impressed Douglass, the incipient adolescent hero, who identified with them as kindred spirits. Besides the telling antislavery arguments of the dialogue’s slave character, Douglass found Sheridan on Catholic emancipation particularly relevant and instructive. “From the speeches of Sheridan,” he claimed, “I got a bold and powerful denunciation of oppression and a most brilliant vindication of the rights of man.”⁶³

Combining the slave’s libertarian logic with Sheridan’s natural rights logic, the young hero decided that God had neither “ordained slavery” nor “willed my enslavement for His own glory.” Furthermore, he contended, “I had now penetrated to the secret of all slavery and of all oppression”: “the pride, the power, and the avarice of man.” Armed with this secret, the youthful hero was ready to do battle against slavery. All by himself he literally overcame “The Vicissitudes of Slave Life,” humbled “Covey, The Negro Breaker,” and ran away to freedom. His personal heroic expectations and fantasies, structured around liberation, were being realized. The power of his will was coming into focus. James McCune Smith labeled Douglass’s “unfaltering energy and determination to obtain what his soul pronounced desirable” one of his “original gifts.” Miller lauded Douglass as a prime example of that “freedom of the will which counts for most in the making of manhood.”⁶⁴

Douglass’s conscious will to be great both grew out of and reflected, in part, his desire to liberate himself as completely as possible from bleak ordinariness. He wanted to elevate himself above the common run. Characteristically, the self-conscious hero must distance himself from the mundane. He must appear, whether or not in fact he is, above it all. Douglass, the self-conscious hero, cultivated and combined the images of the omniscient outsider and the insightful analyst. He thus often gave the paradoxical impression that the general slave reality which he so brilliantly explored somehow did not apply to his heroic self.

As an omniscient hero, Douglass could analyze—even criticize—aspects of

slave society and culture because he at once embodied and transcended them. Consequently, he distanced himself from the practice of slave etiquette wherein younger slaves referred to older slaves in terms of fictive kinship ties out of deference. He explained that they used these titles “not because they really sustained that relationship to any, but according to plantation etiquette, as a mark of respect, due from the younger to the older slaves. Strange, and even ridiculous as it may seem, among a people so uncultivated, and with so many stern trials to look in the face, there is not to be found, among any people, a more rigid enforcement of the law of respect to elders, than they maintain.” Similarly, Douglass elevated himself above the tendency among some slaves of different masters to argue over the relative kindness and greatness of their masters, as if these qualities redounded to the slave’s credit and benefit.⁶⁵ Certainly a burgeoning hero, though momentarily a young slave, could not fall prey to such delusions. The foibles of mere ordinary slaves, set against Douglass’s telling analyses of these weaknesses, vividly strengthened the image of his extraordinariness.

Douglass eventually deemed the fateful decision of his master to send him instead of another child, at age eight, to live with his master’s relatives in Baltimore as evidence of divine favor. If he had not been chosen to go to Baltimore, his destined rendezvous with greatness might have been altered or temporarily sidetracked. Reflecting the characteristic religiosity of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he contended that “from my earliest recollections of serious matters, I date the entertainment of something like an ineffaceable conviction, that slavery would not always be able to hold me within its foul embrace; and this conviction, like a word of living faith, strengthened me through the darkest trials of my lot. This good spirit was from God; and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise.”⁶⁶

Reflecting Douglass’s shift to religious liberalism, in *Life and Times* he omitted the earlier attribution of this good fortune primarily to divine favor. Rather, he simply reasserted that it represented “one of the most interesting and fortunate events of my life.”⁶⁷ Because his idealized self was, in a sense, divine, this heroic self could easily assume primary responsibility for its own good fortune.

The classic prophecy of greatness constituted another vital piece of evidence that the child hero had divine favor on his side. When Douglass was around thirteen years old, his Uncle Lawson, “my chief instructor in religious matters . . . my spiritual father,” told him, “that the Lord had great work for me to do; and I must prepare to do it; that he had been shown that I must preach the gospel.” Douglass’s response was clear and decisive; he would abide by the prophecy, regardless of the ramifications and his initial anxiety. He followed

Uncle Lawson's advice to read and study the Scriptures and to wait upon the Lord to show him how he could do His will. Uncle Lawson's spiritual tutelage deeply influenced Douglass's "character and destiny." He later observed that it "fanned my already intense love of knowledge, into a flame by assuring me that I was to be a useful man in the world."⁶⁸

The crowning glory for Douglass was his role in the crusade to emancipate his enslaved brethren. In 1888, he conceded that "my special mission in the world, if I ever had any, was the emancipation and enfranchisement of the Negro. Mine was a great cause." In 1852, he had acknowledged that his personal emancipation had signified a dramatic rebirth. Furthermore, his abolitionist dedication, he understood, "had made me a great man (beg pardon for egotism)." It had saved him "from the bondage of sectarianism and priestcraft, from the bondage of color even, and false notions of brotherhood."⁶⁹

Douglass's heroic self-image, principally its projection of the child hero, merged fact and imagination to the point where the distinction became meaningless. This self-conscious heroism signified, most importantly, a profound search for his inner self through the elaboration of an ideal self. To compensate for obscure and unheroic beginnings, Douglass willed and created a heroic childhood. The deepest importance of this symbolic transformation was both intellectual and emotional. On an intellectual level, this change rationalized the paradox of heroic genius and slave origins. On an emotional level, it atoned for a deep-seated and enduring sense of childhood loss. This dilemma had resulted primarily from his early lost family: his unknown white father, his virtually unknown Negro mother, brothers, and sisters, and his traumatic separation from his beloved Negro grandmother.⁷⁰ Lacking the security and sustenance of a traditional familial background, he turned inward and projected a heroic self-image transcending kinship. Deep inside, however, he found it to be an unsatisfying solution. Toward a better solution, he sought to alleviate the burden of his roles as uncommon hero, racial patriarch, and representative Negro by emphasizing his roles as typical self-made man, friend, husband, and father. Notwithstanding and in part because of his extraordinariness, Douglass succeeded remarkably well in this struggle.

The impact of Douglass's heroic self-image on his continuing legend is pervasive. As a self-conscious hero, he willfully perpetuated a heroic image of himself. This is evident, for example, in his self-perception as a model for black success. In an explanation addressed to white readers of his *Life and Times* for his blatant self-promotion, he asked their indulgence. He noted that "if I have pushed my example too prominently for the good taste of my Caucasian readers, I beg them to remember that I have written in part for the

encouragement of a class whose aspirations need the stimulus of success.” Continuing, he elucidated how he personified and inspired black American success.

I have aimed to assure them that knowledge can be obtained under difficulties—that poverty may give place to competency—that obscurity is not an absolute bar to distinction, and that a way is open to welfare and happiness to all who will resolutely and wisely pursue that way—that neither slavery, stripes, imprisonment, nor proscription need extinguish self-respect, crush manly ambition, or paralyze effort—that no power outside of himself can prevent a man from sustaining an honorable character and a useful relation to his day and generation—that neither institutions nor friends can make a race to stand unless it has strength in its own legs—that there is no power in the world which can be relied upon to help the weak against the strong or the simple against the wise—that races, like individuals, must stand or fall by their own merits—that all the prayers of Christendom cannot stop the force of a single bullet, divest arsenic of poison, or suspend any law of nature.⁷¹

Douglass’s symbolic and inspirational viability appealed to all Americans. James McCune Smith located the reason for Douglass’s strong grip on the contemporary public imagination and his mesmerizing power over friends and associates largely in his thoroughgoing Americanism. Smith contended that Douglass “is a Representative American man—a type of his countrymen.” He has “passed through every gradation of rank comprised in our national makeup, and bears upon his person and upon his soul everything that is American.” A little more than one hundred years later, President John F. Kennedy saw Douglass as a prime symbol of the universal desire for freedom and human rights, on one hand, and America’s dedication to realizing them, on the other. He wrote: “The life of Frederick Douglass is part of the legend of America. As a successful fighter for freedom a century ago he can give inspiration to people all around the world who are still struggling to secure their full human rights. That struggle must go on until those rights are everywhere secured. By advancing that cause through law, democratic methods and peaceful action, we in America can give an example of the freedom which Frederick Douglass symbolizes.”⁷²

The timeless quintessence of Douglass’s life derives principally from his universal and egalitarian humanism. In spite of his self-conscious heroism, he fervently believed in universal human equality. Indeed, his life and thought revolved around this grand guiding principle. Being a complex individual, he occasionally acted and expressed ideas contrary to this ideal. It was most

unusual for him to do so wittingly, however. He struggled valiantly to lead a life consistent with the lofty idealism of universal and egalitarian humanism and achieved a notable measure of success. Kelly Miller contended that “only the man who breaks the barrier of class and creed and country and serves the human race . . . is worthy to be accounted great in the superlative degree.”⁷³ Frederick Douglass, without a doubt, was that sort of man.

When it is finally ours, this freedom, this liberty, this beautiful and terrible thing, needful to man as air, usable as the earth; when it belongs at last to our children, when it is truly instinct, brain-matter, diastole, systole, reflex action; when it is finally won; when it is more than the gaudy mumbo-jumbo of politicians: this man, this Douglass, this former slave, this Negro beaten to his knees, exiled, visioning a world where none is lonely, none hunted, alien, this man, superb in love and logic, this man shall be remembered—oh, not with statues' rhetoric, not with legends and poems and wreaths of bronze alone, but with lives grown out of his life, the lives fleshing his dream of the needful, beautiful thing.

— Robert Hayden, "Frederick Douglass"

Epilogue

Douglass's effectiveness as a race leader, social reformer, and national spokesman, in addition to his importance as a thinker, came primarily from the representative character of his life and mind. As a classic example of American notions of individual success, his life appeared to validate and his thought reflected the individualism so central to American culture, notably the ideology of self-made success. Similarly, his life and thought revealed his deep commitment to basic American principles generally, like freedom, equality, and justice. His embodiment of the intrinsic interrelationship between the Euro-American and Afro-American minds—in essence, the American mind—enabled him to move between the Afro-American and Euro-American worlds. It likewise rendered him especially well suited to mediate between those worlds and to promote their integration through a recognition of a common ethos and a common humanity.

In addition to illustrating the congruence between the Afro-American mind and the American mind, his thought demonstrated the crucial point of divergence between them. Rejecting the dominant racism infecting Euro-American thought, and, in turn, American thought, Douglass espoused a distinctive brand of universal and egalitarian humanism. Interestingly enough, his humanism had roots in the best of America's ideals as well as Afro-American race consciousness. Largely from this humanism came an eminently moral, meliorist, and activist social vision. In part, the continuing black liberation struggle has grown out of that social vision.

Douglass's middle-class strategy of racial elevation—illustrative of the mainstream cast of his mind—betrayed certain telling intellectual and tactical limitations. By promoting basic American ideas about success and respectability and stressing the Afro-American's adherence to them, for instance, he highlighted the Afro-American's essential Americanness and hoped to pave the way for his acceptance by Euro-Americans. Individual black success, he believed, would redound to the glory of the race, thereby making blacks, as a group, more palatable to whites. Moreover, once blacks became economically powerful, the argument continued, whites would have to accept them. To a limited degree, this approach worked. Some individual black success, like Douglass's, apparently proved acceptable to certain whites, consequently enhancing their estimation of black ability. Most, however, saw such black achievement as the exception proving the rule of black inability. More often than not, they refused to countenance the equal and untrammled participation

of blacks in the mainstream, not to mention black economic success. Although painfully aware of this exceedingly distressing dilemma, Douglass's belief in the fundamental soundness of the economic system impeded his comprehension of the structural reality of the economic oppression blacks endured and, therefore, the pressing imperative of fundamental economic change.

Douglass's political and cultural ideas disclosed a similar limitation. Indeed, after a point, his enduring faith in the Republican party became increasingly problematic. While he, as an individual, reaped various appointments as a party loyalist, Republicans rewarded his people's loyalty with occasionally supportive rhetoric and increasing neglect. His stalwart Republicanism contributed to his failure to explore more carefully and fully alternative political possibilities for his people's struggle, such as the third party insurgency of Populism. Perhaps pragmatic considerations rendered the Republican party the Negro's only political hope. But given the dubiousness of that hope, an alternative to traditional political channels deserved more serious consideration.

Douglass's blindness to Afro-American culture illustrated a critical intellectual weakness resulting from his Americanism. Embracing the Euro-American and hierarchical bias endemic to American culture, he neither adequately appreciated nor understood Afro-American culture and the Afro-American roots of American culture. Clearly, he underestimated the complexity of both American culture and the Negro's relationship to it. His bourgeois tastes found the rural, folk, and often unpolished quality of black expressive culture, like ecstatic religiosity, sorely wanting.

The notion of Euro-American cultural superiority also informed his unenlightened, though commonly held, perception of Africa as the benighted "dark continent." Without an accurate and sufficient understanding of the Negro's ancestral homeland, Douglass tended to overstate the Americanness and to understate the Africanness of the Afro-American's cultural identity. Indeed, the concept of African cultural inferiority has typically had troubling, often negative, consequences for the Afro-American psyche. In Douglass's case, it contributed to an ambivalence toward Africa, race as a category and physical reality, and especially, Negroness.

A striking paradox of these and similar limitations of Douglass's thinking was that for a national spokesman seeking to appeal to a broad audience these limitations often functioned as an asset precisely because they reflected a common—thus familiar and comprehensible, even if questionable—wisdom. Consequently, the assimilationist, integrationist, activist, political, and economic strands of his black elevation ideology seemed viable. Similarly, moral suasion, strategic alliances, and ceaseless agitation appeared to be appropriate

tactics for the social reform battlefield. The American system, in other words, was basically sound, in spite of serious flaws, because it had the requisite channels and encouraged the necessary efforts, ideological and otherwise, to alleviate those flaws. Not surprisingly, therefore, the severe dislocations which emancipation, the Civil War and Reconstruction, immigration, industrialization, and urbanization wrought in the society around him failed to undermine his optimistic long-term vision of America and the Negro American's struggle.

In a sense, Douglass's mature thought remained wedded to a simpler, romantic view of America. As a result, he never quite came to grips with industrialization and urbanization and their ramifications for black progress. He, instead, urged his people to stay on the land and use their labor power as a wedge to enhance their plight. This Arcadian idealism belied the harsh reality of the increasing powerlessness of southern black peasants. It likewise showed his adherence to the traditional American notion equating virtue with farm life and sin with city life. American freedom and democracy, he suggested, demanded the strong moral character associated with rural, agrarian life.

A telling measure of Douglass's intellectual leadership among his own people was that his preeminence persisted even though some of his ideas met with extensive and growing criticism among some blacks. His religious liberalism, opposition to the Exoduster migration, later life attacks on excessive race pride, stalwart Republicanism, and marriage to a white woman, for example, engendered significant black opposition. Nevertheless, his uncanny ability to articulate the Negro American's fundamental aspirations and Americanness overrode intrablack philosophical and tactical disagreements. He served not only as a race leader and spokesman, then, but as a symbol of his people's continuing freedom struggle. Indeed, over time, the emblematic character of his life and thought grew and has persisted to the present.

As an intellectual activist committed to helping to realize a better America fully incorporating blacks, and other nonwhite peoples, into its mainstream, Douglass vigorously promoted the ethic of assimilationism. The persistence of racist white opposition to full black integration into the mainstream, though, has raised serious doubts about the viability of assimilationism. It worked extraordinarily well for Douglass. On the other hand, it has often failed miserably for other blacks. Clearly, it has worked much better for blacks as a mechanism for individual and, to an extent, continued middle-class success rather than group, or lower-class, progress.

That most nineteenth- and twentieth-century Afro-Americans have seemingly adopted some variant of the assimilationist-integrationist ethic attests to the profound depth of their American identity, particularly their belief in the

American Dream. Likewise, it demonstrates a stubborn idealism battered, but not vanquished, by reality. In fact, intrablack differences concerning the best ideology and strategy for liberation represent a more basic tension between idealism and pragmatism. Whether blacks, as individuals or a group, pursue an assimilationist or separatist, racial nationalist or American nationalist, violent or nonviolent, revolutionary or reformist, accommodationist or activist approach to social change, adjustments have to be made between belief and action. Freedom demands a measure of ideological as well as strategic flexibility. The course of Douglass's life and intellectual maturation, like those of black activists and intellectuals before and after him, distinctly reveals the inevitability and necessity of such compromises.

Notes

Abbreviations

A-SCBPL: Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library

Life and Writings: Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*

Douglass Papers (LC): Library of Congress, Frederick Douglass Papers

Douglass Papers (HUMSC): Moorland-Spingarn Collection, Howard University, Frederick Douglass Papers

Chapter 1

1. Douglass, *Narrative*, 21; Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, 31–34.
2. Douglass, *Narrative*, 21–22; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 51, 79–88; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 45–49; Preston, *Young Frederick Douglass*, 173.
3. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 59.
4. *Ibid.*, 53, 55–57.
5. *Ibid.*, 52; Prichard, *Natural History of Man*, 1:157. For a different, yet nonetheless stimulating, interpretation of this issue, see Walker, “Frederick Douglass,” 252–54.
6. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 60, 57.
7. *Ibid.*, 58.
8. *Ibid.*, 60, 38, 53; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 30, 32.
9. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 30.
10. *Ibid.*, 30–33.
11. *Ibid.*, 73–77.
12. *Ibid.*, 71; *New York Herald*, 6 Sept. 1866.
13. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 78–79.
14. *Ibid.*, 82–83, 80, 87.
15. *Ibid.*, 83, 92–93.
16. *Ibid.*, 79, 84–85.
17. *Ibid.*, 84, 86.
18. *Ibid.*, 90.
19. *Ibid.*, 90, 93–94, 91–92.
20. *Ibid.*, 91–92.
21. *Ibid.*, 101–2.
22. *Ibid.*, 107–12.
23. “Slavery, the Free Church, and British Agitation Against Bondage,” 3 Aug. 1846, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:318–19; “Our Position in the Present Presidential Canvass,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 10 Sept. 1853, in *Life and Writings*, 2:212.
24. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 111.
25. *Ibid.*, 153, 151–52, 150.
26. “The Danger of the Republican Movement,” 28 May 1856, *Life and Writings*, 5:388; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 115–17, 121.
27. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 121–24.
28. *Ibid.*, 125.
29. *Ibid.*, 135, 123–24.
30. *Ibid.*, 131–34.
31. *Ibid.*, 136–39.
32. *Ibid.*, 138–43.
33. *Ibid.*, 150, 51, 155–60.
34. *Ibid.*, 160, 164–65.
35. *Ibid.*, 163–64, 166–75.
36. *Ibid.*, 148–86.
37. *Ibid.*, 186.
38. *Ibid.*, 190–92.
39. *Ibid.*, 165–66, 193; Sprague, *My Mother as I Recall Her*; Preston, *Young Douglass*, 149, 151–52.
40. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 197–205.
41. *Ibid.*, 209–13, 178–85, 207–9.
42. *Ibid.*, 206; Douglass to “Dear Friend” [Isabel Jennings], Sept. 1846, Douglass Papers (LC), r1; Shepperson, “Frederick Douglass and Scotland,” 307; *Life and Writings*,

1:133; Douglass to Francis Jackson, 29 Jan. 1846, *ibid.*, 135; Walker, “Frederick Douglass,” 255–57.

43. Sprague, *My Mother as I Recall Her*, 9. Many, including the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs and the Douglass Memorial and Historical Association, continued the work after her death. Consequently, in 1972, Cedar Hill was dedicated as a national monument administered by the National Parks Service.

44. Washington, *Up From Slavery*, 140–59; Harlan, *Booker T. Washington*, 204–8.

Chapter 2

1. “To Our Oppressed Countrymen,” *The North Star*, 3 Dec. 1847, *Life and Writings*, 1:283; “The Recent Anti-Slavery Festival and Convention in Rochester,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 25 May 1852, *ibid.*, 5:230.

2. “Prospectus for an Anti-Slavery Paper to be Entitled *North Star*,” n.d., *ibid.*, 5:69; “The Recent Anti-Slavery Festival,” *ibid.*, 230.

3. “An Account of American Slavery,” 15 Jan. 1846, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:133; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 90, 88.

4. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 88–89.

5. *Ibid.*, 213.

6. *Ibid.*, 213–14; *Liberator*, 29 Mar. 1839, 9 July 1841.

7. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 213–14.

8. *Ibid.*, 215–16.

9. *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 26 Aug. 1841.

10. “Recollections of the Anti-Slavery Conflict,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 65–66; Holland, *Frederick Douglass*, 363.

11. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 226. For an engaging analysis of Garrison’s philosophy of social reform, see Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*.

12. “I Have Come to Tell You Something About Slavery,” Oct. 1841, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:3–5; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 217–18; Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 15–37; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 43–59.

13. Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 43–59;

Pease and Pease, “Boston Garrisonians and the Problem of Frederick Douglass,” 29–48; Litwack, “Emancipation of the Negro Abolitionist,” 137–55.

14. Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 107, 57; Goldstein, “Political Thought of Frederick Douglass,” 45–55.

15. Rogers, *Herald of Freedom*, 3 Dec. 1841, cited in Quarles, ed., *Frederick Douglass*, 100.

16. *Herald of Freedom*, 16 Feb. 1844, cited in Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 58.

17. Lynn *Pioneer*, cited in *Liberator*, 30 May 1845; *The North Star*, 12 Mar. 1848; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 59–60.

18. For excerpts from early slave narratives, including that of Olaudah Equiano, see “Africa and the Slave Trade,” in Frazier, *Afro-American History*, 3–26; for more on the literary and historical significance of the slave narrative, see Nichols, *Many Thousand Gone*; Butterfield, *Black Autobiography in America*, 11–89; Osofsky, Introduction, *Puttin’ on Ole Massa*, 9–48; Blassingame, *Slave Community*, 227–38.

19. “I Have Come to Tell You Something About Slavery,” Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:4.

20. “What the Black Man Wants,” Apr. 1865, *Life and Writings*, 4:163; “The Anti-Slavery Advocate and the Testimonial to Mrs. Stowe,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 22 July 1853, *ibid.*, 5:287–88, 286; “The Claims of Our Common Cause,” July 1853, *ibid.*, 2:267; Douglass to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 8 Mar. 1853, *ibid.*, 235; see also Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 405–6.

21. “The Meaning of July 4th for the Negro,” 5 July 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:190.

22. *Ibid.*, 203.

23. Pease and Pease, “Boston Garrisonians.”

24. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 228; Maria Weston Chapman to David Lee Child, 24 Aug. 1843, Child Papers; Chapman to Sidney Gay, 22 Aug. 1843, cited in Pease and Pease, “Boston Garrisonians,” 32.

25. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 228. Douglass to Chapman, 10 Sept. 1843, *Life and Writings*, 1:111–12; Pease and Pease, “Boston Garrisonians,” 32–33.

26. Douglass to Wendell Phillips, 28 Apr.

1846, in Bartlett, “New Light on Wendell Phillips,” 107; Douglass to Chapman, 29 Mar. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:143; Chapman to Richard Webb, 29 June 1865 (copied extract), Samuel J. May Papers; Webb to Chapman, 26 Feb. 1846, Weston Papers.

27. Douglass to Chapman, 29 Mar. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:143–44.

28. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 259; Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 30 Mar. 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:370; May to John E. Estlin, 30 Sept. 1847, May Papers; Phillips to May, 20 April 1849, cited in Pease and Pease, “Boston Garrisonians,” 37; William Lloyd Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, 20 Oct. 1847, in Merrill, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 3:532–33; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 81–82.

29. “Our Paper and Its Prospects,” *The North Star*, 3 Dec. 1847, *Life and Writings*, 1:280–81.

30. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 259–60.

31. *Ibid.*, 261. For a detailed analysis of Douglass’s constitutional positions, see Goldstein, “Political Thought of Frederick Douglass,” 82–118.

32. Phillips, *Constitution*, 4–5.

33. “American Slavery,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 28 Oct. 1847, *Life and Writings*, 1:274–75; Phillips, *Constitution*, 5–6.

34. Douglass to Chapman, 29 Mar. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:143.

35. *The North Star*, 4 Aug. 1848; Wesley, “Participation of Negroes in Anti-Slavery Parties,” 51–54; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 155–57. Wesley contends that the Liberty party was the first major national party to have significant black participation.

36. *The North Star*, 25 Aug., 1 Sept. 1848.

37. *Ibid.*, 16 June, 21 July 1848.

38. *The North Star*, 21 July 1848; “What Good Has the Free Soil Movement Done,” *ibid.*, 25 Mar. 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:368–69.

39. *Radical Abolitionist*, July 1856, cited in Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 170.

40. “The Republican Party,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 12 Sept. 1856; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 325–28; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 183–88; Douglass to Garrison, 17 Sept. 1864, *Life and Writings*, 3:407.

41. “What Good Has the Free Soil Move-

ment Done,” *Life and Writings*, 1:367–68; Edmund Quincy to Caroline Weston, 9 Mar. 1844, Weston Papers; Abby Kelley to Chapman, 6 Oct. 1844, *ibid.*

42. C. H. Chase to Douglass, 23 Jan. 1849, and Douglass to Chase, *The North Star*, 9 Feb. 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:352–53; Phillips, *Constitution*, 5–7.

43. *Life and Writings*, 1:361–62, 366.

44. “The Constitution and Slavery,” *The North Star*, 16 Mar. 1849, *ibid.*

45. Goodell, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*; Goodell, *Views of American Constitutional Law*; Spooner, *Unconstitutionality of Slavery*.

46. Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 21 May 1851, *Life and Writings*, 2:157; “Change of Opinion Announced,” *Liberator*, 23 May 1851, *ibid.*, 156; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 261–62.

47. “Is the United States Constitution For or Against Slavery?” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 24 July 1851, *Life and Writings*, 5:191–99; “The Republican Party—Our Position,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 7 Dec. 1855, *ibid.*, 2:380–83; “The Constitution of the United States,” Blum et al., *National Experience*, 2:838–40.

48. “The Anti-Slavery Movement,” Jan. 1855, *Life and Writings*, 2:350–53.

49. *Ibid.*, 351, 352.

50. Douglass to Smith, 21 May 1851, *ibid.*, 156; *The North Star*, 15 May 1851; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 142.

51. Douglass to Smith, 15 May 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:180–81; Phillips to Elizabeth Pease, 21 Nov. 1852, 10 Jan. 1853, Garrison Papers (A-SCBPL); Garrison to May, 23 Sept. 1853, Ruchames, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 4:256.

52. *Liberator*, 14 Nov. 1851; *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 12, 19 Aug. 1853.

53. Robert Purvis to Garrison, 12 Sept. 1853; Anti-Slavery Letters to Garrison, cited in Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 144; William C. Nell to Garrison, 19 Aug. 1853, *Liberator*, 2 Sept. 1853; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 24 Sept. 1853; Smith, “William Cooper Nell,” 189–90; Farrison, *William Wells Brown*, 262–64.

54. Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 87–88, 91–95, 105.

55. *Ibid.*, 105.

56. Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 148–49; Garrison to Samuel J. May, Jr., 21 Mar. 1856, Ruchames, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 4:391.
57. Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 106–7; Julia Griffiths to Gerrit Smith, 26 Apr. 1851, cited in *ibid.*, 107.
58. *New National Era*, 14 May 1874, in Foner, *Douglass on Women's Rights*, 104.
59. Stember, *Sexual Racism*; Halsell, *Black/White Sex*; Hernton, *Sex and Racism in America*; Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, 176–90.
60. Estlin to May, 12 Jan. 1847, cited in Pease and Pease, “Boston Garrisonians,” 40–41.
61. Douglass to Samuel D. Porter, 12 Jan. 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:166–67.
62. *Liberator*, 18 Nov. 1853; Anna Douglass to Garrison, 21 Nov. 1853; *Liberator*, 2 Dec. 1853; see also, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 9 Dec. 1853.
63. *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 9 Dec. 1853.
64. *Ibid.*
65. *Ibid.*
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*; “Communi-paw and the American Anti-Slavery Society,” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 18 May 1855, *Life and Writings*, 5:351.
69. Douglass to Charles Sumner, 2 Sept. 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:210.
70. Garrison to May, 28 Sept. 1860, Ruchames, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 4:693–94; W. Garrison to H. Garrison, 14 May 1863, Merrill, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 5:153; “On the Death of William Lloyd Garrison,” 2 June 1879, *Douglass Papers* (LC), r15, p. 5.
71. “The Anti-Slavery Movement,” Jan. 1855, *Life and Writings*, 2:354, 357; Speech Comparing Abolition Movements and Emancipation in Great Britain and the United States [1892], *Douglass Papers* (LC), r16, p. 4; “On the Death of William Lloyd Garrison,” *ibid.*, r15, p. 2.
72. “The Anti-Slavery Movement,” *Life and Writings*, 2:357; “The Claims of the Negro,” 12 July 1854, *ibid.*, 294; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, vi; Douglass to Garrison, 24 Feb. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:141.
73. “The Free Church Connection with the Slave Church,” 12 Feb. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:157; “The Bible Opposes Oppression, Fraud, and Wrong,” Belfast, 6 Jan. 1846, *ibid.*, 129.
74. “The Anti-Slavery Movement,” *ibid.*, 2:348.
75. *Ibid.*, 348–49.
76. *Ibid.*, 358. For an expansive discussion of the relationship between slavery and democratic revolutions, see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution: 1770–1823*.
77. Lecture on Haiti, 2 Jan. 1893, *Douglass Papers* (LC), r16, pp. 34, 35, 36; “Negotiations for the Môle St. Nicholas,” *ibid.*, p. 15.
78. “The Reproach and Shame of the American Government,” 2 Aug. 1858, *Life and Writings*, 5:396.
79. “The Revolution of 1848,” 1 Aug. 1848, *ibid.*, 1:321–30; Speech at annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, May 1848, *ibid.*, 5:81.
80. “The Revolution of 1848,” *ibid.*, 1:324.
81. *Liberator*, 8 June 1849; Speeches at Great Anti-Colonization Mass Meeting of the Colored Citizens of the City of New York, 23 Apr. 1849, *Life and Writings*, 5:113.
82. “Shooting a Negro,” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 24 Feb. 1854, *Life and Writings*, 5:318; “The True Remedy for the Fugitive Slave Bill,” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 9 June 1854, *ibid.*, 326.
83. “American and Scottish Prejudice Against the Slave,” 1 May 1846, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:245.
84. *Ibid.*
85. “The Meaning of July 4th for the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:201.
86. *Ibid.*, 200.
87. *Ibid.*, 192.
88. *Douglass' Monthly*, Feb. 1861, *ibid.*, 3:65; “Nemesis,” *Douglass' Monthly*, May 1861, *ibid.*, 99.
89. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 336; see also, “Fighting Rebels with One Hand,” *Douglass' Monthly*, Sept. 1861, *Life and Writings*, 3:151–54.
90. “The Proclamation and a Negro Army,” Feb. 1863, *Life and Writings*, 3:322.
91. *Ibid.*, 322–23.

Chapter 3

1. Huggins, "Afro-Americans," 95–98.
2. Scarborough, Introduction to Gregory, *Frederick Douglass*, 7; Douglass to Samuel Hanson Cox, D.D., 30 Oct. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:189.
3. Huggins, "Afro-Americans," 96–97.
4. Douglass, Introduction to *Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition in Life and Writings*, 4:477.
5. Huggins, "Afro-Americans," 97.
6. Bell, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions*; Wesley, "Participation of Negroes," 32–74; Bell, "National Negro Conventions of the Middle 1840s," 247–60; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 260–62.
7. Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet*, 103–5, 159; Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America," in Stuckey, *Ideological Origins*, 172–73.
8. "Men of Color, To Arms!" 21 Mar. 1863, *Life and Writings*, 3:318; *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens, Buffalo* (15 to 19 August 1843), in Bell, *Minutes*, 13; "The American Colonization Society," 31 May 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:398–99; Goldstein, "Violence as an Instrument for Social Change," 61–72.
9. "The Union of the Oppressed for the Sake of Freedom," *The North Star*, 10 Aug. 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:400.
10. J. M. Smith to Gerrit Smith, 28 July 1848, Gerrit Smith Papers, cited in Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 94; Walker, "Frederick Douglass," 240–47, 257–59, offers a different interpretation predicated upon what I believe to be a faulty speculation: that in part Douglass became an abolitionist out of self-delusive desires to be white.
11. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 264.
12. *Ibid.*
13. "The Meaning of July 4th for the Negro," 5 July 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:196.
14. "The Nebraska Controversy—The True Issue," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 24 Feb. 1854, *ibid.*, 179, 177; "The Dred Scott Decision," *ibid.*, 411, 412.
15. "The Dred Scott Decision," *ibid.*, 411, 412.
16. "How to End the War," *Douglass' Monthly*, May 1861, *Life and Writings*, 3:94.
17. "Fighting Rebels With Only One Hand," *Douglass' Monthly*, Sept. 1861, *ibid.*, 152.
18. "Black Regiments Proposed," *Douglass' Monthly*, May 1861, *ibid.*, 97–98.
19. Basler, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 5:423; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 66–69.
20. "The Proclamation and a Negro Army," *Douglass' Monthly*, Feb. 1863, *Life and Writings*, 3:334; "The Condition of the Country," *ibid.*, 317.
21. "Men of Color, To Arms!" *ibid.*, 318; "Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?" *Douglass' Monthly*, Apr. 1863, *ibid.*, 340–44.
22. *Douglass' Monthly*, Aug. 1863; "Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?" *Life and Writings*, 3:341–44.
23. Douglass to Major G. L. Stearns, 1 Aug. 1863, *Life and Writings*, 3:367–69; "The Commander-in-Chief and His Black Soldiers," *ibid.*, 369–72; "Duty of Colored Men," *ibid.*, 372–73; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 343–46.
24. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 347–49.
25. *Ibid.*, 349–50.
26. Douglass to Theodore Tilton, 15 Oct. 1864, *Life and Writings*, 3:422–24; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 357–59.
27. "Another Word to Colored Men," *Douglass' Monthly*, Aug. 1863, *Life and Writings*, 3:345; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 342–43.
28. "Why Should a Colored Man Enlist?" *Life and Writings*, 3:340.
29. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 373.
30. *Ibid.*, 373, 374.
31. *Ibid.*, 398, 399, 374.
32. "The Cause of the Negro People," 4–7 Oct. 1864, *Life and Writings*, 3:418–20; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 396, 378–79.
33. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 377–78. For a thorough discussion of Douglass's political thought, see Goldstein, "Political Thought of Frederick Douglass."
34. "Reconstruction," *Atlantic Monthly* (Dec. 1866), *Life and Writings*, 4:198–204; Douglass to an English correspondent, June 1864, *ibid.*, 3:404.
35. Washington *Chronicle*, 23 Dec. 1883, clipping, in "Race Problem," Douglass Papers (LC), r12, fol. 24; Douglass to Harriet Beecher

Stowe, 8 Mar. 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:229–30.

36. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 377; Centennial Celebration of the Abolition Society of Pennsylvania (1875), Douglass Papers (LC), r15, p. 9.

37. Centennial Celebration of the Abolition Society of Pennsylvania (1875), Douglass Papers (LC), r15, p. 9.

38. “The Color Question,” 5 July 1875, *ibid.*, p. 7.

39. “Self-Made Men,” [1874?], Douglass Papers (HUMSC), 15–16.

40. “The Color Question,” Douglass Papers (LC), r15, p. 7.

41. *New National Era*, 6 Apr. 1871; Douglass to Major M. R. Delany, *ibid.*, 31 Aug. 1871, *Life and Writings*, 4:281.

42. Howe, *Refugees from Slavery*, 104; *Commonwealth* (8 Jan. 1864); both cited in McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 186–87.

43. “What Shall Be Done With the Slaves if Emancipated,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, Jan. 1862, *Life and Writings*, 3:189–90.

44. “Self-Made Men,” Douglass Papers (HUMSC), 16. “A Defence of the Negro Race,” 1894, Douglass Papers (LC), r17, p. 2.

45. “Self-Made Men,” Douglass Papers (HUMSC), 16.

46. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 398–404, 472–76; W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction*, 185, 197–99, 201, 273–74, 327, 338–39.

47. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 521–22; Plan to Buy Land to be Sold to Freedmen, Douglass Papers (LC), cited in Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 253–54.

48. Speech, Elmira, N.Y., 1 Aug. 1880, Douglass Papers (LC), r15, pp. 31–33.

49. “The Nation’s Problem,” 16 Apr. 1889, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 325–26.

50. *Ibid.*, 313.

51. *Ibid.*, 326.

52. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 503.

53. Painter, *Exodusters*, 159, 243–50; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 428.

54. Delany, *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party*, 121; *Douglass’ Monthly*, Jan. 1861; May 1861.

55. “The Claims of Our Common Cause,” 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:259; “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *The Lesson of the Hour* (1894), *ibid.*, 4:513–14.

56. Douglass to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 8 Mar. 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:233; “The Letter of Benjamin Coates, Esq.,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 17 Sept. 1858, *ibid.*, 5:416; “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *ibid.*, 4:515; Sweet, *Black Images*, 35–147; Dick, *Black Protest*, 9–35; Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*, 251–77.

57. “The Letter of Benjamin Coates, Esq.,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 17 Sept. 1858, *Life and Writings*, 5:416; “The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States,” 12 Sept. 1879, *ibid.*, 4:332–34.

58. Holland, *Frederick Douglass*, 368; “Southern Barbarism,” 1886, *Life and Writings*, 4:437–38.

59. “The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States,” *Life and Writings*, 4:331, 333, 334–35.

60. *Ibid.*, 338–40, 337; Painter, *Exodusters*, 225–33, 3–68.

61. *New York Daily Herald*, 11 Apr. 1879, cited in Painter, *Exodusters*, 249, 190–91; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 428.

62. “The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States,” *Life and Writings*, 4:336, 334.

63. John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 313; Wells, *On Lynchings*.

64. Douglass, *Narrative*, 25.

65. “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *Life and Writings*, 4:505–6, 492–93.

66. *Ibid.*, 493, 499.

67. Wells, *On Lynchings*; “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *Life and Writings*, 4:501–2.

68. “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *Life and Writings*, 4:503–4, 495; Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Capitalist Setting,” 24–30.

69. “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *Life and Writings*, 4:495; Douglass, Introduction, *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, *ibid.*, 474.

70. “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *Life and Writings*, 4:504; Davis, “Rape, Racism, and the Capitalist Setting,” 25, 27.

71. “Our Position in the Present Presidential Canvass,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 10 Sept. 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:216; “The Danger of the Republican Movement,” 28 May 1856, *ibid.*, 5:386; “The Cause of the Negro People,” *ibid.*, 3:412.

72. Remarks at Mass Meeting of Colored Republicans, 14 Mar. 1876, Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 3.

73. De Santis, *Republicans Face the Southern Question*; Hirshon, *Farewell to the Bloody Shirt*; Grossman, *Democratic Party and the Negro*; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 26–82.

74. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 419–20, 425; Douglass to S. D. Porter, Esq., 21 Mar. 1877, *Life and Writings*, 4:321.

75. Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 322–25.

76. *New York Age*, 12 Jan. 1889; *New York Times*, 9 Nov. 1877; Decoration Day Speech, 1878, Douglass Papers (LC), r15, pp. 5, 8; *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 1879; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 322–25.

77. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 527–28.

78. *People's Advocate*, 6 Oct. 1883; *New York Globe*, 29 Sept. 1883; Address to the People of the United States, 24 Sept. 1883, *Life and Writings*, 4:381; *Cleveland Gazette*, 29 Sept. 1883; De Santis, “Negro Dissatisfaction,” 148–59; De Santis, “Republican Party and the Southern Negro,” 71–87; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 536–37.

79. “The Civil Rights Case,” 22 Oct. 1883, *Life and Writings*, 4:393, 401.

80. *Ibid.*, 402.

81. *Ibid.*, 402–3, 398.

82. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 417.

83. *New National Era*, 23 Mar. 1871; *Harper's Weekly*, 11 May 1872; Open Letter to Voters of the Fourth District of Virginia, 15 Aug. 1888, Douglass Papers (LC), r5.

84. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 415–17; Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 516–19, 529–30, 534–46, 551–53; *New National Era*, 28 Mar., 11 Apr. 1872.

85. *New National Era*, 29 Feb., 14 Mar., 18 Apr. 1872.

86. Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 435–53.

87. *Ibid.*, 443.

88. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 409, 408; “Santo Domingo,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 3.

89. McFeeley, *Grant*, 333, 337; “Santo Domingo,” Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 3, 13.

90. “Santo Domingo,” Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 34, 33, 36, 37.

91. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 612–13; *Lecture on Haiti*, 2 Jan. 1893, *Life and Writings*, 4:483–86.

92. *New National Era*, 4 May 1871; *Lecture on Haiti*, *Life and Writings*, 4:483–84.

93. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 599–619;

Logan, *Diplomatic Relations with Haiti*, 410–57.

94. F. L. Barnett to Douglass, 10 Aug. 1891, Douglass Papers (LC), r6; “The Negro in the Present Presidential Campaign,” *Zion's Herald*, 28 Sept. 1892, *ibid.*, r2, pp. 1–2; Meier, “Negro and the Democratic Party,” 173–82.

95. Fortune, *Black and White*; Fortune, *Negro in Politics*, 58–59, 38; *New York Age*, 20 July 1889; Meier, “Negro and the Democratic Party,” 177–79.

96. *Philadelphia Press*, 27 Apr. 1870; Address to the Colored Citizens of the United States, 1888, Douglass Papers (LC), r16, pp. 2, 8–9; “The United States Cannot Remain Half-Slave and Half-Free,” *Life and Writings*, 4:370; “The Nation's Problem,” Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 319–20; Douglass to E. D. Passmore, cited in Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 335–36.

97. Open Letter to the Voters of the Fourth District of Virginia, 15 Aug. 1888, Douglass Papers (LC), r5; Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 318–20.

Chapter 4

1. Douglass to F. T. Frelinghuysen, 23 May 1874, Douglass Papers (LC), r2; “The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People,” New York, 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:246; *New National Era*, 2 Oct. 1873.

2. Douglass to Friends Hayden and Watson, 19 Nov. 1886, *Life and Writings*, 4:445–46.

3. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 474.

4. “Things to be Thought of,” *New National Era*, 1 Dec. 1870; Letter from the editor, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 30 July 1852, *Life and Writings*, 5:237.

5. Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 125–47; Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 42–58; Douglass to Reverend C. S. Smith, M.D., 13 Oct. 1882, Douglass Papers (LC), r3; Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 25 Sept. 1873, *Life and Writings*, 2:360.

6. “Self-Evaluation—Reverend S. R. Ward,” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 13 Apr. 1855, *Life and Writings*, 2:360.

7. *Ibid.*, 361; “To Our Oppressed Countrymen,” *The North Star*, 3 Dec. 1847, *ibid.*, 1:283.

8. Okoye, *American Image of Africa*, 132; *Douglass' Monthly*, Aug. 1862.
9. "Our Weakness," *New National Era*, 1 Dec. 1870; "Reply to Frederick Douglass, Esq.," *Christian Recorder*, 21 Jan. 1871.
10. "Reply to Frederick Douglass, Esq.," *Christian Recorder*, 21 Jan. 1871; Letter to Major Delany, *New National Era*, 31 Aug. 1871, *Life and Writings*, 4:279–80.
11. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 494; Speech at the dedication of the Manassas (Virginia) Industrial School, 3 Sept. 1894, Douglass Papers (LC), r17, p. 16; "Composite Nation," 1867, *ibid.*, r14, p. 9.
12. "Colored Newspapers," *The North Star*, 8 Jan. 1848, *Life and Writings*, 1:291.
13. Douglass, *Narrative*, 21–22; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 51–52; Walker, "Frederick Douglass," 248–50.
14. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 29; Speech at the dedication of the Manassas Industrial School, 3 Sept. 1894, Douglass Papers (LC), r17, p. 20.
15. "The Nation's Problem," 16 Apr. 1889, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 316.
16. John Edward Bruce to editor of *Cleveland Gazette*, 11 May 1889, in Quarles, ed., *Frederick Douglass*, 118; "The Nation's Problem," Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 317.
17. "The Nation's Problem," Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 318.
18. *Ibid.*, 318, 319.
19. Grimké, "Second Marriage of Frederick Douglass," 324–29; Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 297–300; Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 337–39.
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21. Cited in *The Hub*, 2 Feb. 1884, clipping, *ibid.*, r34; *Philadelphia Record*, 28 Jan. 1884, clipping, *ibid.*; *Galveston Print*, 27 Jan. 1884, clipping, *ibid.*; Anne Weaver Teabeau in *Jet* (22 Nov. 1979), 30; *Cleveland Gazette*, 2 Feb. 1884, Douglass Papers (LC), r34.
22. Douglass to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 30 May 1884, *Life and Writings*, 4:410; Douglass to [?], n.d., cited in Foner, *Frederick Douglass*, 338; *Owego Record* (N.Y.), 2 Feb. 1884, clipping, Douglass Papers (LC), r34.
23. Samuel York Atlee to Douglass, 26 Jan. 1884, Douglass Papers (LC), r4; *Owego Record* (N.Y.), 2 Feb. 1884, clipping, Douglass Papers (LC), r34; Meier, "Frederick Douglass' Vision for America," 143–46.
24. "Colored Churches—No. III," *The North Star*, 10 Mar. 1848, *Life and Writings*, 5:72–74; *Fifth Annual Convention of the Free People of Colour* (Philadelphia, 1835), 26–27, in Bell, *Minutes*; Dick, *Black Protest*, 163–66.
25. Douglass to A. Calstrom, Esq., 8 Feb. 1886, *Life and Writings*, 4:430; Douglass to W. J. Wilson, 8 Aug. 1865, *ibid.*, 172; "Colored Churches—No. III," *ibid.*, 5:72–73; "Equal School Rights," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 20 Apr. 1855, *ibid.*, 347–49; "The Case of Reverend Dr. Pennington," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 8 June 1855, *ibid.*, 352.
26. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 268–69; "My Son, Lewis Douglass," *New York Times*, 8 Aug. 1869, *Life and Writings*, 4:219; Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 125–47.
27. Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 108.
28. *The Colored American*, 13 Mar. 1841, in Stuckey, *Ideological Origins*, 161; *Fourth Annual Convention of the Free People of Colour* (New York, 1834), 4, in Bell, *Minutes*.
29. "Address to the People of the United States," 24 Sept. 1883, *Life and Writings*, 4:377; "Integration," n.d., Douglass Papers (HUMSC), Box 4, p. 3; Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 125–47; Dick, *Black Protest*, 163–95.
30. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 400–402; Osthaus, *Freedmen, Philanthropy, and Fraud*, 79–137.
31. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 402; Osthaus, *Freedmen, Philanthropy, and Fraud*, 183–86.
32. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 402–4; Douglass to Senator Frelinghuysen, 23 May 1874, *Life and Writings*, 4:306.
33. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 400–406; Osthaus, *Freedmen, Philanthropy, and Fraud*, 173–200; Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 3 July 1874, *Life and Writings*, 4:306–7; Letter to the editor of the *National Republican* [1890], *ibid.*, 458.
34. W. E. B. DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk* in Franklin, *Three Negro Classics*, 237; Osthaus, *Freedmen, Philanthropy, and Fraud*, 201–25.

35. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 399–400; Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 25 Sept. 1873, *Life and Writings*, 4:304; Douglass on the Negro press in Penn., *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, *ibid.*, 469.

36. “The Nation’s Problem,” Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 320; Douglass to the *Boston Daily Whig*, 27 June 1847, *Life and Writings*, 1:253.

37. “The Nation’s Problem,” Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 320.

38. John Edward Bruce to the editor of the *Cleveland Gazette*, 11 May 1889, cited in Quarles, ed., *Frederick Douglass*, 118–19.

39. Douglass on the Negro press, *Life and Writings*, 4:469.

40. W. E. B. DuBois, *Souls of Black Folk*, 214–15.

Chapter 5

1. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:289; Allport, *Nature of Prejudice*, 8; William J. Wilson, *Power, Racism, and Privilege*, 32; Fredrickson, *Black Image*; Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution*.

2. “The Civil Rights Case,” *Life and Writings*, 4:397; “The Color Line,” *ibid.*, 342–52; “Toussaint L’Ouverture,” Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 1.

3. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 45; “Why is the Negro Lynched?”—*The Lesson of the Hour* (1894), *Life and Writings*, 4:519; *The North Star*, 16 Nov. 1849, *ibid.*, 1:418.

4. *The North Star*, 7 Apr. 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:382; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 507.

5. “Toussaint L’Ouverture,” Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 3; “The Color Line,” *Life and Writings*, 4:343. Race prejudice is based upon racial identity, whereas color prejudice is based upon skin color. Antiblack prejudice combines both race and skin prejudice.

6. [The Brotherhood of Man], n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 17; “Prejudice Against Color,” *The North Star*, 5 May 1848, *Life and Writings*, 5:75–78.

7. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:292; “Slavery,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 1–5; Farrison, *William Wells Brown*, 320–21; Sweet, *Black Images*

of America, 102–3.

8. “What Are the Colored People Doing for Themselves?” *The North Star*, 14 July 1848, *Life and Writings*, 1:319; “The Unholy Alliance of Negro Hate and Antislavery,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 5 Apr. 1856, *ibid.*, 2:385–87; “A Temperance Address,” *Glasgow Saturday Post* and Paisley and Renfrewshire *Reformer*, 21–30 Mar. 1846, *ibid.*, 5:37–41; “The Church and Prejudice,” *National Antislavery Standard*, 23 Dec. 1841, *ibid.*, 1:103–5; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 352–53, 398; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 546.

9. “The Negro Problem,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 2.

10. “The Nation’s Problem,” 16 Apr. 1889, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 314. This speech is very similar to [Political Speech], Douglass Papers (LC), r19; “A Defence of the Negro Race,” 1894, *ibid.*, r17, pp. 5–6; “The Negro Problem,” *ibid.*, r18, p. 2.

11. “The Negro Problem,” Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 9–10; “A Defence of the Negro Race,” *ibid.*, r17, pp. 5–6. For more on the idea of whites as responsible for antiblack prejudice and its alleviation, see Douglass to the editor, *Republic*, n.d., *ibid.*, r9; Douglass to W. H. Thomas, 18 July 1886, *Life and Writings*, 5:443.

12. “The Church and Prejudice,” 1841, *Life and Writings*, 1:443.

13. See William J. Wilson, *Power, Racism, and Privilege* for a sociohistorical discussion of this idea.

14. “The Color Line,” *Life and Writings*, 4:347.

15. Douglass to DeWitt Miller, 22 Jan. 1893, *ibid.*, 477; Interview with Douglass, *Washington Press*, 11 Jan. 1889, Douglass Papers (LC), r10; “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *Life and Writings*, 4:517, 519.

16. “The Negro Problem,” Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 10; Address delivered on the Twenty-Sixth Anniversary of the Abolition of Slavery, 16 Apr. 1888, *ibid.*, r16, p. 1.

17. “The Nation’s Problem,” Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 314.

18. *The North Star*, 5 May 1848, *Life and Writings*, 5:75–78.

19. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 368–73; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 553; “The American Colonization Society,” 31

May 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:392; Douglass to Garrison, 23 May 1846, *ibid.*, 170; Douglass to William A. White, 30 July 1846, *ibid.*, 1:183.

20. *Liberator*, 10 Oct. 1845, *Life and Writings*, 1:120; “The American Colonization Society,” *ibid.*, 1:394–95; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 368–73.

21. Douglass to Garrison, 28 Oct. 1845, *Life and Writings*, 5:7.

22. “My Trip Abroad,” 1887, Douglass Papers (LC), r16, p. 27.

23. Douglass to Garrison, 29 Sept. 1845, *Life and Writings*, 1:121–22; [Daniel O’Connell], n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19.

24. “The Color Line,” *Life and Writings*, 4:347.

25. *Ibid.*; Douglass’s Europhilia is evident throughout his Diary (tour of Egypt and Africa), 1886–1887, Douglass Papers (LC), r1, and “My Trip Abroad,” 1887, *ibid.*, r16.

26. Douglass to Francis Jackson, 24 Jan. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:136.

27. Jordan, *White Over Black*, 3–98. I take his specific observations and analyses of English society and attitudes to be generally applicable to European society and attitudes.

28. “The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People,” May 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:249; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 405; [The Abolitionists], n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 29.

29. Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 14 Dec. 1857, *Life and Writings*, 5:393.

30. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 405; “The Color Line,” *Life and Writings*, 4:348.

31. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 138–39; Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 321; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 402.

32. “The Color Line,” *Life and Writings*, 4:345–46; Douglass’ *Monthly*, Aug. 1855, *ibid.*, 2:455.

33. “The Color Line,” *ibid.*, 4:346.

34. “The Folly of Our Opponents,” *The Liberty Bell*, 1845, in *Life and Writings*, 1:113–14; “The Color Line,” *ibid.*, 4:346.

35. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 341–44; Douglass’ *Monthly*, Sept. 1862, *Life and Writings*, 3:268; “The Color Line,” *ibid.*, 4:348; Introduction, *The Reason Why the Col-*

ored American is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition, Douglass Papers (LC), r16, pp. 3–4; “Augustine” to the *Colored American*, 2 Dec. 1837, in Stuckey, *Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*, p. 118. The historiographical debate of the last thirty years on the genesis of prejudice and racism and their relationship to the development of slavery is quite relevant here. Oscar and Mary Handlin have argued that slavery engendered antiblack prejudice (“The Origins of the Southern Labor System,” 199–222). Carl Degler, on the other hand, has countered that antiblack prejudice preceded slavery (“Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice,” 49–66). The debate advanced one step further with Winthrop Jordan’s synthesis suggesting that “rather than slavery causing ‘prejudice,’ or vice versa, they seem rather to have generated each other. Both were, after all, twin aspects of a general debasement of the Negro. Slavery and ‘prejudice’ may have been equally cause and effect, continuously reacting upon each other dynamically joining hands to hustle the Negro down the road to complete degradation” (*White Over Black*, 80). More recently, Edmund Morgan has attempted to trace the origins of racism back to English class prejudice, or more narrowly, English attitudes toward the poor (*American Slavery—American Freedom*, 316–37).

36. *The North Star*, 13 June 1850, *Life and Writings*, 2:129.

37. “The Color Line,” *ibid.*, 4:350.

38. “Augustine” to the *Colored American*, 16 Feb. 1839, in Stuckey, *Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*, 145; Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 100–106.

39. “The Color Line,” *Life and Writings*, 4:344, 348.

40. Jordan, *White Over Black*, 3–43; “The Church and Prejudice,” *Life and Writings*, 1:104; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 398–99.

41. “The Nation’s Problem,” Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 312–13; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 68; “Gavitt’s Original Ethiopian Serenaders,” *The North Star*, 29 June 1849, *Life and Writings*, 5:142.

42. Douglass to friends Hayden and Watson, 19 Nov. 1886, *Life and Writings*, 4:444–45; “The Color Line,” *ibid.*, 344; “Why is the

Negro Lynched?" *ibid.*, 2:298–99.

43. "Why is the Negro Lynched?" *ibid.*, 507; "The Claims of the Negro," *ibid.*, 2:298–99.

44. "Composite Nation," 1867, Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 14; "The Negro Problem," *ibid.*, r18, p. 12.

45. "The Present and Future of the Colored Race in America," *Douglass' Monthly*, June 1863, *Life and Writings*, 3:355.

46. [The Negro as a Man], n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 10; "The Present and Future of the Colored Race in America," *Douglass' Monthly*, June 1863, *Life and Writings*, 3:355; *The North Star*, 13 Oct. 1848, *ibid.*, 5:104.

47. *The North Star*, 30 May 1850, *Life and Writings*, 2:122.

48. "The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People," *ibid.*, 243.

49. *Douglass' Monthly*, October 1860.

50. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 366–67; *New National Era*, 27 July 1871; "Slavery," n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 22; "Address to the People of the United States," 24 Sept. 1883, *Life and Writings*, 4:376.

51. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 412; *The North Star*, 14 July 1848, *Life and Writings*, 1:315; *Freeman* (Philadelphia), clipping, n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r34.

52. Douglass to Rosetta Douglass Sprague, n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r32 (Miscellaneous Correspondence);

"Exordium," n.d., *ibid.*, r17, p. 9; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 367; Douglass to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 8 Mar. 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:231.

53. *New National Era*, 27 July 1871; "Frederick Douglass Responds to His Critics," *The Hub*, 1884, Douglass Papers (LC), r12, fol. 24.

54. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 96, 85.

55. "The Color Line," *Life and Writings*, 4:348; "The Lesson of the Hour," Douglass Papers (LC), r16, p. 2; Speech before New York Assembly, 1 May 1880, *ibid.*, r15, p. 32; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 78.

56. "West India Emancipation," 4 Aug. 1857, *Life and Writings*, 2:437.

57. *The North Star*, 13 June 1850, *ibid.*, 128–29.

58. "The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People," *ibid.*, 243;

"Oration at the Second Annual Exposition of the Colored People of North Carolina," 1 Oct. 1880, Douglass Papers (LC), r15, p. 173; "Negroes, Monguls, and Hebrews," inc. mss., n.d., Douglass Papers (HUMSC), Box 4, p. 2.

59. "Oration at the Second Annual Exposition of the Colored People of North Carolina," Douglass Papers (LC), r15, pp. 164, 173.

60. "Address Before the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association," 18 Sept. 1873, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 290. For an extensive discussion of the racism of Social Darwinism and its impact, see Fredrickson, *Black Image*, pp. 228–319.

61. "Address Before the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association," Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 290.

62. *Ibid.*; "Why is the Negro Lynched?" *Life and Writings*, 4:515–17; *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*, Douglass Papers (LC), r16, pp. 19–20.

63. Interview with President Andrew Johnson and Frederick Douglass, George T. Downing, William Whipper, John Jones, and Lewis Douglass, 7 Feb. 1866, *Life and Writings*, 4:191; Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 309–11; Douglass, *Narrative*, 100. For a good discussion of the relationship between racism and capitalism, see Chapter 10, "Racism," in Reich et al., *Capitalist System*, 369–88. See especially Reich, "The Economics of Racism," 381–88. Reich argues that "racism benefits white employers and other rich whites while it hurts poor whites and white employees. Thus racism is seen as a phenomenon of capitalist society. Racism is useful to capitalism because it obfuscates class interests and provides a convenient psychological outlet for worker frustration, thereby reinforcing the existing class structure" (381–82).

64. "Address to the People of the United States," *Life and Writings*, 4:382; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 180.

65. "Address to the People of the United States," *Life and Writings*, 4:382; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 179–83.

66. "Address to the People of the United States," *Life and Writings*, 4:383.

67. "Cheap Labor," *New National Era*, 17

Aug. 1871; “Address to the People of the United States,” *Life and Writings*, 4:383.

68. “One-Sided Reform,” *New National Era*, 29 Feb. 1872; “Self-Made Men” [1874?], Douglass Papers (HUMSC), 31–32.

69. *The North Star*, 25 May 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:384–87; “It is Not to the Rich But to the Poor That We Must Look,” 23 Aug. 1852, *ibid.*, 5:244–45; “Baptists, Congregationalists, The Free Church, and Slavery,” 23 Dec. 1845, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:113–14.

70. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 477, 453; Speech on the seventy-ninth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday, 12 Feb. 1888, Douglass Papers (LC), r16, p. 14.

71. “The Color Line,” *Life and Writings*, 4:351.

72. Douglass to anonymous, fragment, 4 Feb. 1894, Douglass Papers (LC), r7; Easton, *Treatise on the Intellectual Character*, 40; “Address to the People of the United States,” *Life and Writings*, 4:378.

73. “The Future of the Colored Race,” *The North American Review*, May 1866, *Life and Writings*, 4:195; “Address to the People of the United States,” *ibid.*, 378.

74. “The American Colonization Society,” *ibid.*, 1:393; *Baltimore Commonwealth*, 24 July 1915, in Xeroxed Newspaper Articles, Frederick Douglass Material, v. 12, Douglass Papers, Yale University. See also *The North Star*, 25 May 1849, *Life and Writings*, 1:384–87.

75. Douglass, “A Defence of the Negro Race,” Douglass Papers (LC), r17, p. 8; Speech at the dedication of the Colored Industrial School at Manassas, Virginia, 3 Sept. 1894, *ibid.*, 22–23. See also Introduction, *Why the Colored American is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, *Life and Writings*, 4:476–77.

76. “The Future of the Colored Race,” *Life and Writings*, 4:195; Meier, *Negro Thought*, 100–106.

77. Douglass to Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Life and Writings*, 2:234.

78. Douglass to A. M. Powell, *ibid.*, 4:230; *The North Star*, 25 May 1849, *ibid.*, 1:386–87.

79. *Douglass’ Monthly*, Nov. 1862, Jan. 1863, *ibid.*, 3:292, 311.

80. *Douglass’ Monthly*, Nov. 1862, *ibid.*, 292; “The Nation’s Problem,” Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 313.

81. “Seeming and Real,” *New National Era*, 6 Oct. 1870, *Life and Writings*, 4:227.

82. Douglass, Introduction, *Why the Colored American is Not in the World’s Columbian Exposition*, *ibid.*, 476–77; West India Emancipation Day Speech, 1 Aug. 1880, Douglass Papers (LC), r15, p. 46.

83. “The American Colonization Society,” *Life and Writings*, 1:395–96; Douglass and Richard T. Greener to George F. Hoar, 22 June 1880, Douglass Papers (HUMSC), Box 1.

84. *The North Star*, 9 Apr. 1848, *Life and Writings*, 1:302–3.

85. “Exordium,” Douglass Papers (LC), r17, p. 13.

Chapter 6

1. Hersh, *Slavery of Sex*, 1–79; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 15–52.

2. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*, 39–77.

3. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 473.

4. *Ibid.*, 472, 469.

5. Douglass to Oliver Johnson, 1885, *Life and Writings*, 4:427; “Emancipation of Women,” 28 May 1888, in Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 118.

6. “The Women’s Association of Philadelphia,” *The North Star*, 15 June 1848, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 51–52; “American Prejudice Against Color,” 23 Oct. 1845, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:70.

7. Douglass to Sidney Howard Gay, Sept. 1847, *Life and Writings*, 1:264; “Address to Members of the Women’s League,” n.d., Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 128–31.

8. “Emancipation of Women,” Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 118, 116; “It Moves,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 9–11; “The Woman’s Suffrage Movement,” Apr. 1888, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 115.

9. Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right*, 95–115.

10. “Woman Suffrage in Austria,” *New National Era*, 7 Dec. 1871, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 101; “Woman Suffrage,”

n.d., *ibid.*, 143–44; Degler, *At Odds*.

11. “Woman Suffrage Movement,” n.d., Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 126; “Women’s Rights: Circulate the Petitions,” *ibid.*, 65; “Woman Suffrage in Austria,” *ibid.*, 101–2.

12. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 470; “American Prejudice Against Color,” Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:70 n. 24; stanza from poem by Elizabeth Chandler, cited in Hersh, *Slavery of Sex*, 8; “Charges and Defense of the Free Church,” 10 Mar. 1846, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:171–72.

13. Douglass to Gerrit Smith, 15 May 1851, *Life and Writings*, 2:155; “Woman and the Ballot,” *New National Era*, 27 Oct. 1870, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 98, 96; “Woman Suffrage,” *ibid.*, 139.

14. “The Ladies,” *The North Star*, 10 Aug. 1848, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 49; Address Before Woman Suffrage Convention, n.d., *ibid.*, 125.

15. “The Rights of Woman,” *The North Star*, 28 July 1848, *ibid.*, 50; “The Woman’s Suffrage Movement,” *ibid.*, 114.

16. Diary of Trip Abroad, 19 Feb. 1888, Douglass Papers (LC), r1; “Emancipation of Woman,” Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 118.

17. “Emancipation of Woman,” Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 118–19.

18. “The Only True Basis of Rights,” *ibid.*, 51.

19. Tour of Europe, Douglass Papers (LC), r16, p. 4.

20. “The National Woman’s Rights Convention at Syracuse,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 17 Sept. 1852, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 56; “Emancipation of Woman,” *ibid.*, 116.

21. “Woman Suffrage,” *ibid.*, 145–46.

22. *Ibid.*, 138; “Emancipation of Woman,” *ibid.*, 123.

23. “Woman Suffrage,” *ibid.*, 138; Address Before Woman Suffrage Convention, *ibid.*, 124; “Some Thoughts on Woman’s Rights,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 10 June 1853, *ibid.*, 59.

24. “The Woman’s Suffrage Movement,” *ibid.*, 110.

25. “The Rights of Women,” *ibid.*, 51;

“The Only True Basis of Rights,” *ibid.*; “Woman’s Rights Convention at Worcester, Massachusetts,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 30 Oct. 1851, *ibid.*, 55.

26. “Woman’s Rights Convention at Worcester,” *ibid.*, 55.

27. “Woman Suffrage Movement,” Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 126, 127; “Woman Suffrage,” *ibid.*, 135; “Some Thoughts on Woman’s Rights,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 10 June 1853, *ibid.*, 59–60; Hersh, *Slavery of Sex*, 177–78, 52–53, 59; *The North Star*, 7 Mar. 1848; *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 23 Dec. 1853.

28. Hersh, *Slavery of Sex*, 218–48; Degler, *At Odds*.

29. “Woman’s Rights of the Right Kind,” *New National Era*, 28 July 1870; “Woman’s Rights: Circulate the Petitions,” Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 65–67; “The Just and Equal Rights of Women,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 25 Nov. 1853, *ibid.*, 64.

30. Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:70–71, 73.

31. “The Woman’s Suffrage Movement,” Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 116; Terrell, “Frederick Douglass,” *ibid.*, 176.

32. “Woman Suffrage Movement,” *ibid.*, 94.

33. “The Only True Basis of Rights,” *ibid.*, 51; “Woman Suffrage,” *ibid.*, 141–42.

34. “Emancipation of Woman,” *ibid.*, 120; “Woman Suffrage,” *ibid.*, 138;

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38. “The Constitution and Title Deed to Woman’s Franchise,” *New National Era*, 21 Sept. 1871, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 100–101.

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41. “Lucy Stone at Musical Fund Hall, Philadelphia,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 17

- Feb. 1854, Foner, *Douglass on Women's Rights*, 67–70; Letter from Francis Barry, Berlin, Ohio, and reply to Mr. Barry's letter, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 17 Mar. 1854, *ibid.*, 70–73.
42. *Ibid.*
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44. *Ibid.*
45. "An Account of American Slavery," 15 Jan. 1846, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:135; "International Moral Force Can Destroy Slavery," 17 Mar. 1846, *ibid.*, 183–84.
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48. Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 1:870; Blackwell, *Lucy Stone*, 90.
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50. Stanza from "Think of Our Country," a poem by Elizabeth Chandler, cited in Hersh, *Slavery of Sex*, 8.
51. "Our Colored Sisters," *The North Star*, 16 Nov. 1849, Foner, *Douglass on Women's Rights*, 53.
52. "American Slavery," *Life and Writings*, 1:276; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 112; see also, "Our Colored Sisters," *The North Star*, 16 Nov. 1849, 52–53; "Black Women and Philadelphia Centennial Commission," *New National Era and Citizen*, 22 May 1873; Douglass to L. M. Saunders, 1885, Foner, *Douglass on Women's Rights*, 107–9.
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54. Stewart, "Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality," 189; Fannie Barrier Williams, "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Woman," 275–76; see also section 4, Chapter 5.
55. Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race, and Class*, 137–48.
56. Pauli, *Her Name was Sojourner Truth*, 238.
57. "The Vote: Speech of Frederick Douglass in Boston," 25 Jan. 1865, Foner, *Douglass on Women's Rights*, 77–78; Equal Rights Convention for New York State, 20 Nov. 1866, *ibid.*, 78–80; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 53–78.
58. Equal Rights Convention for New York State, 79–80.
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60. *Ibid.*
61. *Revolution*, 20, 27 May 1869.
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64. Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 2:381–82; see also Foner, *Douglass on Women's Rights*, 86–87.
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73. "Woman," *The North Star*, 26 May

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75. “Emancipation of Woman,” *ibid.*, 122.

76. *Twin City American*, 4 May 1899, Foner, *Douglass on Women’s Rights*, 175.

Chapter 7

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2. For more on the problem of the negative impact of racism on social reform see: Pease and Pease, *They Who Would Be Free*; Allen, *Reluctant Reformers*; Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*.

3. Douglass to Samuel Hanson Cox, D.D., 30 Oct. 1846, *Life and Writings*, 1:196; “The Temperance Cause in America and Britain,” 21 May 1846, Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:266; see also *ibid.*, “Intemperance and Slavery,” 55–59; “Intemperance Viewed in Connection with Slavery,” 165–70; “Temperance and Anti-Slavery,” 205–9; “The American Temperance Movement, Slavery, and Prejudice,” 339–41.

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gaging interpretation of Douglass’s novella *The Heroic Slave*, see Takaki, “Not Afraid to Die,” 17–35.

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34. Van Deburg, "Frederick Douglass," 40–41; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 29

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65. "Temperance and Anti-Slavery," 206; "The Temperance Cause in America and Britain," 267–68, 265; Quarles, *Frederick Douglass*, 137–40.

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Chapter 8

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4. Gossett, *Race*, 84–143, 310–38.

5. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 59–60.

6. "The Claims of the Negro," 12 July 1854, *Life and Writings*, 2:307; Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 97–99; Gossett, *Race*, 84–122.

7. "Lesson of the Hour," 16 April 1888, *Douglass Papers* (LC), r16, p. 2; "The Color Line," *The North American Review* (June 1881), in *Life and Writings*, 4:348.

8. [A Comparison of Abolition Movements and Emancipation in Great Britain and the United States], [1892], *Douglass Papers* (LC), r16, p. 3; Emerson, *English Traits*, 298; Diary of tour of Europe and Africa, 20 Sept. 1886, *Douglass Papers* (LC), r1.

9. "The Coolie Trade," *New National Era*, 10 Aug. 1871, in *Life and Writings*, 4:262.

10. [A Comparison of Abolition Movements and Emancipation . . .], *Douglass Papers* (LC), r16, p. 2.

11. Diary, 2 Mar. 1887, *ibid.*, r1.

12. Toll, *Resurgence of Race*, 3–46. Toll argues that there were two major images of freedpeople during the first sixty years of emancipation. "The first, suggested by former slaves like Frederick Douglass and developed by T. Thomas Fortune and Booker T. Washington, depicted the freedpeople as an impoverished peasantry in need of social rehabilitation to survive the Darwinian struggle. The second, developed primarily by formally educated free Blacks like Alexander Crummell and George Washington Williams and then stated in a more radical and sophisticated way by DuBois, saw Blacks as a nascent ethnic group in need of cultural revitalization to understand themselves" (pp. 3–4).

13. Address Before the Tennessee Colored

Agricultural and Mechanical Association, 18 Sept. 1873, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 290; Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 97–129.

14. Address Before the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 290; Douglass to Rosetta Douglass Sprague, 5 Feb. 1890, Douglass Papers (LC), r32; *ibid.*, 137; “Slavery,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 7.

15. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:308; “Lecture on Slavery, No. 1,” 1 Dec. 1850, *ibid.*, 137; “Slavery,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 7.

16. Diary, 16 Feb. 1887, Douglass Papers (LC), r1; “Slavery,” n.d., *ibid.*, r19, p. 22.

17. [Lecture on Trip to Europe], [1887], p. 25; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 580; Douglass to Lewis Douglass, 20 Feb. 1887, Douglass Papers (LC), r32.

18. “Slavery,” Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 8, 5; “Slavery,” *ibid.*, r19, p. 9.

19. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 50.

20. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 76–77; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion*; Wood, *Black Majority*; Berlin, “Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society,” 44–78. The process of African American acculturation described and analyzed by Mullin, Wood, and Berlin for the colonial period obviously did not stop there. Clearly, though, nationhood, the ban on the importation of African slaves into the country after 1808, and a host of social and demographic factors significantly altered the process over time.

21. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 76–77.

22. *Ibid.*, 238–49.

23. Delany, *Principia of Ethnology*; Brown, *Black Man*; Blyden, “Negro in Ancient History”; Garnet, *Past and Present Condition*; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 38–39; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 586.

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26. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:304, 296, 300.

27. *Ibid.*, 300–301; Prichard, *Natural History of Man*, 1:139–41; Address Before the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechani-

cal Association, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 289; Volney, *Travels Through Syria and Egypt*, 1:80.

28. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:304, 296, 300; [The Negro as a Man], Douglass Papers (LC), r19, pp. 20–22.

29. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:300–302.

30. Diary, 18 Feb. 1887, Douglass Papers (LC), r1, p. 41; “Santo Domingo,” *ibid.*, r18, pp. 25, 27.

31. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:296; [The Negro as a Man], Douglass Papers (LC), r19, pp. 12–13.

32. “Oration at the Second Annual Exposition of the Colored People of North Carolina,” 1 Oct. 1880, in Douglass Papers (LC), r15, p. 160; “Farmers and Mechanics,” n.d., *ibid.*, r19, p. 24; Address Before the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association, Brotz, *Negro Thought*, 288; Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 199.

33. See, for example, *Lecture on Haiti . . . January 2, 1893* (Chicago, 1893), in either Douglass Papers (LC), r16, or *Life and Writings*, 4:478–90.

34. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:296, 300, 304; [The Negro as a Man], Douglass Papers (LC), r19, pp. 20–22.

35. Psalms 58:31; Okoye, *American Image of Africa*; Williams, “Black Journalism’s Opinions,” 224–35.

36. Newspaper fragment, clippings file (Frederick Douglass), Douglass Papers (LC), r10; *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 26 Feb. 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:173.

37. “The Letter of Benjamin Coates, Esq.,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, 17 Sept. 1858, *Life and Writings*, 5:416–17; “African Colonization,” *New National Era*, 19 Dec. 1872, *ibid.*, 4:301; Review of *A Tribute for the Negro*, by Wilson Armistead, *The North Star*, 7 Apr. 1849, *ibid.*, 1:384.

38. “The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People,” May 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:252; “African Civilization Society,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, Feb. 1859, *ibid.*, 445; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 422; *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 41, 101.

39. “Self-Made Men,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 17.

40. “Slavery,” n.d., *ibid.*, r19, p. 18.

41. “Farmers and Mechanics,” n.d., *ibid.*,

p. 10; Introduction, *Why the Colored American is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition*, *Life and Writings*, 4:475; "Why is the Negro Lynched?" [*The Lesson of the Hour*] (1894), *ibid.*, 508.

42. Smyth, "The African in Africa," in Bowen, *Addresses and Proceedings of the Congress on Africa*, 69.

43. Okoye, *American Image of Africa*; Drake, "Negro Americans and the Africa Interest"; Review of *A Tribute for the Negro*, in *Life and Writings*, 1:384.

44. Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 199; "What Shall Be Done with the Slaves If Emancipated?" *Douglass' Monthly*, Jan. 1862, *Life and Writings*, 3:189.

45. Frederick Douglass to Henry Clay, *The North Star*, 3 Dec. 1847, *Life and Writings*, 1:289. Colonization refers to efforts to resettle United States blacks outside the continental United States or in a separate section of it. Colonialism refers to the usurpation of one nation's sovereignty by another toward the end of imperial domination. The notion of the West's "civilizing mission"—attempting to refashion nonwestern nations in a western mold—is discussed in Jacobs, "Black American Perspectives."

46. "Horace Greeley and Colonization," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 26 Feb. 1852, *Life and Writings*, 2:173.

47. Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 70–84.

48. "Why is the Negro Lynched?" *Life and Writings*, 4:513; Sweet, *Black Images of America*, 82–84.

49. "Why is the Negro Lynched?" *Life and Writings*, 4:513.

50. "Composite Nation," 1867, Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 13; "The Color Line," *Life and Writings*, 4:345–46.

51. "The Races," Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 2; Douglass to Clay, *The North Star*, 3 Dec. 1847, *Life and Writings*, 1:288; *New National Era*, 27 Jan. 1870, p. 3; *New National Era and Citizen*, 19 June 1873, p. 2. For a succinct analysis of Grant's Native American policy see Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian*, 166–70.

52. "Composite Nation," Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 7.

53. *New National Era*, 14 July 1870, p. 2; [Toussaint L'Ouverture], n.d., Douglass Pa-

pers (LC), r19, p. 8; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 334; Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian*, 27–31.

54. "Lecture on Slavery, No. 7," 8 Dec. 1850, *Life and Writings*, 2:144–45.

55. Douglass to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 8 Mar. 1853, *ibid.*, 233; "The Claims of the Negro," *ibid.*, 308.

56. The conflict between Native American cultural imperatives and white American cultural imperatives, notably racism, is evident throughout Berkhofer, *White Man's Indian*. See also Nash, *Red, White, and Black*, and Jennings, *Invasion of America*.

57. "Self-Made Men," Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 1; Douglass to John Van Voorhis, 26 Mar. 1894, Douglass Papers (LC), r7.

58. "The War With Mexico," *The North Star*, 21 Jan. 1848, *Life and Writings*, 1:292; "The American Colonization Society," 31 May 1849, *ibid.*, 398; "Slavery and America's Bastard Republicanism," 10 Nov. 1845, in Blassingame, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 1:81.

59. "Our Southern Sister Republic," *New National Era*, 10 Aug. 1871, *Life and Writings*, 4:259, 260, 259–61.

60. *Ibid.*, 259.

61. "Composite Nation," Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 11; *New National Era*, 22 Apr. 1870, p. 2; "The Races," Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 2; Takaki notes the issue of Chinese cultural achievement in his assessment of Henry George's attitudes toward the Chinese (*Iron Cages*, 244).

62. "The Negro Exodus From the Gulf States," 12 Sept. 1879, *Life and Writings*, 4:325–26; *New National Era*, 14 July 1870, p. 2.

63. "Composite Nation," Douglass Papers (LC), r14, pp. 8, 12–14; *New National Era*, 27 Jan. 1870, p. 3; *ibid.*, 28 Apr. 1870, p. 2.

64. *New National Era*, 28 Apr. 1870, p. 2; "Recollections of the Anti-Slavery Conflict," Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 21–22.

65. "The Coolie Trade," *Life and Writings*, 4:263.

66. *Ibid.*

67. "The United States Cannot Remain Half-Slave and Half-Free," 16 Apr. 1883, *ibid.*, 370.

68. An Address to the Colored People of the United States, *The North Star*, 29 Sept. 1848, *ibid.*, 1:333.

69. “The Present and Future of the Colored Race in America,” May 1863, *ibid.*, 3:348–49.

70. “Exordium,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r17, p. 2; “The Future of the Colored Race,” *The North American Review*, May 1886, *Life and Writings*, 4:195.

71. “The Future of the Negro,” *The North American Review*, July 1884, *ibid.*, 412.

72. “The Future of the Colored Race,” *ibid.*, 195–96.

73. “The Negro Problem,” n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, pp. 18–20; “The United States Cannot Remain Half-Slave and Half-Free,” *Life and Writings*, 4:370; “The Future of the Colored Race,” *ibid.*, 196.

74. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 59; Douglass to [?], Douglass Papers (LC), r12; *Washington Chronicle*, 23 Dec. 1883 (clipping), *ibid.*, fol. 24 (“Race Problem”).

75. *New National Era*, 28 Apr. 1870; “The Present and Future of the Colored Race in America,” *Life and Writings*, 3:352; “Our Composite Nationality,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 18 Dec. 1869, p. 3.

76. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:306; “Our Composite Nation,” Douglass Papers (LC), r14, pp. 17, 1–2.

77. *New National Era*, 27 Jan. 1870, p. 3; “Our Composite Nation,” Douglass Papers (LC), r14, pp. 15, 24–25.

78. Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, cited in Milton Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 116.

79. Quoted by Stuart P. Sherman in his Introduction to *Essays and Poems of Emerson*, cited in *ibid.*, 117.

80. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:299, 306–7.

81. Lynch, *Edward Wilmot Blyden*, 72; Henrickson, “African Intellectual Influences on Black Americans,” 282.

Chapter 9

1. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 579.

2. Douglass to friends Hayden and Watson, 19 Nov. 1886, *Life and Writings*, 4:446.

3. Historian John S. Haller defines eth-

nology as “the comparative and developmental study of social man and his culture” (*Outcasts from Evolution*, 96).

4. *Ibid.*, 96–97.

5. *Ibid.*, 78–79; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 42–68.

6. Douglass’s interpretation of ethnology in general and the origins debate in particular bears out Stocking’s recent observation that race “was the central theoretical concern of pre-Darwinian anthropology” (*Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 40).

7. The most complete treatment of the “American school” of ethnology is William Stanton’s *Leopard’s Spots*. See also Chapter 3, “Science, Polygenesis, and the Proslavery Argument,” in Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 71–96.

8. Morton, *Crania Americana*; Morton, *Crania Aegyptica*; William Stanton, *Leopard’s Spots*, 25–53.

9. Nott, “The Mulatto a Hybrid,” 252–56. Nott’s theory of mulatto degenerationism relied heavily upon an anonymous article: [“Philanthropist”], “Vital Statistics of Negroes and Mulattoes,” 168–70. This article used data from the 1840 census to argue several claims, one of which was that mulattoes were more short-lived than full-blooded Negroes and whites; and, as a result, that neither miscegenation nor freedom for the Negro was desirable because the free Negro’s alarming mortality rate was due primarily to the high incidence of mulattoes among them and the Negro’s congenital ability to exist only under domination or slavery. William Stanton, *Leopard’s Spots*, 66–68.

10. Nott, *Two Lectures*; William Stanton, *Leopard’s Spots*, 68–72; both Caldwell, *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race*, and Colfax, *Evidence Against the Views of the Abolitionists* are cited in Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 73–74.

11. Gliddon, *Ancient Egypt*.

12. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*; William Stanton, *Leopard’s Spots*, 46–50, 66–72, 100–101, 104–9, 145–47; Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 75.

13. Samuel Stanhope Smith, *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion*; William Stanton, *Leopard’s Spots*, 3–10; Fredrickson,

Black Image, 72.

14. Bachman, *Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race*; Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 83; William Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 123–36, 170–73.
15. Anthropologist Marvin Harris notes the paucity of racial egalitarianism in the history of (white) Western anthropological thought during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Among the elite few were John Stuart Mill, Henry Thomas Buckle, Claude Helvétius, James Burnett (Lord Monboddo), and certain unnamed nineteenth-century “socialist and communist reformers and revolutionists.” (Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 16, 44–46, 83, 101, 128, 131.)
16. Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 127, n. 60; McPherson, *Struggle for Equality*, 135–53.
17. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:289–309; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 375; “The Races of Men,” [1858–61], Douglass Papers (LC), r14; “The Negro as a Man,” *ibid.*, r19. Other important black ethnological works include: James McCune Smith, “On the Fourteenth Query of Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on Virginia*,” 224–38; and Delany, *Principia of Ethnology*.
18. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 374–75.
19. *Ibid.*, 375–76. For a representative sampling of Douglass’s postwar addresses see Douglass Papers (LC), rs14–20, or *Life and Writings*, 4.
20. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 374–76; Douglass to friends Hayden and Watson, 19 Nov. 1886, *Life and Writings*, 4:446.
21. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:289, 308.
22. “The Negro as a Man,” Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 1; “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:291.
23. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:291.
24. “The Races,” Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 11.
25. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:292.
26. “The Races,” Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 11.
27. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:293–94, 306.
28. *Ibid.*, 307.

29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, 295.
31. *Ibid.*, 292, 295; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 115.
32. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:295.
33. Nott and McGee quoted in Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution*, 82, 107.
34. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:298.
35. *Ibid.*; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 36.
36. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:304–6; Douglass to Henry Blair, 16 Sept. 1862, *ibid.*, 3:284–85.
37. Douglass to Blair, 16 Sept. 1862, *ibid.*, 285.
38. Douglass, “The Negro Exodus From the Gulf States,” 12 Sept. 1879, *ibid.*, 4:325–26.
39. Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 71–96; 228–55; Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution*, see especially the Introduction; Thomas and Sillen, *Racism and Psychiatry*.
40. “The Races,” Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 7; “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:298.
41. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:303–4.
42. *Ibid.*, 303.
43. *Ibid.*
44. *Ibid.*
45. *Ibid.*, 290.
46. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 51–53, 251; Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 130–31.
47. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 26–27, 74–76, 113–15, 163–94; Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth Century*, 105–9.
48. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 26–27, 74–76, 113–15, 163–94.
49. Haller, *Outcasts from Evolution*, 3–68; William Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, 25–53; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 127–28, 214–22, 224–27, 229, 260–63, 300–301; an interesting Marxist analysis of the contemporary “IQ” crisis is Lawler, *IQ, Heritability, and Racism*.
50. Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 82–83, 98; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 113–14, 161–233; Haller, *Outcasts*

from *Evolution*, 95–120; Stocking, *Shaping of American Anthropology*, is a good introduction to Boasian anthropology.

51. Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 100–101.

52. “The Negro as a Man,” Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 8.

53. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:294–95; “The Races,” Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 7.

54. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:293; “Composite Nation,” Douglass Papers (LC), r14, p. 22.

55. Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 55; Harris, “Race,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, cited in Thomas and Sillen, *Racism and Psychiatry*, 27–28.

56. Jordan, *White Over Black*, 533–38; Fredrickson, *Black Image*, 2, 97–98, 101, 125–26.

57. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:304–5.

58. *Ibid.*

59. “The Condition of the Freedmen,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 8 Dec. 1883, *ibid.*, 4:408.

60. “Southern Barbarism,” 1886, *ibid.*, 434–35.

61. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 45.

62. *Ibid.*, 82–83.

63. “The Demands of the Hour,” *New National Era*, 6 Apr. 1871, *Life and Writings*, 4:242; “Why is the Negro Lynched?” *ibid.*, 515–16.

64. “The Work Before Us,” *The Independent*, 27 Aug. 1868, *ibid.*, 206–10.

65. Coleman, *Biology in the Nineteenth-Century*, 66–79.

66. *Ibid.*; Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution*, 184–86, 234–69.

67. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:306.

68. *Ibid.*, 306–7. Carl Degler briefly discusses Israel Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot* (1908) in *Out of Our Past*, 295–96.

69. “The Condition of the Freedmen,” *Life and Writings*, 4:404.

70. “The Claims of the Negro,” *Life and Writings*, 2:307.

Chapter 10

1. Miller, “Frederick Douglass,” 226; “The Present Condition and Future Prospects of the Negro People,” May 1853, *Life and Writings*, 2:245.

2. “Self-Made Men,” [1874?], copy in Douglass Collection (HUMSC), 39 (for another copy see Douglass Papers, [LC], r18).

3. Franklin, *Memoirs*; Franklin, *Poor Richard*; Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man*, 9–24.

4. Cotton Mather, “A Christian at His Calling,” 23.

5. Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man*, 4–6.

6. *Ibid.*, 77–98.

7. *Ibid.*, 108–20; Carnegie, *Autobiography*; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 376; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 25 Apr. 1868.

8. “Self-Made Men,” Douglass Collection (HUMSC), 6–7; Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man*, 68–69.

9. “Self-Made Men,” Douglass Collection (HUMSC), 15.

10. *Ibid.*, 15, 5–6.

11. *Ibid.*, 2, 1–2.

12. *Ibid.*, 10; Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man*, 115.

13. “Self-Made Men,” Douglass Collection (HUMSC), 10, 11.

14. *Ibid.*, 12.

15. *Ibid.*, 9.

16. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

17. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

18. *Ibid.*, 21, 22.

19. *Ibid.*, 25, 22.

20. *Ibid.*, 31, 18, 19.

21. *Ibid.*, 13, 14, 23, 18–24.

22. *Ibid.*, 19, 24.

23. *Ibid.*, 13, 39, 25–26.

24. *Ibid.*, 27–29.

25. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

26. *Ibid.*, 31–32.

27. *Ibid.*, 32.

28. *Ibid.*, 34, 35.

29. *Ibid.*, 37, 38.

30. *Ibid.*; *Omni* (July 1980), 38.

31. Emerson, *Representative Men*, 10; Emerson, “Heroism,” in *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 18, 11.

32. “Self-Made Men,” Douglass Collection

(HUMSC), 7, 8.

33. Emerson, *Representative Men*, 39, 38, 12; Douglass, "John Brown," in Quarles, *Blacks on John Brown*, 56–57; "Pictures and Progress," n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r18, p. 21.
34. Emerson, *Representative Men*, 9; "Self-Made Men," Douglass Collection (HUMSC), 4; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 213.
35. Emerson, *Representative Men*, 17; "Self-Made Men," Douglass Collection (HUMSC), 4, 5.
36. Miller, "Frederick Douglass," 232.
37. "William the Silent," n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 22.
38. Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln, n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19, fol. 2, pp. 1–2; *ibid.*, fol. 3, pp. 12 (fragment), 22.
39. Emerson, *Representative Men*, 24; Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln, Douglass Papers (LC), r19, fol. 3, p. 24; "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln," 14 Apr. 1876, *Life and Writings*, 4:313.
40. Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln, Douglass Papers (LC), r19, fol. 3, pp. 23, 4, 3, 2, 24.
41. "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln," *Life and Writings*, 4:316.
42. *Ibid.*, 319, 312.
43. Quarles, *Blacks on John Brown*, xiv.
44. *Ibid.*, xiii; Douglass on John Brown (fragment), 2 May 1883, John Brown fol., Douglass Papers (LC), r19; "The Presidential Campaign of 1860," 1 Aug. 1860, *Life and Writings*, 2:517; "John Brown: An Address," Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 61.
45. "John Brown: An Address," Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 61.
46. *Ibid.*, 61, 62, 65.
47. "John Brown: An Address," Douglass Papers (LC), r19, p. 55; Miller, "Frederick Douglass," 230, 231.
48. Miller, "Frederick Douglass," 225. "Capt. John Brown Not Insane," *Douglass' Monthly*, Nov. 1859, *Life and Writings*, 2:458, 459, 460.
49. Quarles, *Blacks on John Brown*, xiii; "Capt. John Brown Not Insane," *Life and Writings*, 2:460.
50. "A Black Hero," *Douglass' Monthly*, Aug. 1861, *Life and Writings*, 3:134; "The Heroic Slave" (1853), appendix, *ibid.*, 5. "The Heroic Slave" originally appeared in

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52. "The Douglass Institute," Oct. 1865, *Life and Writings*, 4:179; "The Color Line," *ibid.*, 344–45.
53. "The Douglass Institute," *ibid.*, 179.
54. "Toussaint L'Ouverture," n.d., Douglass Papers (LC), r19, copy 1, pp. 3, 7, 8, 9; "The Douglass Institute," *Life and Writings*, 4:179.
55. "Toussaint L'Ouverture," Douglass Papers (LC), r19, copy 1, pp. 29–30, 2.
56. *Ibid.*, 16, 17.
57. *Ibid.*, copy 2, pp. 10, 15, 11.
58. Henry Wilson, *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power*, 1:499–500; Miller, "Frederick Douglass," 227.
59. Walker, "Frederick Douglass," 227, 209–61; Weissman, "Frederick Douglass," 725–51; Sulloway, "Freud as Conquistador," 25–31, 27.
60. Pascal, *Design and Truth in Autobiography*; Walker, "Frederick Douglass," 226.
61. Weissman, "Frederick Douglass," 738–39; Douglass, *Life and Times*, 50–51.
62. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 72–73.
63. *Ibid.*, 84–85.
64. *Ibid.*, 85; Smith, Introduction, Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, xix; Miller, "Frederick Douglass," 227.
65. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 69; Walker, "Frederick Douglass," n. 4, p. 365.
66. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 139–40.
67. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 75.
68. *Ibid.*, 91.
69. "Emancipation of Women," 28 May 1888, in Foner, *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights*, 116; "It is Not to the Rich But to the Poor That We Must Look," 23 Aug. 1852, *Life and Writings*, 5:245.
70. Weissman, "Frederick Douglass," 743.
71. Douglass, *Life and Times*, 479.
72. Smith, Introduction, Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, xxv; John Fitzgerald Kennedy to Rosa L. Gragg, 2 Mar. 1961, on exhibit in Frederick Douglass Institute—Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.
73. Miller, "Frederick Douglass," 225.

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