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FREDERICK DOUGLASS:
AN AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATOR

by

Jerry Paul Ross

Abstract of a Dissertation
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of The University of Southern Mississippi
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ABSTRACT

FREDERICK DOUGLASS:
AN AMERICAN ADULT EDUCATOR

by Jerry Paul Ross

May 2010

Throughout his life, Frederick Douglass struggled to be something extraordinary. He rose from a life in slavery to become the most prominent African-American of his day and a leading figure in the abolitionist movement. Lost in the discussion of his life are the adult education roles that he played throughout his life and career. Beginning while he was still a slave and extending until his death, he worked to educate adults in order to transform individual lives and society as a whole. Douglass was primarily engaged in adult education in the fields of religious adult education, social movements, popular education, and political activism.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

ADULT EDUCATION AND DOUGLASS’ STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

"Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation are those who want crops without plowing up the ground—they want rain without thunder and lightning." 1

Although adult education is a relatively young field, the practice of adult education has existed for centuries. Because adult education has only existed as an academic discipline and an organized field of practice since the early twentieth century, it is useful to explore the historical roots of adult education in order to provide a broader understanding of the discipline. Setting this foundation will only serve to strengthen the discipline and help the scholars in the field understand where we have come from as a discipline. Adult education takes on many forms and is provided by different institutions and a variety of people in a multitude of settings. One way to explore the history of adult education is to look at how those who have not traditionally been considered adult educators have worked to educate adults. Many individuals, who seemingly have no connection to adult education, have engaged in adult education as both learners and as teachers.

One person whose life is worth examining from the perspective of adult education is Frederick Douglass. Douglass was the most prominent nineteenth century African-American and his life has been explored through a variety of ways. Prior research, although extensive, has ignored the educational role of Douglass’ work. Douglass has gone by many titles including abolitionist, orator, journalist, and diplomat. One label that is not used is educator and certainly not adult educator. Douglass took on many causes

and issues during his life, and his approach led him to try to influence and educate his readers and listeners. In this research project, I detail Douglass’ role as an adult educator through a variety of means and venues. My project will not be purely biographical, although that will be part of it, but rather I will try to situate Frederick Douglass’ life and work within adult education primarily through the areas of religion, abolitionism, journalism, and political activism. In each of these four areas, I show how Douglass’ work was adult education and which contemporary adult education theories most appropriately apply to his speeches and writings. From his time as a slave, through his illustrious life and career, Douglass was engaged in adult education whether it was fully intentional or not.

Statement of Problem

It is my belief that Douglass made significant contributions to the history of adult education and by exploring this history, the field of adult education will be stronger. Frederick Douglass, whose original name was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, was born a slave in Talbot County, Maryland in 1818, and his time in bondage also took him to inner city Baltimore, Maryland. He was almost entirely self-educated although Sophia Auld, the wife of his master, aided him by beginning to teach him to read until her husband, Hugh Auld, made her stop. He also learned how to read and write through watching others write and by persuading white children into helping him learn to read. The rest of his education was completely on his own and would continue throughout his entire life. Douglass also educated himself through the *Columbian Orator* and this collection of speeches, poems, and essays greatly influenced his speaking and writing style. While he was still a slave, Douglass engaged in his first efforts to educate others.
He established two different Sabbath schools and had more than thirty slaves of different ages participate in the schools, which primarily focused on learning to read the New Testament although later his focus shifted more towards general literacy.

Once he escaped to freedom at the age of twenty, Douglass quickly became a star on the abolitionist speaking circuit. It was said by Douglass’ neighbor in Rochester, New York, “Frederick Douglass had his education in four great schools, graduating from one to the other in natural sequence and with honors - Methodism, Garrisonism, Journalism, and Political Campaignism.” In each of these components of his life, Douglass not only received education, but also sought to educate others. These four areas of Douglass’ life serve as the organizational framework for this dissertation and the chapters in it. His powerful oratory skills were perfectly suited to Douglass’ educational efforts. Douglass was also an influential speaker on the Lyceum circuit during the 1850s into the 1870s and arguably he represented the most important African-American who participated in the Lyceum.

Douglass’ writing career was also highly educational as his autobiographies put a face to slavery. He had a diverse writing career that included three autobiographies as well as work as a journalist and editor. His three autobiographies were written during his time in freedom and describe his life from different perspectives. Each of these autobiographies provides information on different aspects of his life in slavery and in freedom as well as his views on the state of African-Americans in the United States. Early in his life of freedom, Douglass began writing for William Lloyd Garrison’s The Liberator. This gave him a taste for journalism that led him to found the North Star,

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which later became the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. Douglass, in his writings, provided educational information on issues related to abolition as well as race relations. In his writings, he sought to inspire fellow abolitionists to action as well educate them as to the current state of affairs. Douglass’ life stretched from his beginnings in Maryland to Massachusetts then to New York and finally to Washington, D.C. Through this study, I will work to shed new light on how Douglass was engaged in adult education from his own education to the work he carried out to educate others throughout his life.

**Connection to Adult Education**

As I will detail below, there is an abundance of source material from and about Frederick Douglass. For this research project, the challenge will be to make the connection between what Douglass said and wrote, as well as what is known about his life, and adult education in order to show that he did contribute to adult education. There are many different purposes of adult education, but a central tension has and continues to be over whether adult education should mostly benefit the individual or society. At different times in his life, Douglass was an advocate for both purposes although his overall emphasis was on social transformation and this project will show how he walked the line between adult education to benefit the individual and societal transformation.

Merriam and Brockett have synthesized the various typologies related to goals and purposes of adult education and these typologies are useful in showing how Douglass’ work relates to adult education.3 Douglass’ work cuts across many of the categories in the typologies. For example, the category that Bryson refers to as Relational and Darkenwald and Merriam call individual self-actualization is relevant for much of

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Douglass’ work. He often spoke about the importance of self-reliance and one of his most famous speeches is titled “Self-made Men.” Although Douglass did often speak and write about improvement of the self, his main message was aimed at improving society. Bryson has called this type of adult education political while Darkenwald and Merriam label it adult education for social transformation. Darkenwald and Merriam’s description of this type of adult education is most relevant because they situate it in terms that are much more radical and thus more appropriate for Frederick Douglass’ work. According to Merriam and Brockett, adult educators in this area “have a more radical agenda of empowering adults to bring about change, rather than fitting into the status quo.”

In line with this more radical view of the purpose of adult education, it is important to consider the work of Paulo Freire when evaluating how Douglass’ work can be considered adult education. Freire, the Brazilian educator, worked during the mid-twentieth century to liberate oppressed farmers in his native country. To Freire, the ways that adult education empowers both individuals and society could not be separated. Freire made a key distinction between his type of education, which he called problem-posing education, and traditional education, which he referred to as banking education. In banking education, the teacher is the source for information and hands down information to passive students. In problem posing education, the teacher and student work together to explore their sociocultural situation. This type of education leads to an ongoing process of conscientization where the learner becomes more aware of the oppressive nature of society and takes on a role in social change. As one can see in Douglass’ own

6. Ibid.
life, he became aware of how slave society was oppressive to him. He escaped and sought to change society.

**Douglass’ Early Life and Education**

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Tuckahoe, Maryland in 1817. His mother was Harriet Bailey and it is believed that his father was a white man, possibly her master. Douglass, who was born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, was separated from his mother when he was an infant, which was a common practice at the time, and he only saw her four or five times during his entire life since she died when Douglass was about seven years old. Douglass began his life as the slave of Colonel Edward Lloyd who owned as many as 1,000 slaves.

When Douglass was about seven or eight years old, he left Lloyd’s plantation and was sent to Baltimore, Maryland to serve Hugh Auld, who was the brother of Lloyd’s son-in-law Thomas Auld. This move to Baltimore was one of the transformational moments in Douglass’ life as it allowed him many new opportunities that he would not have received had he stayed on the plantation. The life of urban slaves was quite different from those on plantations. Urban slaves tended to perform household duties and less physically demanding work than those on plantations. Douglass himself said about his move to Baltimore, it “laid the foundation and opened the gateway, to all my subsequent prosperity.”

The setting in Baltimore was more important to Douglass’ development rather than the specific work that he performed, as he was able to have a measure of autonomy and begin the process of working towards freedom.

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In Baltimore, Douglass was put under the direction of Sophia Auld, who was Hugh’s wife, and was specifically tasked to help take care of their son, Thomas. Even though he was but a child when he left the plantation to go to Baltimore, Douglass was already in many respects transitioning into adulthood as he was performing many adult roles. He was to be a caretaker for a small child even though he was still a child himself. He was now responsible for others and himself without the strong support system of a family since his mother was deceased and he never knew his father. The fact that Douglass was acting and performing as an adult in a child’s body made his efforts to learn to read and write even more amazing. Douglass had to fight custom, even if not law, to obtain literacy as teaching slaves to read was de facto but not de jure illegal.8

Sophia Auld, who Douglass called “a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings,” sowed the seeds of literacy for Douglass.9 Soon after coming to Baltimore, Sophia began teaching Douglass his ABC’s out of kindness and practicality and soon progressed to teaching him to spell words of a few letters. To Sophia, teaching Douglass to read was only natural and would help him to be a better slave. Douglass loved learning from the very beginning and picked up these new skills quickly. Unfortunately, these early lessons did not last long because Hugh soon put an end to Sophia’s efforts. To Hugh, teaching a slave to read was irresponsible and potentially dangerous. Hugh said that if you teach a slave to read “there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit

him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. It would make him discontented and unhappy.”\textsuperscript{10}

In many respects, Hugh Auld was exactly right because learning to read did make Douglass discontented and unhappy with his life as a slave and he began to want something more for his life. He also began to realize that he was being deprived an opportunity and actively sought to obtain new knowledge. Douglass said about these events and Hugh’s reaction, “from that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom.”\textsuperscript{11} It is clear that this was the next transformational moment in Douglass’ own education and would start him on the path that would lead him to the eventual life he would have. Douglass also said about these events and this time, “in learning to read, I owe almost as much to the bitter opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress. I acknowledge the benefit of both.”\textsuperscript{12} By depriving young Douglass of the opportunity to continue to learn to read and write, Hugh Auld inadvertently started him on the path that would lead him to being one of the greatest abolitionist orators and the most prominent African-American of his day. Both the act of learning to read and the denial of the ability to continue his studies served as catalysts to inspire Douglass to strive for more.

After Hugh Auld put a stop to his wife’s instruction of Douglass, Sophia became very vigilant about keeping Douglass from learning. Douglass was not allowed to be alone in a room for a long period of time, as it was feared he would be determined to learn to read. Even with the limitations imposed by Hugh and Sophia Auld, Douglass

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 37.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 38.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
found creative ways to obtain literacy. Douglass persuaded the white boys he would meet on the streets of Baltimore as he was running errands for the Aulds. Often these white boys were poor and Douglass found ways to entice them to help him learn. Douglass would smuggle bread out of the Auld’s house and would use it pay the white boys for lessons.

As Douglass’ self-education progressed, he was able to obtain materials that would greatly influence his education and his views on slavery. He knew that slavery was wrong, but when he obtained a copy of *The Columbian Orator*, he was able to learn how to articulate exactly why it was so evil. The *Orator* was a widely read schoolbook at the time. Caleb Bingham originally published it in 1797 and over 200,000 copies had been sold by 1820.\(^{13}\) There were many other similar readers during this time period and they focused on teaching individuals how to write and speak in a persuasive manner. *The Columbian Orator* had a distinct anti-slavery slant and was influenced by a tradition of “Christian radicalism.”\(^ {14}\) Bingham also stressed that educated individuals should devote themselves to service to the community and that this was a shared responsibility.\(^ {15}\) The idea of service and responsibility had a profound impact on Douglass and undoubtedly helped lead him to devote his life to many reform movements. In the *Orator*, Bingham had many dialogues that were designed to educate by showing the reader how to make persuasive arguments. Through these dialogues, Bingham also stressed the importance of students learning by doing rather than just reading.\(^ {16}\) The idea that students learn by

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15. Ibid, 466.
Doing is one of the most important precepts of adult education and although the *Orator* was designed for children, Douglass applied it to his own adult education.

In particular, the dialogue between a master and slave in this book heavily influenced Douglass. This dialogue was influential for Douglass as he began to understand exactly what freedom meant and why slavery was denying him these basic rights. Douglass was also influenced by Sheridan’s speeches on behalf of Catholic emancipation in *The Columbian Orator*. According to Douglass, “the moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder.”17 Douglass began to view learning to read as having a certain duality in that yes, he was inspired, but he was also anguished over the fact that he was still a slave. According to McFeely, *The Columbian Orator* was a book of liberties, of men exhorting mankind to a sense of higher callings, and what was more, it did not ignore that denial of liberty that was slavery.”18 One can easily ascertain why Douglass was so drawn to this book and how it was so influential in his life. Douglass’ entire life was about a sense of higher callings. Douglass also used this book to practice his speaking ability by reading out loud the great speeches in the book.19 In addition, *The Columbian Orator* contained instructions on how to be successful as a public speaker with particular emphasis on the art of persuasion.20

Douglass also used Baltimore newspapers to both further his education in general and to learn more about slavery and the anti-slavery movement. For the first time when he was about twelve or thirteen, Douglass heard the word abolitionist. He was now aware

17. Douglass, 42.
18. McFeely, 35.
19. Ibid.
20. See the preface of *The Columbian Orator*. 
of the movement that would eventually lead to both his stardom and the destruction of slavery. By this time, Douglass wanted to escape to freedom, but he did not think he was ready. He wanted to learn to write so he set about trying to acquire this skill to go with his reading ability and also so that he could forge a pass that would help him as he made his way to a free state. Douglass began learning to write as he worked in the Baltimore shipyards and mimicked the shipyard workers as they labeled parts for which area of the ship they belonged. Again, Douglass turned to the white boys on the streets as he manipulated them into helping him learn to write by claiming to be able to write as well as they could. Finally, he used the spelling books brought home by young Thomas Auld and copied from them until he learned how to write as well as he could. Through ingenuity and perseverance, Douglass had obtained literacy. Although he had relied on others for assistance, Douglass was largely able to do so through self-directed learning, which is one of the hallmarks of adult education.

Douglass’ personal growth had not gone unnoticed and that, combined with the 1831 revolt by Nat Turner, led to Hugh Auld sending him back to his brother Thomas. In 1833, Douglass was sent to St. Michaels, Maryland where he would leave the security and marginally better life of an urban slave for that of a plantation worker. Since he was a child, Douglass had been a house servant so this was a major change for him. Back on the plantation, Douglass began making plans to escape from slavery although it would not happen for several years. On the trip from Baltimore to St. Michaels, Douglass watched the routes that steamboats took as they made their way towards Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.\(^{21}\) Douglass was now faced with an environment where he was forced to

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\(^{21}\) Douglass, 49.
work harder than he ever had before at the direction of brutal masters and overseers while at the same time he was given less food and shelter. In short, he was deprived of many of the facets of life that he had grown accustomed to in Baltimore.

This was a dark period for Douglass, but in spite of that, he took on his first work to educate others. Douglass’ work during this time illustrates how adult education during trying times can lift up both the learner and the teacher. During his time in St. Michaels, Douglass began, along with a white man named Mr. Wilson, a Sabbath school for slaves. In this Sabbath school, Douglass and others sought to teach other slaves how to read the New Testament although the efforts were short lived. After only three meetings, two white teachers from the Methodist Sabbath school broke up Douglass’ school by force. The fear of a violent slave insurrection weighed heavily on the action by the white religious leaders as they asked Douglass if he was trying “to be another Nat Turner.” With this school, Douglass embarked on his first efforts to educate other adults and interestingly this first effort was religious adult education. Throughout his life Douglass had a tenuous relationship with organized religion, which will be discussed more in chapter two. Douglass saw the hypocrisy in his master’s using religion to reinforce slavery and this caused Douglass to struggle with religion.

Shortly after the Sabbath school, Thomas Auld rented Douglass out to an individual named Edward Covey for one year, which was a common practice at the time. Douglass was now a field hand on a farm, which was work he was greatly unaccustomed

22. Ibid, 53.
23. McFeely, 43.
24. Ibid.
25. Douglass, 53.
to doing.²⁶ Covey was a brutal master and seldom a week went by where Douglass was not whipped, especially during the first six months. At around the six-month mark, Douglass had a confrontation with Covey that Douglass was lucky to survive.²⁷ This event was a turning point for Douglass as he became more resolved to escape and to help other slaves. According to Douglass, this event “rekindled the few expiring embers of freedom, and revived a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free.”²⁸

After his one year of forced service to Covey, Douglass was sent to live and work on the farm of William Freeland for the year of 1835.²⁹ Although the work was still very hard for Douglas, Freeland was not as brutal as Covey, thus making Douglass’ time there less difficult. Freeland owned only two slaves, who were Henry and John Harris, and he relied on rented labor for the rest of his work. Soon after arriving on the Freeland farm, Douglass began convincing Henry and John that he could help them learn to read and he instilled in them a desire to do so. Henry and John were not only able to obtain used spelling books, they were able to recruit others who were interested in learning to read.³⁰ Douglass began holding a second Sabbath school at the home of a freed slave. Douglass’ second effort at a Sabbath school was much more successful and at one point he taught approximately forty slaves who were mostly adult men and women from surrounding farms and plantations.³¹ In this Sabbath school, Douglass focused less on learning to read the New Testament and more on literacy in general. Douglass was profoundly impacted

²⁶. Ibid, 54.
²⁷. Ibid, 60-65.
²⁸. Ibid, 65.
²⁹. Ibid, 68.
³⁰. Ibid, 70.
³¹. Ibid, 71.
by this early educational effort and he said “I look back to those Sundays with an amount of pleasure not to be expressed. They were great days to my soul. The work of instructing my dear fellow slaves was the sweetest engagement with which I was ever blessed.”

Douglass continued this Sabbath school almost the entire year he was at the Freeland farm and even expanded it by teaching a handful of slaves two or three nights a week. At the Freeland farm, through his educational efforts, Douglass became a leader and this newfound leadership would be a role that Douglass would play in the African-American community for the duration of his life. Douglass’ leadership role in this Sabbath school also had a transformational effect for some of his pupils. Reflecting back about the Sabbath school in 1855, Douglass said “I have met several slaves from Maryland, who were once my scholars; and who obtained their freedom, I doubt not, partly in consequence of the ideas imparted to them in that school. I have had various employments during my short life; but I look back to none with more satisfaction, than to that afforded by my Sunday school.”

Clearly, the Sabbath schools had a transformational effect for both Douglass and the learners. Douglass’ time as teacher, one of his only more traditional education roles, made him better prepared for all the important later roles he would take.

Towards the end of his time at the Freeland farm, Douglass made his first escape attempt, which failed and Douglass was briefly imprisoned. Although Thomas Auld threatened to send Douglass south to work, a dangerous threat to any slave, Auld instead sent Douglass back to Baltimore to work for Hugh Auld. Here, Douglass was able to

32. Ibid.
33. Ibid, 300.
34. Ibid, 79-80.
regain some of the independence that urban slaves had and he was hired out to learn how
to become a caulker for a ship builder. In his second stint in Baltimore, Douglass learned
a trade and regained something closer to freedom. In Baltimore, Douglass was able to
continue to learn and save some money for himself. Both of these things would serve him
well when he eventually was able to successfully escape from slavery.

During his second stint in Baltimore, Douglass participated in an adult education
group called the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society. This group of mostly free
black men in Baltimore met regularly to discuss issues and Douglass was the only slave
who participated in the group. During these meetings, Douglass engaged in debates and
was also able to learn more about how to secure his freedom. Douglass said about the
society, “I owe much to the society of these young men.”35 Douglass’ role in adult
education had been somewhat backwards up until this point. He had primarily been a
teacher of adults when he was back on the farms in Maryland, but now he was a
participant in adult education and this participation helped prepare him for the next phase
of his life. According to Douglass, “I had on the Eastern Shore been only a teacher, when
in the company with other slaves, but now there were colored persons who could instruct
me.”36 Douglass also stood out when he participated in this group partially because he
was the only slave and in part because his talent was obvious. Douglass was “assigned a
prominent part in its debates.”37 This prominent role is what Douglass would often take
on whether it was as an abolitionist speaker or social reformer. Douglass was certainly

35. McFeely, 68.
36. Douglass, 336.
37. Ibid.
interested in leadership roles, but it is clear that others recognized that having Douglass as a part of the cause was good for everyone involved.

While Douglass was in Baltimore for the second period of his life, he was able to gain some limited autonomy. It was a common practice, especially in urban areas, for slaves to be able to hire themselves out for work with the understanding that some or all of the money earned would be returned to the slave owner.\textsuperscript{38} Douglass was able to negotiate such an arrangement with Hugh Auld. Douglass was able to hire out his own time with the understanding that he would pay Auld an agreed upon sum of money each week, which was three dollars plus board and money for his tools. This amount was around six dollars per week and Douglass was allowed to keep all money earned above this amount as long as he paid Auld each week.\textsuperscript{39} This arrangement worked well for several months until Douglass failed to pay Auld one week because Douglass was unable to reach Auld. Auld rescinded the agreement and forced Douglass to return to him all money that he earned from hiring himself out as a caulker.

Douglass was changed by this incident with Auld and resolved to escape from slavery. On September 3, 1838, he left Auld for the last time and eventually made his way to New York. After a short time in New York, Douglass left New York because there was little work for a caulker so he made his way to New Bedford, Massachusetts. Here in New Bedford, he found work as a caulker and changed his name from Frederick Bailey to Frederick Douglass, after briefly going by Frederick Johnson.\textsuperscript{40} Here in New Bedford, Douglass also first became acquainted with the \textit{Liberator}. Reading William

\textsuperscript{38} McFeely, 63.
\textsuperscript{39} Douglass, 87.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 94-95.
Lloyd Garrison’s paper would be another transformational moment for Douglass and would start him down the path for the next phase of his life that would lead him to prominence and notoriety. According to Douglass, “the paper became my meat and my drink. My soul was set all on fire. Its sympathy for my brethren in bonds—its scathing denunciations of slaveholders—its faithful exposures of slavery—and its powerful attacks upon the upholders of the institution—sent a thrill of joy through my soul, such as I had never felt before!”

The power of the message of the *Liberator* helped give Douglass a voice that would prepare him to take the stage as an abolitionist speaker. This newfound voice would lead him to take the stage for the first time at an abolitionist convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts on August 11, 1841. Although evidence is limited, this speech was well received. A minister at the meeting said Douglass spoke with “intellectual power.” John Collins, who was a leader of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, immediately offered Douglass the opportunity to become a regular speaker for the abolitionist movement. Douglass reluctantly accepted and began speaking primarily about his story, which later evolved into speaking out about the evils of slavery. What really set Douglass apart from the other former slaves in the abolitionist movement was his willingness to speak out against discrimination in all forms and not just slavery. He was a vocal advocate for women’s rights as well as against Jim Crow laws. He also spoke frequently about religion and the hypocrisy in slave owner’s religion. Douglass often spoke about the discrimination he faced in the north, once having said “prejudice against

41. Ibid, 96.
42. Ibid.
43. McFeely, 88.
44. Douglass, 365.
color is stronger north than south; it hangs around my neck like a heavy weight. It presses me out from among my fellow men, and, although I have met it at every step the three years I have been out of southern slavery, I have been able, in spite of its influence, to take good care of myself."  

This is an example of Douglass’ work to make the abolitionist movement more radical and was a source of division within the movement, which will be discussed more in chapter three. Douglass’ orator skills made him a star and led to the next phases of his life as author, journalist, political advocate, and public servant.

Statement of Hypothesis

Very little, if any, of Douglass’ educational work would be classified as formal adult education, at least on the basis of Merriam and Brockett’s definition of formal adult education, but Douglass’ work does fall into their three categories of informal, nonformal, and popular education. Through these categories, Douglass was able to contribute to adult education and educate people through persuasion. Merriam and Brockett provide useful definitions of formal, informal, nonformal, and popular education. Public and private institutions at all levels provide formal education. Informal adult education is often unplanned and incidental learning that takes place in everyday life. The definition of nonformal adult education, which Merriam and Brockett borrow from Coombs, is “any organized educational activity outside the established formal system.” Finally, popular adult education is “designed for the people by the people; an

45. McFeely, 94.
46. Merriam and Brockett, 14.
47. Ibid.
instrument of ideological class struggle." 48 This type of education is often viewed as revolutionary from the perspective of social justice and is often designed to cause people to reevaluate the oppression in their lives. The most popular example of this type of adult education is Paulo Freire's literacy education work in Brazil.

All three of these areas are very relevant for this discussion of Douglass. For example, Douglass' work in the Lyceum circuit could easily be classified as popular education because it was often a mixture of entertainment and education. Douglass was an entertainer, but he used his speaking style to try to expose and break down the oppression in American society as well as uplift the masses through his speaking. Douglass' work with his fellow slaves in the Sabbath schools fits nicely in the category of nonformal education. In addition, Douglass' newspaper work was informal, popular adult education because he was trying to persuade through the publication of his papers although some could argue that this work would also fall into popular adult education. Certainly those who were reading the North Star were influenced by what Douglass wrote in his paper. It is also important to not forget another avenue for adult education and that is Douglass' own education. His own education was primarily through self-directed learning and one can see how his own education extended throughout his life.

By these respected definitions of adult education, it is apparent that Douglass was clearly engaged in adult education. Douglass worked to educate by persuasion and educate for personal and societal transformation. He helped to change the abolitionist movement and to make it more radical, thus helping to bring about the end of slavery. Once it is established that Douglass is part of the history of adult education, there are

48. Ibid.
several issues that come up, which must be answered. First, how specifically was Douglass’ work compatible with adult education standards in each of the four areas of religion, abolitionism, journalism, and political activism? Douglass’ correspondence, as well as his autobiographies, will be useful to understand his mindset and how he viewed his role in each of these areas. Next, how effective was Douglass in each of these four areas? I must show how influential others thought Douglass to be. For example, did other abolitionists view him as an asset or liability as he gained more experience and became more outspoken? Finally, what contemporary adult education theories are most applicable to Douglass’ life and work? Although running the risk of presentism, I must show what contemporary adult education theories, such as transformational learning, apply to Douglass’ work.

Literature Review

The literature related to Frederick Douglass is quite extensive and adequately covers many aspects of his life. Frederick Douglass’ story has been told many different times, but never through the lens of adult education. One area where there is a gap in the literature relates to the educational roles that Douglass undertook during his life. The reason for this is primarily that Douglass was never engaged in formal educational activities, but he was connected to nonformal education during a large portion of his adult life. Most of the literature related to Douglass focuses on his role as an orator, abolitionist, and social reformer, but it does not explore how these roles are educative. Thus, in this dissertation, I will extend the existing literature to include Douglass’ role in adult education. I will primarily take on this task through the four areas of religion, abolitionism, journalism, and political activism. Each of these four areas is an important
part of adult education and adult education has operated in all those areas during various points of its history. Scholars have been largely silent on the educational nature of Douglass’ work in these four areas, but there is extensive literature related to his work in the four areas. In addition, there are several biographies that provide an overall understanding of Douglass’ life. Most well known and extensive is the literature related to Douglass’ work as an abolitionist.

Douglass was a prolific writer and published three autobiographies during his life. Although there is duplicative information in all three works, they are each useful for understanding his life from his perspective. The first autobiography, *Narrative of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, is the most famous and was published in 1845 and the title of this work is the inspiration for the title of this dissertation. In writing this work, Douglass achieved a greater degree of notoriety as well as financial and personal independence. William Lloyd Garrison provided the introduction to this autobiography. In 1855, Douglass published the second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* with an introduction by James McCune Smith. Although many of the stories in this edition are consistent with the *Narrative*, Douglass provides more details in 1855 and has updated it with information on this crucial decade of his work in the abolitionist movement. Finally, in 1893, just two years before his death, Douglass published the last autobiography, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. In this volume, he has provided an update on some of his post-Civil War work, but few insights into his development.

There are many single volume biographies of Frederick Douglass that have consistent themes and adequately provide an overall picture of Douglass’ life. The
biographies of Frederick Douglass tend to be celebratory and focus on chronicling his role in the many reform movements. \(^4^9\) Although McFeely might object to this characterization, these biographies do not go far enough in criticizing Douglass for his habit of self-promotion. Included in Douglass' reform movements were abolition, temperance, women's rights, and the labor movement. Related to Douglass' work in the labor movement and adult education is the treatment of Douglass' efforts to promote industrial training in a trade for freed slaves. \(^5^0\) This area shows how Douglass was interested in education for adults and this is also an important area where this research project can extend the literature related to Douglass. In addition to this gap, there is another important area that is neglected by scholars who have studied Douglass, and that is Douglass' work with Sabbath Schools while still a slave. During this time, Douglass engaged in his first efforts to educate others and this involved educating adults. He established two different Sabbath schools and had more than thirty slaves of different ages participate in the schools, which primarily focused on learning to read the New Testament. \(^5^1\) Scholarship in these two areas fails to address the contributions that Douglass made to adult education through these efforts.

These biographies are still valuable for several reasons. First, they show Douglass' personal development over time, which is a hallmark of adult education. This self-development is important in the effort to relate Douglass' own education to self-directed learning. Second, these works provide an overall view of Douglass' life so that gaps can be identified. Since this project is going to be partially a biographical portrait of


\(^5^0\) Ibid.

\(^5^1\) McFeely.
Douglass, these works have value in telling his life story, which the works do well. Third, these works can also be useful for examining the criticisms of Douglass in the literature. In particular, McFeely was critical of Douglass on several fronts, including Douglass’ reluctance to criticize post-Reconstruction Republican leaders because he was interested in a political appointment. In addition, McFeely criticizes Douglass for his role as head of the Freedmen’s Savings Bank. McFeely argues that Douglass was not prepared to administer a bank, but he took on this task anyway because of his need for status and prestige. In other words, this was part of Douglass’ overall habit of self-promotion.

Beyond the biographical works, there are many other topical works related to Douglass that are relevant for this discussion. For example, Waldo looks at the evolution of Douglass’ thought over time. In particular, this work is valuable because of the discussion of Douglass’ religious views and how they evolved over time. Douglass was very critical of organized religion early in life, but softened these views later in life. This work, along with others, is indicative of the struggle that Douglass and other black leaders at the time had with religion. Early in his life, Douglass was openly critical of religion and went as far as doubting the very existence of God because of slavery. On one hand, slave owners used religion as a tool to justify slavery while many of those in the abolitionist community held the view that religion and slavery were completely incompatible. Not everyone in the abolitionist or black community held this viewpoint,
but it was a very prevalent view during this time and one that Douglass wrestled with over time. The literature shows how Douglass’ thoughts on the subject of religion evolved over time, but it does not show how Douglass worked to educate for change in this area through his speeches and writings.

Douglass’ role in the abolitionist movement is another interesting area of research in the literature that this project will extend and modify. It is well documented that Douglass had a crucial role in the abolitionist movement, but recent scholarship has looked at how Douglass and others made the movement more radical. There were significant tensions between the William Lloyd Garrison wing of the abolitionist movement and the side of Douglass, James McCune Smith, and Gerrit Smith. The Garrison wing felt that the cause of abolitionism was a moral one that would be advanced by changing hearts and minds while the Douglass/Smith camp felt that it was a political battle that might have to resort to violence. In addition, some authors have looked at the paternalism and racism in the abolitionist movement and the difficulties this caused for freed slaves in the movement. Douglass had to work to change and educate both those individuals inside and outside the abolitionist movement through his speeches and writings. Douglass worked to change hearts and minds, but also worked to make changes through the political process. Douglass’ efforts to educate both those within and outside of the abolitionist movement will be better developed through this research project.

Related to Douglass’ work with the abolitionist movement are his efforts in political activism. Douglass worked to change public opinion, thus changing the political

and governmental endeavors of the nation through his speeches and writings. Indicative of the scholarship related to Douglass’ political activism is in the area of Douglass’ famous Fourth of July speech.\textsuperscript{58} In this 1852 speech in Rochester, New York, Douglass challenged many of the assumptions of the time and went beyond the issue of the abolition of slavery. He also described how as a nation, we had failed to live up to the ideals of the founding fathers. According to Douglass, the American dream was alive and well; it just remained unfulfilled for so many of its people.\textsuperscript{59} In addition, he described how the Fourth is his holiday too, but his people were being denied this holiday.\textsuperscript{60} In analyzing this speech, authors have discussed how Douglass pointed out the hypocrisy of those who said they supported the ideas of independence and the Constitution while at the same time supporting slavery or inequality for freed slaves.\textsuperscript{61}

The literature largely shows this speech as a turning point for Douglass the radical, as he very publically challenged those in the North to not only advocate for abolition, but also to end oppression of free slaves.\textsuperscript{62} Consistently, this speech is considered Douglass’ best as well as one of the finest antislavery speeches of all time.\textsuperscript{63} Colaiaco also exemplifies the scholarship on this speech as he holds up this speech as a vehicle to understand Douglass as a social critic and reformer. Before the Civil War, Douglass was decidedly more radical in his political activism than later in life and some

\textsuperscript{58} James Colaiaco, \textit{Frederick Douglass and the Fourth of July} (New York: Macmillan, 2006).
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 1-2.
\textsuperscript{60} Foner, Philip S., and Yuval Taylor, eds., \textit{Frederick Douglass: Selected speeches and writings}, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 190-192.
\textsuperscript{62} McFeely, 172.
\textsuperscript{63} Oakes, 29.
such as McFeely argue that this was because Douglass did not want to criticize Republican public officials so as to avoid alienating them.

Douglass also had a lengthy, although spotty, career as a journalist. Douglass was the editor and publisher of the *North Star* and the *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Literature in this area shows how Douglass struggled greatly with several aspects of running a newspaper including both finances and the work of editing a paper. Even with these deficiencies, Douglass was still effective in many ways as a journalist and was able to educate through his papers. Much of the literature related to Douglass focuses on the evolution of black newspapers and how Douglass contributed to this evolution. 64 These works show how effective Douglass was as a newspaperman, but do not examine how influential Douglass may have been in educating others through his newspaper work. 65 Also useful in this area is scholarship related to how Douglass was perceived by those in the white and black press at the time. 66 This work will help to lead to the discussion of Douglass’ overall effectiveness in journalism.

There is a model that was useful for this research project. In a work on Booker T. Washington, Virginia Lantz Denton examines Washington’s life as it pertains to adult education. 67 This book is based on Denton’s dissertation, which she completed to fulfill the requirements for a doctorate in adult education at the University of Southern Mississippi. Denton primarily takes a narrative method rather than a topical approach in

her study. Denton’s method is useful for several reasons. First, she effectively places a historical figure within the context of adult education. Second, she looks at what adult education theories are applicable to the work of Washington. Finally, she shows how Washington actually improved adult education through his work. Denton uses a variety of primary and secondary sources in her study. Some of her primary sources are Washington’s papers, Samuel Armstrong’s papers, and newspapers from the time. Denton also uses a variety of secondary sources that examine education at the time, the history of Tuskegee and Hampton, and stories of Tuskegee students.

The many, varied secondary sources related to Douglass are useful in providing an overall picture of Douglass’ life and work. While these works are valuable, there are some clear gaps in the literature that this research project can help to fill. None of the existing scholarship directly relates to the educational work done by Douglass, but these works are still valuable as they will provide a starting point that will allow me to examine Douglass’ work from a different perspective. As mentioned above, this is largely attributable to the fact that Douglass primarily worked in informal education. In addition, there is a clear gap in the existing literature where a holistic study looking at the four areas of religion, abolitionism, journalism, and political activism can contribute.

Plan of Work

There are many different sources that I have used to investigate the topic, but most of the information has come from Douglass’ own words. His speeches, writings, and correspondence will help to guide the project to determine how he has contributed to adult education. The majority of Frederick Douglass’ papers are in the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. This collection includes fifty-four boxes of material and
most of this material has been reproduced onto thirty-four rolls of microfilm. In addition, much of the material in the collection has been digitized and is available on the Library of Congress website. The collection includes correspondence, speeches, writings, and financial and legal records. There are also letters in archives around the United States such as collections at the University of Rochester and Syracuse University. As part of a grant I received from the Charters Library at Syracuse University, I have traveled to Syracuse University to perform some unrelated research in their archives. Syracuse University also has some materials that will be helpful in my research for the dissertation. The abolitionist Gerrit Smith’s papers are located in the Syracuse archives and are valuable for this project because they contain material related to Douglass’ role in the abolitionist movement as well in journalism.

In *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, John Blassingame has produced a multivolume and multiple series work that is a comprehensive set of the archival materials found in Douglass’ papers in the Library of Congress. In series one, Blassingame reproduced four volumes of primary source material on Douglass’ speeches, debates, and interviews. Series two, also edited by Blassingame, covers the autobiographical work of Douglass, which is also readily available in many other forms. An intended series three was to reproduce Douglass’ correspondence. A grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities provided the funding for the compilation of Douglass’ papers in book form. Because of accessibility, these series have provided a large portion of the source material for this dissertation.

In addition, many of his most famous speeches, as well as some of his correspondence, have been published in book form. An additional source of information
will be Philip Foner’s *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*. In this five-volume work, Foner includes biographical material as well as speeches, writings, and correspondence. These five volumes will help to fill in some of the gaps of information, especially the correspondence that is missing from the published *Frederick Douglass Papers*. In addition, in 1999, Foner published an abridged version of his work in a single volume. Primarily, I will utilize Douglass’ papers to answer questions related to Douglass’ speeches and writings in each of the four areas and how educational these works were through a type of content analysis.

What I have developed is a six-chapter dissertation centered on the quote mentioned above about Douglass being educated through Methodism, Garrisonism, Journalism, and Political Campaignism. In each of these chapters, I will examine how Douglass was educated through the topic and how he sought to educate others through his speeches and writings in each area. I will also look at what others had to say about Douglass in order to gauge his effectiveness in these areas. The method for this study is somewhat of a literary analysis of Douglass’ speeches and writings as well as a content analysis. Below is summary of what I have included in the remaining five chapters that will comprise the dissertation.

*Chapter II: Adult Education by Challenging Faith*

In chapter II, I discuss Methodism or more appropriately the religious adult education aspect of Douglass’ life. During his life, especially his early life, he often spoke about the duality of religion as it relates to slavery. Religion was used by slaveholders to support the institution of slavery and by the abolitionist community to oppose that same institution. For example, Douglass spent part of 1845-1847 traveling
and speaking in the United Kingdom and on May 12, 1846 he gave a speech in
Moorfields, England, titled *An Appeal to the British People*. In this speech, which will
not be the only one examined in this chapter, Douglass made several comments on the
relationship between religion and slavery such as, “this I conceive to be the darkest
feature of slavery, and the most difficult to attack, because it is identified with religion,
and exposes those who denounce it to the charge of infidelity.”68 At the same time, he
spoke about what he loves about religion. In the same speech, Douglass said, “I love the
religion of our blessed Savior. I love that religion that comes from above, in the wisdom
of God, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy
and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”69

Chapter III: Adult Education through Social Movements

Chapter III is on Garrisonism or more appropriately Douglass and the abolitionist
movement. Soon after escaping from slavery, Douglass found himself serving as an
abolitionist speaker and from 1841 through the Civil War most of his speeches were
related to the abolition of slavery. One of his most famous speeches in this area was *The
Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro*, which he gave in Rochester, New York on July 5,
1852. In this great speech, Douglass said, “What have I, or those I represent, to do with
your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural
justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?” 70 This chapter

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68. Foner and Taylor, 189-190.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid, 194.
centers on the concept of social movements and the role adult education can play in the effectiveness of these movements.

Chapter IV: Adult Education through Popular Education

I detail in chapter IV the relationship Douglass had with journalism and how he used it as a vehicle to educate others. Douglass began his journalism career writing for the *Liberator* and *The Liberty Bell* before serving as the editor of *The North Star*, which later became the *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. Later on in life he published the *Douglass Monthly*. In these papers, Douglass attacked slavery, discrimination, and sought to persuade others to his political points of view. Douglass used his papers as a vehicle for the promotion of the causes he believed in as well as self-promotion. The primary sources used in this chapter will be the Douglass newspapers as well as other abolitionist papers such as the *Liberator*. Douglass’ newspaper work is an excellent example of popular adult education as newspapers represent an important part of nineteenth-century popular culture.

Chapter V: Political Activism as Adult Education

Douglass also worked to change the United States through the political process and chapter V will be about Douglass’ political activity. This type of education through persuasion is one that Douglass would take on during much of his life and is well suited to adult education in this area. As adult educators continue to redefine what literacy means, a better understanding of political literacy is important for the field. Early on, Douglass differed from many in the abolitionist community by fully embracing political activism as a means to push for an end to slavery and discrimination. In his writings and speeches, Douglass fought against the Compromise of 1850, for voting rights for women,
for the election and reelection of Abraham Lincoln, and for rights after the Civil War. Douglass also advised Presidents and later served as the Minister to Haiti. In this chapter, I primarily use his speeches to show how he worked to change the role of African-Americans in society through the political process as well as the other causes he believed in. Douglass used his speeches and writings on the topic of politics to persuade or educate others about his beliefs and encourage his audience to action.

Chapter VI: How in line with Adult Education was Frederick Douglass?

This chapter serves as the conclusion where I wrap up the research questions and finalize the discussion of Douglass and adult education. I will also tie together the four main chapters of the dissertation in this section. This is also the chapter where I examine the relevant adult education theories and how Douglass’ style would fit into adult education today. At this point in the research, transformational learning and Freire’s liberation pedagogy are the most relevant although narrative learning is also of importance for this discussion. Finally, this chapter examines Douglass’ work in the Lyceum movement where he combined many elements from his other adult education work.

Conclusion

This research project makes a significant contribution to the field of adult education and to the study of the life of Frederick Douglass. His life has been well studied, but there are always new areas for exploration. His role as an educator and how he tried to educate through his speeches and writings will aid in achieving a fuller study of his life. Looking at how principles of education, in particular adult education, could be applied to his work is a new lens to evaluate the life of Frederick Douglass. In addition,
this study will help to shed new light on the history of adult education before it became an organized academic discipline and field of practice. This study also contributes to the way historians have viewed Douglass as it will shed new light on his work in education as well as cause us to reevaluate nineteenth century education. As Douglass said about the importance of education, "a little learning, indeed, may be a dangerous thing, but the want of learning is a calamity to any people." 

CHAPTER II

ADULT EDUCATION BY CHALLENGING FAITH

“Right is of no sex—Truth is of no color—God is the father of us all, and all we are brethren”[^1]

Frederick Douglass had a conflicted relationship with religion. On one hand, he often spoke about his love for God and religion. At the same time, Douglass would complain about how slaveholders used religion to justify the very institution he condemned. In his writings and speeches, Douglass would at times attack organized religion and religious leaders both in the north and south. Although he often focused on Methodism because that was where much of his own religious experience was, he branched out over time to extend his influence to Christianity in general. He would use his pulpit on the lecture circuit and in his writings to try to persuade religious leaders in the north to do more to try to end slavery and to pressure their brethren in the South. He singled out those in the south for their support of the institution of slavery even though it seems at odds with Christianity. Douglass was clearly trying to educate many different groups with his speeches and writings on the subject of religion. In many of his speeches, Douglass included sections on this duality of religion. He wrote about the subject in letters as well as in his autobiographies. The strong statements he made about religion have led many scholars to speculate that Douglass may have embraced a religious philosophy that leaned to Christian liberalism and maybe towards humanism.

Douglass had many religious roles during his life. As described in chapter one, one of the main motivating factors for Douglass to want to learn to read was so that he could read the Bible, which was a common motivating factor among slaves and freed

[^1]: Masthead from the *North Star*.
slaves after the Civil War.² Douglass administered two different Sabbath schools while he was a slave so that he could help others learn to read the Bible although Douglass also recognized the liberating power that literacy would bring to his fellow slaves. After he escaped from slavery, Douglass became involved in his local church in New Bedford. Douglass’ leadership and oratory skills made him stand out in the free black community and he took on a leadership role in this church, as he was a class leader and part-time preacher in this church. His role as a preacher will be described in more detail later in this chapter.

In 1845, Douglass published the first of his three autobiographies, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself. This narrative served many purposes, but it was partially designed to answer some of Douglass’ critics who claimed that he was never a slave. This autobiography also was an opportunity for Douglass to tell his story, raise his public profile, and make some money; and the subtitle of the book demonstrates his own literacy. In this book, Douglass made some of his first major statements about religion and began the process of expanding his role in the abolitionist movement. Douglass spoke about religion in strong terms because it was something that mattered to him. He believed that the institution and the organization of religion could do a great deal first to emancipate his people and after emancipation, to lift up his race. The liberating power of religion is an important theme for both Douglass and religious adult education.

Religious Adult Education

Arguably, religious adult education is one of the oldest and most durable forms of adult education. It has impacted the lives of adults throughout history. In the Greek version of the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as teacher forty-five times. ³ In the New Testament, much of Jesus’ teaching is directed towards adults and not children. There is only one instance mentioned of Jesus teaching children; all other times he is portrayed as teaching adults. ⁴ It is also arguable that Jesus’ teaching style was transformative in nature. His pedagogy was that of challenging faith and intelligence primarily through the use of parables. This teaching style is one that Douglass often utilized in his speeches as will be discussed later in this chapter.

In the United States, religious adult education has been an important part of the history of adult education. When Josiah Holbrook founded the American Lyceum, he viewed the training of Sunday school teachers as a benefit of the organization. As I will show in later chapters, Douglass was an active participant in the Lyceum and used this organization to further the causes he championed. In addition, with the founding of Chautauqua, John Vincent had as one of his original goals the training of Sunday school teachers as well. ⁵ Vincent viewed all of life as education, with faith education being a central part of that education. Vincent also wanted religious adult education that would face the challenges of contemporary society thus adapting as society changed.

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⁵ Ibid.
There were numerous other organizations founded during the 19th Century that focused on religious adult education. The American Tract Society, founded in 1824, and the American Bible Society, founded in 1876, both were focused on religious adult education and to a certain extent on adult literacy. The American Tract Society was involved in working to distribute Bibles and other religious materials to slaves in the south. In addition, both the YMCA and YWCA had Bible classes as a core part of the organizations’ missions and they later expanded to vocational educational activities. Throughout the history of religious adult education, there has been some tension over what should be the goal of this type education. Should it be solely about nurturing faith within the traditions of a denomination, or should it be aimed at fostering critical thought about the faith while also addressing social, economic, and political challenges of society? This was a debate that Douglass participated in during his life by focusing on teaching others to use faith to challenge the institutions of the day including organized religion itself. Much of religious adult education is designed to reinforce the dominant culture, but Douglass often used to challenge the dominant culture.

Early Educational Moments

Douglass had experienced many positive aspects of religion during his early life, but it was the negative experiences while still a slave that impacted him the most. These events helped to shape who Douglass would become and how he would use religion in his speeches and writings later in life. Douglass experienced first hand how some of the worst slave owners and holders were sometimes those who professed to have the

6. Ibid.
strongest faith. This hypocrisy would help to cause Douglass to become a vocal critic of organized religion once he escaped from slavery.

When Auld returned Douglass to the Eastern Shore of Maryland to live in St. Michaels in 1832, he was under direction of Thomas Auld. As described in chapter one, Thomas Auld was not a kind man. Douglass attributed Auld’s spitefulness to many factors, partially because Auld had only obtained slaves through marriage and not through his own work. 7 Douglass did not have kind things to say about Auld: “I do not know of one single noble act ever performed by him. The leading trait in his character was meanness.” 8

After a few months of working for Thomas Auld, Douglass thought that an event had taken place that might alter Auld’s behavior, but he was mistaken. In August 1832, Auld attended a Methodist meeting and “experienced religion.” 9 Douglass had high hopes for this event, but was soundly disappointed in Auld’s behavior after the conversion. Douglass said about this event, “It neither made him to be humane to his slaves, nor to emancipate them. If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways.” 10 Douglass also spoke of how Auld now used his newly found faith to support his cruelty and to justify having slaves. Auld also became a respected member of his church and became a class leader. To the rest of the slaveholding community, the Auld house was one of strong faith even though he was a brutal slave master. As described in chapter I, Douglass helped to lead a Sabbath school while at St. Michaels. Auld, and some of the other religious leaders of the community, broke up this Sabbath

7. Douglass, 51.
8. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
school because of the perceived danger of the school. They felt that such a school could inspire slave revolts and runaways. Douglass viewed this as very hypocritical since these same individuals claimed to be pious, but denied this group an opportunity to learn how to read the Bible.

After the incident with the Sabbath school, Douglass was sent to work on the farm of Edward Covey, a notorious slave breaker, someone who was so violent and oppressive they could break the very spirit of any slave. In addition to his known cruelty, Covey was also known to be a very pious man and was a class leader in the Methodist church. For the first six months of his time with Covey, Douglass was beaten on a regular basis. At around the six-month mark, Douglass had a severe altercation with Covey where he fought back. This incident was a turning point and transformational moment for Douglass. Interestingly, when Douglass described this event in the *Narrative*, he used religious terms to describe the impact of the incident. According to Douglass, “it was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom.” At the same time Douglass was writing about how Auld and Covey misused religion to support slavery and how they claimed to be religious while mistreating slaves, Douglass also chose to speak about the incident in religious terms. Douglass was still using his writings as an opportunity to educate for transformation and to show how events can be liberating. He often spoke about his life and events as conversions.

Douglass’ experience with religion was not entirely negative, even during his time in slavery. He even had some positive experiences with white religious leaders while he

11. Ibid, 53.
12. Ibid, 54.
was a slave. Douglass’ thoughts on the subject evolved between the publication of his first autobiography and his second. As a child, Douglass participated in the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore. Here he was influenced by a black caulker and lay preacher named Charles Johnson. When My Bondage and My Freedom was published in 1855, Douglass wrote more positively about religion than he had in the Narrative. When Douglass was about thirteen and still living in Baltimore the first time, he met a white Methodist minister names Hanson. According to Douglass, “my religious nature was awakened by the preaching of a white minister, named Hanson.” Accepting religion was an important event for Douglass and it influenced how he would work later in life to educate others. “After this, I saw the world in a new light,” Douglass said, “My great concern was, now, to have the world converted. The desire for knowledge increased, and especially did I want a thorough acquaintance with the contents of the bible.” Again Douglass spoke about his life as a vessel to convert others.

Douglass’ faith was also influenced by other slaves, namely a slave known as Uncle Lawson. Lawson lived close to the Aulds in Baltimore and Douglass would go to prayer meetings with him. After these prayer meetings, Douglass would often spend Sunday afternoons with him. Douglass and Lawson helped each other as Douglass could read better than Lawson, and Lawson understood the “spirit” better. During their time together, Douglass would help him learn more about how to read and Lawson taught him

15. McFeely, 37.
17. Douglass, 231.
18. Ibid.
more about faith. Douglass called Lawson his "spiritual father."\textsuperscript{20} Lawson also recognized that Douglass was very talented and destined for great things. According to Douglass, Lawson told him that the "Lord had a great work for me to do."\textsuperscript{21} Douglass was also beginning to think about what he would do with his life. According to Douglass in 1855, he thought he "must preach the gospel."\textsuperscript{22} Douglass had escaped from slavery in 1838 at the age of twenty and when he wrote about these events in 1855, Douglass was showing how his thoughts on religion were shifting and how his use of faith to educate public opinion was also changing. All of these influential people, both the positive and negative ones, helped to shape Douglass and how he would use religious terms in his later speeches and writings.

Douglass the Preacher?

After escaping from slavery, Douglass began creating a new life for himself and his new wife. Anna Murray had been a free slave in Baltimore with whom Douglass had a relationship and she followed him north after he escaped.\textsuperscript{23} Part of the creation of a new life meant finding a church since the church was a central part of free black society. Douglass tried to attend several integrated churches in New Bedford and wanted to join the Elm Street Methodist Church.\textsuperscript{24} Black members of the congregation had to sit in the gallery. Douglass left this church because black members could not take communion until after the white members had left the church.\textsuperscript{25} After trying several other churches in New Bedford, Douglass decided to join a group of free black Methodists who were

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 233.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} McFeely, 68.
\textsuperscript{24} Douglass, 360.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 361.
known as the Zion Methodists.\textsuperscript{26} As was often the case with Douglass' experiences in life, he quickly rose to a leadership position in the church that has been classified as several different types of involvement.

Douglass became an active participant in the New Bedford African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, which along with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, had split off from the Methodist Church because blacks of all types were often relegated to the back pews or to the balconies.\textsuperscript{27} At this church, mainly two individuals influenced Douglass. First was Bishop Christopher Rush who was the area bishop for the church. Rush was the first person in the church to ask Douglass to take on a leadership role when he asked Douglass to serve as an exhorter.\textsuperscript{28} The exhorter was someone who was tasked with urging the congregation on during the service and discussions. The other influential person in the continuing faith development for Douglass was Thomas James, who was the pastor of the New Bedford Church.\textsuperscript{29}

Both Rush and James were very involved in the abolitionist movement and in urging free blacks in the north to participate in the movement. James had served as a preacher, and helped found several churches in upstate New York, which was a hotbed of the abolitionist movement and the area that Douglass would later call home. James was the one who allowed Douglass to take the next step in his transition towards becoming a great orator by giving him an opportunity to serve as a lay preacher in the church.\textsuperscript{30} This role for Douglass was important because it let him practice his public speaking in general

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} McFeely, 81.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 82.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
and gave him a platform to begin speaking out about the abolitionist cause. In James’ mind, his preaching and the abolitionist movement were intertwined and he wanted to instill that same belief in Douglass. James observed about Douglass the preacher, “I some time afterwards licensed him to preach... On one occasion, after I had addressed a white audience on the slavery, I called upon Fred. Douglass.” It is entirely possible, based on James’ statements, that Douglass’ first forays into the abolitionist movement took place at the urging of a preacher and not at the later Nantucket meeting described earlier. On March 12, 1839, Douglass gave one of his first speeches or sermons to the church related to the abolitionist movement. As was often the case in churches, especially free black churches, the topic of conversation often veered away from religion and moved towards other issues. On this day, the topic of conversation was the idea of colonization, where blacks would be shipped from the United States back to Africa. Douglass used his position, and his voice, to help educate the members of the church on the issue of slavery in general and more specifically why blacks deserved to be free in the United States.

Douglass wrote about his experience at the New Bedford church on several occasions and several have credited it with helping to make him who he became. In My Bondage and My Freedom, Douglass spoke about having served as a “class-leader and local preacher.” In the Narrative, Douglass discussed speaking first on the subject of Christianity to the black community before making his way to speak before a white audience.

31. Ibid, 83.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Douglass, 353.
audience. The Zion Methodists have always claimed Douglass as one of their members and list him as having been a preacher in their denomination. In 1894, just before his death, Douglass wrote a letter to James Hood, who was writing a history of the Zion Methodists. Here Douglass spoke of his time as a preacher in the little church in New Bedford:

It is impossible for me to tell how far my connection with these devoted men influenced my career. As early as 1839 I obtained a license from the Quarterly Conference as a local preacher, and often occupied the pulpit by request of the preacher in charge. No doubt that the exercise of my gifts in this vocation, and my association with the excellent men to whom I have referred, helped to prepare me for the wider sphere of usefulness which I have since occupied. It is from this Zion church that I went forth to the work of delivering my brethren from bondage, and this new vocation...separated me also from the calling of a local preacher. I look back to the days I spent in little Zion, New Bedford, in the several capacities of sexton, steward, class leader, clerk, and local preacher, as among the happiest days of my life.

Douglass clearly recognized how significant this time in New Bedford as a preacher and church leader was towards his later career and success. This type of education was instrumental in helping Douglass learn how to deliver a speech and use a speech to educate an audience. Logan has called this type of education “pulpit literacy” and lists it as a vital source of rhetorical education. To get to be a lay preacher, Douglass had to pass a test and give a demonstration sermon. Clearly, Douglass’ time as a preacher, and the preparation to become one, helped to make him the person he

36. Douglass, 153.
38. Ibid, 596.
40. Ibid.
would later become. This work also prepared Douglass for his later life and for when he would speak out on the subject of faith and Christianity.

Speeches and Writings on the Subject

Douglass often spoke and wrote about the subjects of faith and Christianity. Some of his most important thoughts on the subject come from his *Narrative*. Published in 1845, this book served a few purposes. First, slave narratives were useful to the abolitionist movement because they could show the brutality of slavery. Second, these narratives could be useful in raising funds for individuals as well as for the abolitionist movement. Third, for Douglass, this book helped to answer some of his critics. There were some who were skeptical of the fact that Douglass had ever been a slave so the detail in which Douglass went to tell his story helped to convince or educate others about his own struggle. Thus the *Narrative* was instrumental in Douglass' efforts to educate others about slavery, himself, and about the duality of religion as well as the gap between precept and practice.

After writing the *Narrative*, Douglass recognized that his work could be taken as being anti-religion, so he attached an Appendix that was designed to clarify some of his points on religion. According to Douglass, "I find, since reading over the foregoing *Narrative*, that I have, in several instances, spoken in such a tone and manner, respecting religion, as may possibly lead those unacquainted with my religious views to suppose me an opponent of all religion." Douglass wanted to make it clear that he was not speaking out against all religion, or all religious people, but rather about what he called "slaveholding religion." Douglass said, "what I have said respecting and against religion,

41. Douglass, 97.
I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper.”42 To Douglass, there was a clear distinction between true religion and the hypocritical religion of many in the United States. This distinction is one that Douglass would often make.

In the Narrative, Douglass also spoke about what he valued and cherished about religion. He said, “I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land.”43 Here Douglass also wrote about the practice of denying slaves, and in many cases free blacks, the right to learn to read. “He who claims it a religious duty to read the Bible denies me the right of learning to read the name of the God who made me.”44 Here Douglass is using his Narrative as a vehicle to educate his readers about the need to teach all to learn to read, thus taking on the cause of literacy education.

Douglass also used the Narrative, and other writings, to try to persuade religious leaders in the north to do more to eradicate slavery. In describing a hymn that Douglass includes in the Narrative, he commented on northern religion by remarking, “I conclude these remarks by copying the following portrait of the religion of the south, (which is, by communion, and fellowship, the religion of the north).”45 Douglass wanted to inspire those in the north to act. The Narrative stands as one of Douglass’ most important statements on how slaveholding religion is at odds with true religion, but this was not Douglass’ only foray into the subject of religion. He included passages about religion in

42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid, 100.
many of his most famous speeches and engaged in debates with others about the role that religious leaders could, and should, play in working towards the abolition of slavery.

Douglass often spoke about the struggle to abolish slavery in biblical terms. He would use parables and biblical references to provide context for the struggle as well as to inspire those in the movement. Even though the split between Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison was beginning to develop when the *Narrative* was published in 1845 and had been completed by the time *My Bondage and My Freedom* was published in 1855, Douglass still spoke very favorably about Garrison. The split between Garrison and Douglass, which will be discussed in chapter three, was over how best to go about the abolition of slavery. Douglass and others wanted to take the movement in a more radical direction, and they thought the struggle to be more political than moral or at least they wanted to use politics as a means to accomplish their moral goals. In his second autobiography, Douglass claimed that Garrison’s paper *The Liberator* “took its place with me next to the bible.” Using a description similar to that of Moses in the Old Testament, Douglass also said, “I not only liked—I loved this paper, and its editor. He seemed a match for all the opponents of emancipation.” Douglass felt that Garrison was a person who would help to lead Douglass’ people out of bondage. Douglass portrayed Garrison as “the man, the Moses, raised up by God, to deliver modern Israel from bondage.” Here we see an example of Douglass using parallels from the Bible to aid in the struggle of his day.

46. Douglass, 362.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
Well before the publication of the *Narrative* and *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass was an abolitionist orator. In this capacity, he spoke about prejudice in the church. Douglass often used analogies to make his points during his speeches and in many cases used humor as part of his rhetorical efforts. In an 1841 speech to the Plymouth Church Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass delivered a speech about prejudice in the church. In this speech, Douglass uses the fisher of men metaphor and spoke about his experience in the New Bedford churches. “But it seems, the kingdom of heaven is like a net; at least so it was according to these pious Christians; and when the net is drawn ashore, they had to set down and cull out the fish. Well, it happened now that some of the fish had rather black scales; so these were sorted out and packed by themselves.”49 Here he is directly challenging both his audience and the norms of society. Even amongst those in the abolitionist movement, there was a great deal of prejudice. As Douglass said later in this same speech, “Yet people in general will say they like colored men as well as any other, but in their proper place!”50 Here, we can see him beginning to speak about what would happen after emancipation and how to ensure not just freedom, but also equality for the freed slaves.

Douglass also wrote about the duality of religion in his correspondence with William Lloyd Garrison. In an 1846 letter to Garrison, Douglass said, “slavery has its own standards of morality, humanity, justice, and Christianity.”51 In this letter, Douglass was describing a critic of his, A. C. C. Thompson of Delaware, a proponent of slavery, who was trying to discredit Douglass in the local papers. Douglass spoke about how he

49. Foner and Taylor, 3.
50. Ibid, 4.
would respond to Thompson by “preaching the slaveholders’ sermon.” Douglass turned Thompson’s words claiming that the Bible justified slavery against him and said he has only confirmed what Douglass wrote in the *Narrative* by defending slaveholders as being pious. In both his private correspondence and his public speeches and writings, Douglass maintained a consistent message about religion, which was that American religious institutions and leaders had lost sight of true religion.

Douglass not only delivered his message to just those in the United States, but he also spent almost two years in the United Kingdom giving speeches and raising money for the abolitionist cause. He traveled in the United Kingdom from 1845-1847. In an 1846 speech to the British people from Moorfields, England, Douglass delivered some important remarks related to the subject of slavery and here Douglass intertwined the subject of education and Christianity. Speaking about slavery and the slaves themselves, Douglass, perhaps thinking of Auld’s prohibition of Mrs. Auld’s teaching him to read, stated, “He is deprived of education. God has given him an intellect; the slaveholder declares it shall not be cultivated.” Douglass also spoke about his purpose in England and described it in educational terms. He commented, “we want them to know that a knowledge of their whippings, their scourgings, their branding, their chainings, is not confined to their plantations, but that some Negro of theirs has broken loose from his chains—has burst through the dark incrustation of slavery, and is now exposing their deeds of deep damnation to the gaze of the Christian people of England.”

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52. Ibid, 21.
54. Foner, 32.
55. Ibid, 33.
leaders in the United States. Douglass said, “we have slavery made part of the religion of the land. Yes, the pulpit stands up as the great defender of the cursed institution, as it is called. Ministers of religion come forward and torture the hallowed pages of inspired wisdom to sanction the bloody deed.” 56 Through his words, Douglass is simultaneously trying to show the evils of slavery and educate the British people on how it is incompatible with true religion. Douglass also sought to counter some of his critics in this powerful speech. Here Douglass sought to answer the question, “are you not undermining religion?” 57 Douglass responded again by saying what he values in religion. “I love the religion of our blessed Savior. I love the religion that comes from above, in the wisdom of God, which is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” 58 Douglass closed with an appeal to the British to help him abolish slavery: “it requires the humanity of Christianity, the morality of the world to remove it. Hence, I call upon the people of Britain to look at this matter, and to exert the influence I am about to show they possess, for the removal of slavery from America.” 59

Douglass also wrote about his work in terms that are common in religious adult education literature such as conversion both in terms of his own spiritual journey and for his efforts out in the free world. In his second autobiography, he referred to his own realization while still a slave that slavery was incompatible with religion: “I seemed to live in a new world, surrounded by new objects, and to be animated by new hopes and desires. I loved all mankind—slaveholders not excepted; though I abhorred slavery more

56. Ibid, 37.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid, 38.
than ever. My great concern was, now, to have the world converted.”\textsuperscript{60} The way that Douglass describes his awakening process is very similar to the concept of transformational learning by Jack Mezirow.\textsuperscript{61} In particular, this is very similar to a disorienting dilemma as described by Mezirow. Douglass had experienced an event or events over time that caused him to reconsider things in his life, he tried out new ideas, and he took on new roles. This process of transformational learning is one that Douglass will undertake numerous times in his life in several different areas. This transformation or conversion also caused Douglass to want to learn more. He said “the desire for knowledge increased, and especially did I want a thorough acquaintance with the contents of the bible.”\textsuperscript{62}

Douglass directly equated the struggle for abolition, as well as the struggle to be part of free society, with improved moral and mental character. In an 1846 speech in London on the relationship between the temperance cause and his struggle, Douglass spoke eloquently about how his people need to do more when they get freedom. Douglass was clearly beginning to advocate for what to do once freedom is obtained. On this subject he said, “I have met with, has been the fact, that some of the coloured people who have been redeemed from their chains, they have not made good use of their freedom. I found, therefore, that in seeking to obtain the object of my heart—the emancipation of my race from slavery—that I must also labour for the mental, moral, and religious elevation of those who had gained their freedom.”\textsuperscript{63} By combining the three elements of mental, moral, and religious, Douglass is espousing a belief that the three are

\textsuperscript{60} Douglass, 231.
\textsuperscript{61} Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 132.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Blassingame, 1:266.
interconnected and showing that he must do more to educate other free blacks, mostly adults, in these three areas.

Douglass continued to attack slavery on moral grounds even as he was beginning to transition into attacking it on legal grounds. In an 1850 speech in Rochester, New York, where Douglass would make his home, Douglass still spoke forcefully about slavery being morally wrong, but he also started incorporating governmental and violent language into his speeches. In this speech Douglass said, “Slavery is a sin, in that it comprehends a monstrous violation of the great principle of human liberty, to which I have endeavored thus to draw your attention. In this respect, it is a direct war upon the government of God. In subjecting one man to the arbitrary control of another, it contravenes the first command of the Decalogue [Exodus 20:3]; and as upon this command rests the whole superstructure of justice, purity, and brotherly kindness, slavery may be justly regarded as a warfare against all the principles of infinite goodness.”

In this section of a lengthy speech, Douglass takes on many issues and themes. First, Douglass is still speaking in very moral terms. From the beginning, he calls it a sin and he references the Old Testament to show the evils of the institution. Second, he attacks the institution on the basis of humanity. Finally, he begins to paint slavery as an affront to the principles on which the founders based the government of the United States. Douglass says that it violates human liberty and justice. In this relatively minor speech, which was part of a weekly lecture series that Douglass participated in at Rochester, Douglass shows the trademarks of language and style that will guide him

64. Ibid, 2:262.
65. Ibid.
throughout the next decade. Douglass would use this style and language to educate both those inside and outside the abolitionist movement about slavery and how best to eradicate it from the United States.

Even though Douglass went out of his way to show that he cherished and valued religion, his skepticism of organized religion was often evident in many of his speeches. In an 1849 speech in New York city, Douglass delivered a speech titled “Too Much Religion, Too Little Humanity.” In this speech, Douglass criticized many Christian denominations for their lack of efforts to abolish slavery including Baptists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists. Douglass also tried to show his audience why he believed that in a very religious nation, slavery could exist: “I believe the grand reason why we have Slavery in this land at the present moment is that we are too religious as a nation, in other words, that we have substituted religion for humanity—we have substituted a form of Godliness, an outside show for the real thing.” In this speech, he is directly challenging religious leaders in the North who Douglass felt had not done enough work in the abolitionist movement.

Douglass targeted many religious leaders in the North as being complicit in slavery for not having done enough to stop it. In an 1847 speech in Syracuse, New York titled “Love of God, Love of Man, Love of Country,” Douglass spoke about what he viewed as the stronghold of slavery in the United States, how northern abolitionists should view slaveholding relatives, and who should be the heart of the abolitionist movement. Douglass clearly believed that the churches held the most power in the

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid, 2:93.
south and were responsible for slavery’s continuation. In this speech, Douglass said, “I take it that all who have heard at all on this subject, are well convinced that the stronghold of slavery is in the pulpit. Say what we may of politicians and political parties, the power that holds the keys of the dungeon wherein the bondman is confined, is the pulpit.” Later in the same speech, he again clarified his position on religion and sought to position religious leaders as having the potential to have the greatest impact noting, “I dwell mostly on the religious aspects, because I believe it is the religious people who are to be relied on in the Anti-Slavery movement. Do not misunderstand my railing—do not class me with those who despise religion—do not identify me with the infidel.”

In both the speech above, and in many others, Douglass used quoted or paraphrased scripture to make his points with the audience. In the speech above, Douglass paraphrases or quotes from the books of Ephesians, Titus, Genesis, James, Luke, and Matthew. Douglass had a firm grasp of scripture and knew when to use it in his speeches so that his message would be effective in educating his audience. As another example of his use of scripture, in an 1854 speech in New York, he utilized scripture in several ways. In this speech, he asked the question, “was the holy apostle really wrapt in the hallowed fires of inspiration when he uttered the sublime declaration that of one blood God made all nations of men to dwell upon all the face of the earth, or was he mistaken?” This is almost a direct quote from Acts 17:26. Douglass used this passage to show that slavery was against God’s plan in order to inspire others to act.

69. Ibid, 2:96.
70. Ibid, 2:480.
Conclusion

Reginald Davis has written on the subject of Douglass and what he calls "liberation theology." Davis considers Douglass' work in the area of religion to be precursor to liberation theology and attempts to utilize the work of Paulo Freire to show how Douglass used religion as a means to liberate his people. Davis tries to show how Douglass worked to free his people from the oppression of slavery and racism. Davis does try to make the connection between what he calls the liberation theology and Douglass' efforts to use religion to educate others. Douglass did use his speeches and writings as a means to liberate others from slavery. He tried to educate others through these speeches and writings to change the United States, the abolitionist movement, and religion. Davis believes that the work of Douglass helped to allow others such as Freire to develop later. The connection between Douglass' work and Paulo Freire will be further explored in chapter six.

Douglass' relationship with religion has long been a subject for discussion. In speeches, he would forcefully criticize religion and praise it. He was inspired by the rhetorical force of the scripture, but appalled by how religious leaders in both the North and South applied it in practice and particularly how it was abused as a means defend slavery. He would say what he loved about religion and what he hated. Douglass did so not just to keep his speeches entertaining, but also to educate and to touch the moral chord of his audiences. He had an evolving sense of faith and wanted to shape religion into what he thought it should be. He also wanted religion and religious leaders to play an important role in the abolitionist movement. Douglass used his speeches to educate and

inspire them to act so that they would not only participate in the movement, but also so that they might influence their brethren in the South.

Douglass used scripture frequently in his speeches either by quoting it directly or by paraphrasing it. In addition, he often used parables, much like religious stories will, in order to make his points. Douglass also compared the struggles of American slaves with those of Jews in the Old Testament to show that their struggle was not unique and could be overcome. Douglass primarily used scripture in three ways. First, he would use it to challenge the fact that slaveholders often used the Bible to support slavery. He would show how one could argue against the institution based on this document just as forcefully. Second, he used scriptures to strengthen what he believed was true religion. Douglass often remarked that he loved the religion that helped the poor and the oppressed and he wanted to reinforce his own religious philosophy. Finally, he used scripture to attack slavery on moral grounds. If slavery was so incompatible with religion, how could it be justified?

Douglass had a long history with religion. Learning to read the Bible was what inspired him to obtain literacy, at least in the beginning until he discovered the emancipating power of literacy. He taught other adults about religion both directly through Sabbath schools and as a class leader in his church in New Bedford and he also taught others indirectly through his speeches and writings. He also was a lay preacher for a period of time before becoming one of the most famous abolitionist orators. Although his faith journey was often controversial, Douglass often relied on scripture to strengthen his arguments to educate using the rhetorical power of the scriptures. A phrase that he often used to describe his own faith adequately summarizes his faith journey. "I love the
religion of our blessed Savior. I hate the slaveholding, the woman-whipping, the mind-darkening, the soul-destroying religion that exists in the southern states of America."\^{72}

Douglass frequently employed this statement because he wanted to show what he so valued in religion. By the quote on the masthead of *The North Star* that began this chapter, Douglass wanted to teach the world that everyone was equal before the eyes of God.

CHAPTER III

ADULT EDUCATION THROUGH SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

“This struggle may be a moral one; or it may a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle.”

Douglass’ work to educate others about religion and faith was very much related to his work in the abolitionist movement. Adult education has had a very prominent role in social movements including Jane Addams’ work with settlement houses as well as an important role in the United States Civil Rights Movement. This involvement in social movements also extends to the abolitionist movement. Douglass was a prominent leader in the movement to abolish slavery. As a former slave, Douglass could speak on the subject in ways that very few others could. In the abolitionist movement, Douglass worked to educate others through persuasion in two main ways. First, Douglass was actively trying to show the evils of slavery and why it was incompatible with American ideals. Second, he was also trying to change the abolitionist movement itself to make it more radical and more involved in politics. Soon after escaping from slavery, Douglass found himself serving as an abolitionist speaker and from 1841 through the Civil War most of his speeches were related to the abolition of slavery.

Douglass’ speeches and writings on the subject of slavery are too numerous to fully cover in this space, but there are several that are the most helpful in understanding how Douglass’ work was adult education. Arguably the most important of these speeches was given on July 5, 1852, in Rochester, New York titled “The Meaning of July Fourth

for the Negro."² Douglass used this speech to drive home many of his views on the
dichotomy that existed for white and black Americans. In this speech, Douglass
repeatedly made statements such as, "It is the birthday of your National Independence,
and of your political freedom."³ The important part of that statement is in the use of your
and not our in the statements to illustrate that this is not a holiday for those in slavery or
even for free African-Americans. As Douglass was transitioning in his speech from
lauding the ideals of the founders to saying how the nation has fallen short of those
ideals, he asked the questions, "Fellow citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I
called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your
national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural
justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?"⁴

In showing a disconnect between the original intent of the founders and the
current state of affairs, Douglass answered the question in the title of his speech. He said,
"what, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; 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."⁵ Clearly, Douglass was trying to educate both those in and outside the
abolitionist movement that this was not a day for celebration until all of those in the
United States were able to benefit from the ideals of the founders. Douglass also worked
to educate those in the abolitionist movement about the issue of whether or not the
Constitution was a pro or anti-slavery document. This issue was a point of contention
between some in the movement. Over time, Douglass became a vocal proponent of the

². Foner and Taylor, 188.
³. Ibid, 189.
⁴. Ibid, 194.
⁵. Ibid, 196.
idea that the Constitution was anti-slavery at its core, but was being falsely interpreted as pro-slavery. Douglass said, “there is no matter in respect to which the people of the North have allowed themselves to be so ruinously imposed upon as that of the pro-slavery question of the Constitution. In that instrument I hold there is neither warrant, license, nor sanction of the hateful thing; but interpreted, as it ought to be interpreted, the Constitution is a glorious liberty document.”

Social Movements and Adult Education

Adult education and social movements have long been connected. During their time, these movements are often considered radical or subversive, which would certainly be true of Douglass’ work and the abolitionist movement. Social movements have a long history of utilizing adult education to inspire their members to action and to persuade others to come around to their point of view. Douglass was directly challenging what many people in the United States thought to be correct. Whenever an individual or group is challenging societal norms, they will be viewed as radicals. Douglass’ work in social movements is well chronicled, but what has not been fully studied is how Douglass sought to change the movements he was involved in. Douglass had two main educational roles in the abolitionist movement. First, he was working to educate the people who listened to his speeches and read his writings. Douglass worked to persuade them about the evils of slavery and to inspire his audience to take action to end the practice. Second, Douglass was working to educate those in the abolitionist movement and to change the

6. Ibid, 204.
focus of the movement. Douglass worked to make the abolitionist movement more radical and more involved in the political process.\(^7\)

John Holst loosely describes social movements as being either old (working class movements) or new (feminist, environmental, peace, autonomy or identity).\(^8\) In the spirit of everything old being new again, the abolitionist movement is a better fit in the new category as it was a group whose work centered around race and identity. Charles Tilly, the major scholar in the field of social movements, has defined social movements as “a group of people identified by their attachment to some particular set of beliefs.”\(^9\) Obviously, this is a very generic definition of social movements. Later, Tilly took a more subversive approach in defining social movements by saying that these groups offer “a sustained challenge to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders by means of repeated public displays of that population’s worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment.”\(^10\) This second definition has a much better correlation with the abolitionist movement as they relied on public displays, often in the form of speeches, to show the worth of the enslaved population.

There are many different theories as to how social movements engage in collective action. The sociologist Emile Durkheim wrote extensively about society and how society changes. According to Durkheim, “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its

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own life; one may call it collective or common conscience.”\textsuperscript{11} Durkheim described society as one of conflict and action. According to Tilly, “the basic Durkheimian idea presents a society strained by forces of disintegration and forces of integration.”\textsuperscript{12} In the Durkheim tradition, there are three main types of collective action, which are routine, restorative, and anomic.\textsuperscript{13} These three types of collective action work together as the society works to either change or maintain society. Society members use routine collective action to replenish shared beliefs. In the middle is restorative collective action, which people use to move a society back into the mainstream. Finally, at the other end of the perspective is anomic collective action, which society uses to alter shared beliefs. Clearly, the abolitionist movement would fall into the category of anomic collective action as they were trying to alter society itself. Even within the abolitionist movement, there was discourse over how to go about this change and Douglass was right at the heart of this discussion.

Marco Giugni offers three main criteria to evaluate whether a social movement is or has been successful.\textsuperscript{14} At the center of these criteria is the belief that when evaluating social movements there must be a more holistic evaluation. First, we must look beyond short-term public policy changes and look for long-term benefits for the movement’s members or the beneficiaries of the group’s efforts. Second, we must consider changes to the very structure of the political system. Finally, to fully understand the impact of any social movement, we must understand how the culture changed because of the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Tilly, 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly, xxii-xxiii.
\end{itemize}
movement’s efforts. These criteria are valuable when considering the effectiveness of both the abolitionist movement and Douglass’ efforts within the movement.

Holst has said that there are two main forms of adult education in social movements. First, social movements can use adult education “to educate and persuade the larger public and politicians.” Second, adult education can be used internally for organization and process development. With both of these forms, adult education can have a central role in spreading the message of the organization and contributing to the organization’s effectiveness. Douglass’ work also directly corresponds to Holst’s first purpose of adult education in social movements, but there are elements of the second as well. Douglass was clearly trying to use his speeches and writings to both educate and persuade the public and politicians. This dual role that Douglass envisioned for the abolitionist movement was a cause of contention within the abolitionist movement and will be described below.

Paulo Freire has said “education is politics.” But one could also say that this statement could also be turned around to state that politics is education. The political process, particularly efforts to change society, is based on the concept of changing perceptions to change the current reality. Freire was using adult education to show workers in Brazil that how society was oppressing them. The idea that adult education can help to bring about social justice, as well as creating an informed citizenry, is a core idea for the field. Adult education must be more than just a tool for vocation. It must be a tool to transform individuals and society.

15. Holst, 81.
16. Ibid.
17. Holst, 77.
Douglass in the UK

In August 1845, after the publication of his *Narrative*, Douglass set sail for Liverpool so that he could begin a stint in the United Kingdom. All told, he would spend the next twenty-one months traveling through the British Isles as he raised awareness and money for the abolitionist cause. There had long been a strong connection between the abolitionists in the United States and the British people often provided financial support for the abolitionist cause. The trip abroad also allowed Douglass to gain some independence within the abolitionist movement, as he would begin the transition from just a popular public speaker to a leader in the movement. According to the historian Philip Foner, Douglass “returned to the States a world figure, a mighty power for freedom.”

Douglass also gained his official freedom during this trip as a group of abolitionists collected the funds to purchase his freedom from Thomas Auld. With this trip, Douglass began on the path that would transform him from just sharing his story to helping to shape the abolitionist movement. Douglass would use the power of speeches while in the British Isles, and his correspondence to others in the movement, to begin to transform the movement itself. There was also a practical reason for the trip abroad. After the publication of the *Narrative*, there was a fear that by outing himself so publicly, Douglass could be apprehended and returned to slavery.

Even while onboard the steamer *Cambria*, Douglass experienced the dichotomy of his current situation. On the journey across the Atlantic, Douglass experienced racism and prejudice at the hands of the crew and other passengers. Douglass was denied access to the main passenger cabins of the ship having to settle for a lower-class

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19. Douglass, 376.
accommodation, which was most likely travel steerage. Although Douglass expected such treatment, his white traveling companions were surprised by the insult. According to Douglass, “the insult was keenly felt by my white friends, but to me, it was common, expected, and therefore, a thing of no great consequence.” In addition, during a speech he gave onboard, Douglass was also challenged and ridiculed by several passengers from the south. These passengers repeatedly interrupted Douglass’ speech and even threatened to throw him overboard.

Douglass did experience the first kindness of the British people from the captain of the Cambria. The night before the Cambria docked in Liverpool, Captain Judkins invited Douglass to lecture on American slavery. Douglass gave a lecture of which we have no text, but the impact of the lecture was the altercation with the southern passengers described above. Judkins not only protected Douglass as he gave his speech, but after it was over, he placed the unruly passengers in irons. This incident also helped to give Douglass some notoriety once he arrived in Liverpool. After arriving, the passengers in question went to press “to justify their conduct, and to denounce me as a worthless and insolent negro.” According to Douglass, this event helped in “awakening something like a national interest in me, and securing me an audience. . . .” Always seeming to be at the right place at the right time, Douglass capitalized on this event to promote his early speeches.

22. Ibid, 371.
23. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
As mentioned above, a group of abolitionists purchased Douglass’ freedom while he was in the British Isles. The act of manumission was a difficult and sometimes controversial subject. Prior to this action, Douglass was potentially subject to fugitive slave laws and could be returned to Thomas Auld should he be captured. This act did prove to be controversial as some in the abolitionist community felt that by purchasing a slave’s freedom, they were condoning the institution of slavery. According to Douglass, “they thought it a violation of anti-slavery principles—conceding a right of property in man—and a wasteful expenditure of money. On the other hand, viewing it simply in the light of a ransom, or as money extorted by a robber, and my liberty of more value than one hundred and fifty pounds of sterling, I could not see either a violation of the laws of morality, or those of economy, in the transaction.”

By writing about this event in 1855, Douglass was showing that it is sometimes better to be practical than morally superior. In other words, it was better to assure his continued freedom, and the ability to travel for the abolitionist cause, than to stand against this act on principle.

Douglass’ time in the Great Britain was often focused on the “concentration of moral and religious sentiment of its people against American slavery.” He often spoke to large audiences. For example, on May 22, 1846, he delivered a speech to over 2,000 people at Finsbury chapel in Moorfields, England. This speech will be discussed below for its contribution to Douglass’ educational efforts during this time. Douglass gave about fifty lectures in Ireland over the span of about four months. He was very impressed by the Irish people as he spoke about the “the spirit of freedom that seems to animate all

27. Ibid, 378.
28. Foner, 1:64.
with who I come in contact and the entire absence of everything that looked like prejudice against me.”\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps the history of the Irish being oppressed influenced their interactions with Douglass. These interactions with all of the people of the British Isles, but especially the Irish greatly influenced Douglass.

After Ireland, Douglass moved on to Scotland where he lectured during the spring of 1846. During this time, cracks began to develop between the Douglass and the Garrisonian camp. Maria Weston Chapman, who was a leader in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, sent a letter to the Irish abolitionist, Richard D. Webb. In this letter, Chapman warned Webb to keep an eye on Douglass so that he would not fall prey to the anti-Garrisonian camp of the English abolitionists.\textsuperscript{30} Once Douglass was alerted about Chapman’s guidance, he was furious. In March 1846, Douglass sent a letter to Chapman expressing his concerns. In this letter, Douglass said “if you wish to drive me from the Anti-slavery Society, put me under overseership and the work is done. Set some one to watch over me for evil and let them be so simple minded as to inform me of their office and the last blow is struck.”\textsuperscript{31}

Clearly, Douglass was beginning to bristle at the efforts to control him by the Garrisonian sect of the abolitionist movement. Douglass was invited to speak at an event in London sponsored by the British and Foreign Anti-slavery Society, which had splintered off from the Garrisonian anti-slavery society.\textsuperscript{32} According to some, Garrison was beginning to grow jealous of Douglass’ success and although the two often shared the same stage, their relationship was never quite the same after Douglass returned to the

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\textsuperscript{29} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, 65. \\
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 144. \\
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 66.
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United States. Douglass was becoming more of his own man and these events while in the United Kingdom helped to further his own education on how to conduct the abolitionist movement. Once that happened, Douglass would be ready to help lead and shape the movement as it moved into the next phase of its struggle.

While Douglass was across the Atlantic, he also began to think about how he would next contribute to the abolitionist movement. Douglass began making plans to purchase a newspaper press and to start an anti-slavery newspaper of his own. This action would further the divide between him and Garrison, as it would put him in direct competition with *The Liberator*. In addition to the ideological move that was taking place in Douglass' own thinking about the future of the abolitionist movement, there was also a physical move getting ready to occur as Douglass was making plans to move from Massachusetts to upstate New York. This move would provide some physical distance between Douglass and Garrison and move him closer to Gerrit Smith, someone who would greatly influence the next part of his life. After moving to New York, Douglass was able to expand on his political endeavors.

Moving to New York and Changing a Social Movement

After returning from the British Isles in 1849, Douglass began making plans to do two things that would be important for both Douglass and the abolitionist movement. First, Douglass started looking for a new residence for his family in Rochester, New York. Second, Douglass started working towards establishing his first newspaper, *The North Star*. Douglass needed to move both literally and psychologically away from the Garrisonian wing of the abolitionist movement headquartered in Massachusetts. Doing so

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33. McFeely, 143.
would allow him to travel and speak on his own without as much influence from Garrison. It would also allow Douglass to have a profession beyond abolitionist speaker.

Outside of Massachusetts, central and upstate New York was the important hotbed for the abolitionist movement with its own principal characters. As the Massachusetts wing was led by William Lloyd Garrison, the New York branch of the abolitionist family was led by Gerrit Smith. John Stauffer has called Smith the “lead protagonist” of this segment of the abolitionist movement. Gerrit Smith’s father was a major land baron during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and often partnered with John Jacob Astor. Residing in Peterboro, New York, Gerrit Smith took over running the family estate after graduating college. Smith soon became active in many different reform movements, especially the abolitionist and temperance movements. Peterboro and Rochester became important stops along the Underground Railroad. Gerrit Smith was active in Liberty Party and later Republican Party politics and was elected to Congress in 1853.

Smith and Douglass exchanged extensive correspondence over their decades of friendship. Syracuse University, where Smith’s papers are housed, holds over 100 letters between the two men spanning from the late 1840’s through the Civil War. Much of this correspondence deals with Douglass’ newspaper ventures, but there the two also extensively discussed the abolitionist movement and the United States’ Constitution on the subject of slavery. In particular, this exchange between the two men is part of Douglass’ continuing education through transformational learning. He was clearly using the letters as a way to try out what was a new way of thinking for him. In a January 11,

1851 letter from Douglass to Smith, Douglass shows that he is beginning to come around to the idea that the Constitution is not a pro-slavery document. On the subject, Douglass stated that he could not see how “slavery could be supported by any idea of justice.”

Clearly, Douglass was beginning to come around to the idea that slavery and the Constitution were incompatible. On this subject, Douglass offered this statement by saying that he was “prepared to treat slavery as a system of lawless violence incapable in its nature of being legalized.” He also used these letters to try to encourage Smith to help Douglass as an abolitionist speaker. In 1852, he asked Smith to accompany him on a trip west to speak on three subjects, which were the true nature of human government, the illegality of slavery everywhere in the United States, and how the federal government was responsible for ending slavery by almost any means. On the last subject, Douglass held that the government had “the right, power, and duty of this government to abolish slavery in every state in the union.”

The two abolitionists also discussed the movement itself in particular the Garrisonian wing of the movement. In 1853, Douglass wrote to Smith that “they [Massachusetts Garrisonians] talk down there, just as if the antislavery cause belonged to them, and as if all antislavery ideas originated with them and that no man has a right to peep on the matter or subject.” Douglass did not want to feel controlled and by moving away from Garrison, Douglass achieved some independence although he still needed Smith’s funding for his newspaper. The two men did disagree some in their letters. In

35. Frederick Douglass to Gerrit Smith, January 11, 1851, Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY.
36. Douglass to Smith, May 1, 1851, Smith Papers.
37. Douglass to Smith, April 15, 1852, Smith Papers.
38. Ibid.
39. Douglass to Smith, April 18, 1853, Smith Papers.
1856, the two disagreed over who to support in the presidential election as Douglass supported the Republican John C. Freemont, while Smith wanted someone more committed to the abolition of slavery.

In addition to Gerrit Smith, the New York abolitionists were led by James McCune Smith, the famous black physician. James McCune Smith was the first African-American to practice medicine in the United States and was also a leading abolitionist speaker. He also wrote the introduction to Douglass' second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Douglass dedicated that same autobiography to Gerrit Smith. Gerrit Smith became a major benefactor for Douglass and helped to support his newspaper enterprises. Gerrit Smith linked James McCune Smith, and Douglass, who all resided in upstate New York and they, along with John Brown, represented the more radical wing of the movement. Gerrit Smith was at the center of this group. These three men changed each other's perspectives and in doing so helped to change the abolitionist movement and the United States. Both of the Smiths were important in turning the abolitionist movement more radical and they influenced Douglass' thinking on important issues such as whether or not the Constitution was pro-slavery, the role of politics in ending slavery, and whether violence was a viable option to end slavery if it came to that drastic step.

Speeches and Writings Related to Abolitionism

From his escape from slavery to the start of the Civil War, Douglass focused most of his public speeches and writings on the abolition of slavery. This was his cause and he was perfectly suited to the task. He had an amazing personal story and combined that with a speaking style that allowed him to enthrall audiences. Over time, Douglass began

40. Douglass to Smith, August 31, 1856, Smith Papers.
shifting his speeches from just telling his story to speaking out on the future of the United States with regards to slavery. There are hundreds of speeches that are relevant to Douglass’ educational work in the area of abolitionism, but there are several that are key to showing how Douglass used his public persona to drive the movement and to change the United States and to use adult education as a powerful political force.

*Speeches in the United Kingdom*

One of the defining moments in Douglass’ life was his trip to the United Kingdom. During the twenty-one months that he spent in the British Isles, Douglass delivered many speeches and engaged in some controversy. Douglass came back from this trip a different person. His speeches during the time in the United Kingdom helped to change the abolitionist movement. Since Douglass’ main topic while abroad was the subject of slavery or more specifically the evils of slavery, there are numerous options of speeches that are relevant to Douglass’ role in using the abolitionist movement for education. There are two speeches that are most important to this discussion. The first was Douglass’ speech delivered in Moorfields, England on May 12, 1846 and the second was his farewell speech to the British people delivered on March 30, 1847 in London.

The 1846 speech in Moorfields is useful in understanding the educational quality of Douglass’ speeches on the subject of slavery and in the name of abolition. In this speech, Douglass has begun to branch out from just telling his personal story to speaking about how the institution of slavery itself has corrupted the United States. Interestingly Douglass uses this speech to speak about how slaves and free blacks were deprived the right to education in the United States. According to Douglass, “he [slaves] is carefully deprived of everything that tends in the slightest degree to detract from his value as
property. He is deprived education. God has given him an intellect; the slaveholder declares it shall not be cultivated.” In this section, Douglass is clearly making a case that education is a basic right given by God that man is denying to a large group. He is also making the case that slavery depends on unquestioned ignorance, and that education unfit a person to be a slave. Implicitly, but clearly, he argues that education is not merely accumulated knowledge, but even more importantly an awareness of one’s surroundings sufficient to challenge the status quo. In short, education, in this sense of questioning and challenging, was subversive. That subversiveness was precisely what slavery’s apologists feared.

Later in the same speech, Douglass continued to take on the subject of education as a right that all are entitled to when he remarked “this is American slavery; no marriage—no education—the light of gospel shut out from the dark mind of the bondman—and he forbidden by the law to read.” The use of the law to deny slaves the right of education is an important topic for Douglass. Here he is not just speaking out about the institution of slavery, but also how all blacks both slave and free are treated in the United States. Douglass later drove home his point by detailing specific examples of how the law was used by slaveholders. He said “If a mother shall teach her children to read, the law in Louisiana proclaims that she may be hanged by the neck. If the father attempts to give his son a knowledge of letters, he may be punished by the whip in one instance, and in another be killed, at the discretion of the court.” Douglass’ statements on education in this speech are some of the strongest he would make during his career.

41. Foner, 32.
42. Ibid.
43. Ibid.
although he will revisit the subject after the Civil War when advocating for schools for
the newly freed slaves.

Education was not the only subject that Douglass spoke about in this speech. As
he often did, he addressed how cruel slaveholders were in their treatment of their slaves.
He also used the various slave codes in the slave states against the institution. “I think no
better exposure of slavery can be made than is made by the laws of the states in which
slavery exists” Douglass noted in this same speech.44 In an interesting form of
argumentation, Douglass used the words that slaveholders and their policy makers
decided to codify in statute against them. Douglass’ point was that these issues must have
been very important for them to be put into statute. He also said, “for the slaveholders
cannot object to this testimony, since it is the calm, the cool, the deliberate enactment of
their wisest heads, of their most clear-sighted, their own constituted representatives.”45

Douglass concluded his speech by discussing what he wanted to accomplish with
this speech and to a larger extent his trip to the British Isles. First, he wanted to raise
awareness of the evils of the institution. He said so when he remarked, “I expose slavery
in this country, because to expose it is to kill it. Slavery is one of those monsters of
darkness to whom the light of truth is death. Expose slavery, and it dies. Light is to
slavery what the heat of the sun is to the root of the tree; it must die under it.”46 In
addition to exposing the British people to the evils of slavery, Douglass also wanted to
make sure that there would be no refuge for those who practiced slavery any where in the
world. “To tear off the mask from this abominable system, to expose it to the light of

44. Ibid, 35.
45. Ibid, 36.
46. Ibid, 39.
heaven, aye, to the heat of the sun, that it may burn and wither it out of existence, is my object when coming to this country” Douglass said.47 In this speech, Douglas attacked slavery using the slaveholders’ own words that they put into law. He brought the light down on the dreadful institution at least for a little while.

When Douglass was preparing to leave England, he delivered a farewell address from London. In this speech in March 1847, Douglass employed many of the same ideas he had used and would use in the future. One tool that Douglass used in this speech was to downplay his own accomplishments, which was something he often did in the introductory portion of his speeches. For example, he began this lecture by expressing “I never appear before an audience like that which I now behold, without feeling my incompetency to do justice to the cause which I am here to advocate, or to meet expectations which are generally created for me by friends who usually precede me in speaking.”48 He went on to say that “while I feel grateful for the generosity of my friends in bestowing them upon me, I am conscious of possessing very little right to them; for I am a plain, blunt man—a poor slave, or rather, one who has been a slave.”49 By beginning in this manner, he was quite possibly trying to manage the expectations of the audience, but he also could have been trying to assuage his mostly white audience. Douglass may have been trying to make sure his predominantly white audience did not feel that he thought himself better than them.

In his farewell address, Douglass also discussed many of the concepts that would help to mark a distinction between his brand of abolitionism and that of the Garrisonians.

47. Ibid.
48. Ibid, 55.
49. Ibid.
For instance, he talked about how the current generation of Americans had perverted the original intent of the founders of the United States. Douglass observed, "I might say, that the present generation of Americans have become dishonest men from the circumstances by which they are surrounded." This concept that the leaders of the United States had corrupted that original meaning of the Constitution is one that Douglass would articulate up until the Civil War. It was also how he would eventually mark his major difference with William Lloyd Garrison.

Douglass also used this lecture as an opportunity to be critical of those in the Northern states who he felt were complacent in slavery. "Why, sir, the Northern States claim to be exempt from all responsibility in the matter of the slaveholding of America, because they do not actually hold slaves themselves upon their own soil. But this is mere subterfuge... If they are not actual slaveholders, they stand around the slave system and support it" Douglass stated. Later on, he provided a glaring example of this hypocritical complacency when he made the statement referring to those in the north, "we would not hold slaves ourselves, and we are most sincerely opposed to slavery; but, still, if your Negroes run away from you to us, we will return them to you." He used statements such as these to educate those in North that they can and must do more to eradicate slavery. Being opposed to the institution was not enough if you helped enforce the laws that secured the very system you opposed.

Douglass' trip to the British Isles was not without controversy. While in London in 1846, Douglass spoke at the World Temperance Convention. Temperance was an issue

50. Ibid, 56.
51. Ibid, 58.
52. Ibid.
that Douglass, and many abolitionists, fully embraced. To Douglass, temperance was something that would help his race gain respectability. During his lecture at this convention, Douglass spoke about the issues of abolition and temperance and also the segregated nature of American temperance societies. This angered some, including Samuel Hanson Cox of Brooklyn, New York. Cox wrote a letter to the *New York Evangelist* criticizing Douglass and those who included him as a speaker at the convention.

In this letter, Cox called Douglass’ speech a “perversion, an abuse, an iniquity against the law of reciprocal righteousness.” Douglass wrote a response to Cox that was published in *The Liberator* in November 1846. There are several important points in his response to Cox that are relevant to Douglass’ educational role. First, Cox had called him an “abolition agitator and ultraist.” Douglass’ response to this was “sir, I regard this as a compliment, though you intend it as a condemnation. My only fear is, that I am unworthy of those epithets. To be an abolition agitator is simply to be one who dares to think for himself…” This statement shows how Douglass was prepared to take the abolitionist movement in a more radical direction. Second, he described the struggle for freedom for African-Americans as a struggle for all people. He described the temperance movement as an important part of this struggle. About the temperance movement, Douglass said the “cause is dear to me. I love it for myself, and for the black man, as well as for the white man. I have labored, both in England and America, to promote the cause, and am ready

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53. Ibid, 41.
54. Ibid, 43.
55. Ibid.
still to labor; and I should grieve to think of any act of mine, which would inflict the slightest injury upon the cause. But I am satisfied that no such injury was inflicted." 56

Douglass also recognized what this trip abroad did for him. He was transformed by this lengthy trip and this transformation would lead him down the path that would help him to change the abolitionist movement. He said as he concluded his farewell address, "But I go back to the United States not as I landed here—I came a slave; I go back a free man. I came here a thing—I go back a human being. I came here despised and maligned—I go back with reputation and celebrity." 57 Once he returned to the United States, Douglass began working to reform the abolitionist movement and carry forward the message he started spreading in the United Kingdom.

Speeches to Change the Abolitionist Movement

After he returned to the United States, and moved to Rochester, New York, Douglass continued his work as an abolitionist orator while he began the work of launching The North Star. Both of these actions gave him more autonomy and provided him with a new base of operations for the next phase of the abolitionist movement. The choice of Rochester was an interesting one. Douglass picked Rochester for a variety of factors including active abolitionists, free black community, etc., but a more interesting question would be why not Syracuse, New York instead. Some such as McFeely have argued that Douglass picked Rochester so that there would be some separation between him and Smith, but he was still close to Smith and his allies. 58 Up to this point, abolitionists had mostly focused on the moral aspects of the anti-slavery cause and

56. Ibid, 44.  
57. Ibid, 74.  
58. McFeely, 151.
ignored the political elements. Both sides would agree that slavery was immoral, but the
Garrisonian wing of the movement felt that to abolish slavery, they would have to first
change the hearts and minds of the American people. Those like Gerrit Smith, and
eventually Douglass, felt that politics, and violence if needed, would be the weapons to
end slavery.

On the subject of whether this was purely a moral struggle or not, he was also
influenced by John Brown. The two men met in 1847 while Douglass was lecturing in
Massachusetts. At this meeting, Brown discussed with him his ideas on whether “moral
suasion” would be enough to win freedom for slaves.⁵⁹ Although Brown’s raid on
Harpers Ferry was still years away, he was already beginning to formulate the ideas that
would lead him to carry out this event. Brown spoke of a plan to arm five groups of men
to help slaves overthrow their masters.⁶⁰ Although Douglass did not quite share Brown’s
zeal for leading the armed rebellion, he did begin to speak out on the subject. In June
1849, he surprised many in his audience when he stated that “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.”⁶¹ Although this surprised and shocked many in his
audience, Douglass was well prepared to debate the merits of a slave revolt with a group
of abolitionists. He spoke of the hypocrisy of abolitionists, and Americans in general,
cheering the French revolution and echoing their chants of “Liberty, Equality,
Fraternity,” but opposing the right of slaves to use violence to overthrow an even stronger

⁵⁹. Foner, 2:50.
⁶⁰. Ibid.
⁶¹. Ibid.
bondage.\textsuperscript{62} Douglass' views on this would continue to evolve in the years leading up to the Civil War. In 1856, he wrote that he thought it was prudent to use "persuasion and argument" to end slavery, but he also thought that the "peaceful annihilation is almost hopeless."\textsuperscript{63} By 1860, he had resolved himself to the fact that it would most likely take war and violence to end slavery. In June of that year, he wrote "I have little hope of the freedom of the slave by peaceful means. The only penetrable point of a tyrant is the fear of death."\textsuperscript{64} His views on violence, as well as politics and the Constitution, show how Douglass not only wanted to educate those outside of the abolitionist movement, but those within the cause. He was campaigning not only for freedom for the slaves, but eventual equality.

As Douglass began to transition to this phase of his life, his speeches and writings began to take on a more political and radical tone. No longer was he content to just speak in moral terms of how wrong slavery was. He now spoke about how the very institution of slavery was a perversion of the founders' original ideas. Douglass spoke about how an entire segment of the population was being denied the very freedoms that the founders hoped to establish when they broke off from England. On July 5, 1852, Douglass delivered not only possibly his finest speech, but also one of the most important abolitionist speeches. In this lecture, Douglass aptly portrayed the many hypocrisies that existed in the United States. Through this speech, he was trying to change not only the South, but also the abolitionist movement itself. Delivered in Rochester, New York, Douglass delivered an address that challenged his audience and is another example of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 51.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
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how he worked to educate those within the abolitionist movement. This speech is also an example of how Douglass used what would we would now consider to be transformational learning in his speeches. In this speech, he challenged his audience and their assumptions in order to try to change both the individual and society.

Early on in the speech, Douglass set the stage for what would be his overall theme of the lecture. He began framing the discussion of the holiday as yours versus ours. In comparing the holiday to Passover for Jewish people, Douglass stated that “it is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance.”65 By establishing a clear distinction early on that this was his audience’s holiday, but not necessarily his holiday, Douglass was pointing out how the United States was failing to live up to the founders’ original ideas. Throughout the speech, he praised the men who stood together to break off from Great Britain. He praised the Declaration of Independence by pronouncing “I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ringbolt to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost.”66

After establishing how important the original ideas of the United States were, and how much he values them, Douglass transitioned to discussing the problems slavery poses for those very ideals. He began to challenge the assumptions of his audience by using a speech on the day to celebrate the birth of freedom in the United States to point

65. Foner, 189.
out the injustices of the current situation. To transition to this phase of his speech Douglass posed the question, “Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here to-day? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us?” 67

He then went on to establish that the Fourth of July is not a day for celebration for millions of citizens in bondage and that this vile institution was a stain on every other aspect of the nation. “Fellow-citizens, above you national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are, to-day, rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them,” Douglass remarked as he continued dissecting the problems of the nation. 68 Clearly, he was establishing how out of sync slavery was with the principles that guided the founding of the United States.

Douglass continued, “I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of the liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America!” 69 Douglass was challenging his audience that even though they opposed slavery, they were still responsible for this scourge on the nation.

Douglass continued this line of questioning his audience when he asked them a very basic question, “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?” 70 In doing so, he

67. Ibid, 194.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid, 195.
70. Ibid, 196.
was creating a climate to inspire his audience to do more. He wanted them to think about the fact that this holiday was not just a day for celebration. He continued,

I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is a 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 equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons 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. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour.  

In this moving passage, Douglass addressed the hypocrisy of celebrating the Fourth of July while so many Americans were in bondage. He also used this speech to discuss his views on the subject of the Constitution and slavery. By 1852, he had moved to the view that the Constitution was at its core an anti-slavery document. In the speech on the Fourth of July, Douglass summed up his views by declaring “take the Constitution to its plain reading, and I defy the presentation of a single pro-slavery clause in it. On the other hand, it will be found to contain principles and purposes, entirely hostile to the existence of slavery.”

Douglass’ transition to the viewpoint that the Constitution was anti-slavery did not happen quickly. When he was a Garrisonian, he embraced their views that this was a moral struggle and the Constitution was a pro-slavery document. As he began to view the Constitution as being anti-slavery, he became more at odds with the Garrisonians. To Douglass, Gerrit Smith, and those within this faction of the movement, the basic ideas of freedom in both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution applied to all, but

71. Ibid, 196-197.
72. Ibid, 204.
political leaders and judges had misinterpreted them. Because of that, they felt that politics could be used to end slavery. Electing public officials who felt that slavery could be ended through politics would help do so. Gerrit Smith himself was elected to Congress in 1852 and served one term in Congress. In addition, he was the nominee of the Liberty Party for President in 1848 and 1852. Smith was also a candidate for Governor of New York in 1858, when he ran on a platform of anti-slavery. As mentioned above, Douglass' correspondence with Smith was instrumental in causing Douglass to shift his way of thinking on the subject of the Constitution. This correspondence was an important part of Douglass' own journey through transformational learning.

Douglass often wrote and spoke on the subject of the Constitution and slavery. His views on the subject evolved over time. Early in his life and career, he held the Garrisonian view that the Constitution was a social contract between those who both opposed to and in favor of slavery. 73 In this view, both sides agreed to the legal protection of slavery in order to forge a political union. Because Garrison felt that the Constitution was an inherently flawed pact because of slavery, he refused to participate in the political process sanctioned by it. He did not vote nor would he support candidates for office in any way even if they supported an end to slavery. 74 There were even some in the Garrison wing of the movement who espoused the idea that the free states should be the ones to secede from the Union they viewed as intrinsically flawed. This was the view that Douglass held for some time. In 1849, he said "I now hold, as I have ever done, that the

74. Ibid.
original intent and meaning of the Constitution ... makes it a pro-slavery instrument—such an one as I cannot bring myself to vote under, or swear to support.”

In May 1851, Douglass announced in *The North Star* a “Change of Opinion.” By doing so, he was overtly defying the American Anti-Slavery Society, which was Garrison’s group. Just two weeks earlier, at a convention for the Society, the delegates had passed a resolution banning the support of any newspaper that did not denounce the Constitution as pro-slavery. According to Douglass, the “Constitution, construed in the light of well established rules of legal interpretation, might be made consistent in its details with the noble purposes avowed in its preamble; and that hereafter we should insist upon the application of such rules that that instrument, and demand that it be wielded in behalf of emancipation.”

He had made a very public pronouncement of his new opinion by using *The North Star* to tell everyone of his true feelings. He went on to say that slavery was always incompatible with the Constitution by writing that “it never was lawful, and never can be made so; and that it is the first duty of every American citizen, whose conscience permits so to do, to use his political as well as his moral power for its overthrow.” Douglass was using the power of his press to educate his audience about his viewpoint and why they should consider this position for themselves. He was trying to persuade them to take action in the manner that he believed to be the most logical.

75. Foner, 1:353.
77. McFeely, 169.
78. Foner, 2:155.
79. Ibid, 156.
Douglass did not end his efforts to educate on the matter with this editorial in his paper. He continued to advocate for the position he believed in when he wrote in 1856, “to suppose that one portion of this instrument sanctions Slavery, and another sanctions liberty, is to array the Constitution in conflict with itself.”80 To him, the two concepts are so dichotomous that there is no way they could be in the same document. Douglass based his views on the Constitution on three main sources, which were the Preamble to the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the intentions of the founders. One of his strongest statements on the subject took place in an 1857 speech on the Dred Scott Decision when he said, “the Constitution, as well as the Declaration of Independence, and the sentiments of the founders of the Republic, give us a platform broad enough, and strong enough, to support the most comprehensive plans for the freedom and elevation of all the people of this country, without regard to color, class, or clime.”81 Douglass used the discussions on the Constitution and slavery as a way to move the abolitionist movement and the debate on the subject of slavery. He was trying to change the opinions of both those within and outside the abolitionist movement and to steer the movement in the direction that he saw fit.

Conclusion

Douglass dealt with many major issues when he wrote and spoke about matters related to slavery. He helped to define and inspire the abolitionist movement to change. The abolitionist movement is an important example of an effective social movement although Douglass’ involvement shows how an organization’s focus can change over time. Because of Douglass, the movement changed into something more political and

80. Ibid, 376.
81. Ibid, 381.
radical. It was no longer just a moral cause, but rather it was one that would utilize the ballot and bullet if necessary to end slavery. Although direct causation can not be proven, the political effects of the abolitionist movement can be shown. In 1848, former President Martin Van Buren ran as the nominee of the Free Soil Party and received ten percent of the vote. By 1852, without a major candidate on the ballot and competition from the Liberty Party, the Free Soil candidate only received five percent of the vote. When the 1856 Presidential election came around, the Republican Party mostly carried on the mantel of abolition, although they were willing to compromise on the subject. In 1856, the Republican John C. Freemont, who was supported by Douglass, received thirty-three percent of the vote. Of course, in 1860, Abraham Lincoln won the Presidency in a divided election. Douglass changed because of his growing involvement in the abolitionist movement and his efforts to educate those within and outside of the movement changed the tone and substance of the debate.
CHAPTER IV

ADULT EDUCATION THROUGH POPULAR CULTURE

“In the publication of the paper, I shall be under no party or society, but shall advocate the slave’s cause in that way which in my judgment, will be best suited to the advancement of the cause.”

Adult education can take many different forms and there are numerous learning opportunities in popular culture. During the nineteenth century, newspapers were an important part of popular culture. These papers were often partisan and took clear positions to advance causes that the people running the papers believed in. In founding *The North Star*, Douglass was seeking to create for himself a life outside of Garrison’s shadow. He also saw this paper as an extension of his lecturing where he would continue to advocate for abolition and the other causes he believed in such as education, women’s rights, and others. He would use *The North Star* to shift the debate on issues, educate others about his positions, and to further politicize the abolitionist movement. Douglass’ work as an editor was also a way for him to develop a defined vocation in a respected field. His move to Rochester was a way to define himself and continue his struggle for autonomy. Throughout his life, Douglass struggled between seeking acceptance within white society and independence from that same society.

Douglass was the editor of several different newspapers before the Civil War including *The North Star, Frederick Douglass’ Paper, The Douglass Monthly* and *The New National Era* for a brief period after the Civil War. In addition, he was heavily influenced by the writings in *The Liberator*. As mentioned above, popular education is often equated with radical adult education and class struggle. Douglass used his

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1. Douglass as quoted in Foner, 1:83.
newspapers as a vehicle to educate his readers about issues of politics and religion, and to talk about the issue of self-reliance. Popular education can also be used to mobilize those within a movement and to cause them to act, which is clearly something that Douglass tried to do through his papers.² Although his papers lasted for several years in one form or another, Douglass was not well prepared to be an editor nor was he ready to run a business.

Popular Culture as Adult Education

Popular culture and popular education can take many different forms within adult education. According to Jarvis, popular education is “designed for the people by the people; an instrument in the ideological class struggle, radical and often revolutionary; and education which involves praxis in as much as the education learned is then put into practice in the class struggle.”³ As Douglass was interested in elevating his people from their oppression, his work in journalism fits in quite well within popular education. One challenge with popular education is that it occurs outside of formal institutions, but their results can be seen by action through the organizations and activities centered on the causes of these adult educators. As M. K. Smith has written, “they look to the way people are with themselves and the world. Such education is, as a result, unpredictable, risky and, hopefully, emancipatory.”⁴

What is popular culture? The concept of popular culture appeared during nineteenth century England and referred to any culture of the masses.⁵ It was not always

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2. Merriam and Brockett, 175.
3. Ibid, 15.
4. Ibid, 247.
considered to be complimentary and was often contrasted with the culture of the elite within a society. Popular culture has also been considered to be "a cultural expression that reflected the wisdom of the folk—that is, a knowledge and values embedded in the lived experiences of people."³⁶ Contemporary critical theorists consider popular culture to be a tool that has a dual role of being an instrument that elites use to oppress and oppressed groups use to tell their story. According to Talmadge Guy, "the important point for the present discussion is that popular culture teaches us about race, class, gender, and other forms of socially significant difference and reify these differences into social relationships that take on the aura of normalcy."³⁷ This is how understanding popular culture is relevant for the appreciation of Douglass' newspaper work as popular adult education. His work within journalism was a way for him to help those who were oppressed both by educating them and white society about African Americans.

Popular culture can be both a barometer of society and an engine to drive a society's viewpoints. According to Patricia Thompson, "recognizing the influence of popular culture in our own lives is the first step to harnessing its educational potential."³⁸ The dual role of popular culture in reinforcing and resisting dominant culture is important. During the nineteenth century, the mainstream press was not interested in resisting dominant culture so we saw many specialty presses spring up during this time. The abolitionist presses are good examples of those. As one form of popular culture becomes part of the dominant culture, the pendulum will swing in the other direction and opposing forces will develop.

6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
Merriam and Brockett list several significant concepts for adult education for social change, which are important to consider when evaluating Douglass' work in the area of popular education. Collaborative learning is the first of these concepts and involves learning based on the concept of education with the people and not for them. Second is the concept of knowledge production, which is different in informal and popular adult education. In this type of education, knowledge is "more than what is produced by society's systems of government, business, and education and transmitted to the less knowledgeable. Legitimate knowledge can also be produced by the disenfranchised. . . ." Power has a significant role in education for social action and popular education. Popular education and adult education for social action recognize the fact that understanding the balance of power is key to challenging oppressive forces within society. The final important concept for understanding adult education for social action and the role of popular education in social action is praxis. Praxis is simply the "interaction of reflection and action." In this process, the educator and the learner work together to apply what they are learning together in order to change society. Popular adult education and Douglass' newspaper work are directly related to these concepts.

Newspapers were an important part of the popular culture of nineteenth century America. Popular culture is often positioned at the nexus of the struggle between dominant culture and secondary groups. Bell hooks has written extensively about the modern uses of popular culture in adult education and how to teach oppressed people about how to critically evaluate cultural images in media. In recent years, many scholars

9. Merriam and Brockett, 249-257.
10. Ibid, 251.
have discussed the role of popular culture in the current practice of adult education, but none has really looked to the past. Studying Douglass’ use of popular culture in the form of newspapers will help us to understand the history of using popular culture to educate adults.

African-American and Anti-Slavery Presses

Certainly, Douglass was not the first African-American to launch a newspaper nor was he starting the first paper designed to further the cause of abolition. William Lloyd Garrison published the first issue of The Liberator in January 1831 and was the leading voice of the abolitionist movement. In addition, the American Anti-Slavery Society, the group heavily influenced by Garrison, produced the National Anti-Slavery Standard as its official publication. Even with its success, The Liberator had never been a financial success and needed financial assistance from wealthy individuals within the abolitionist movement, such as Maria Weston Chapman, to remain in operation.12 The threat that Douglass posed to these other papers was a legitimate cause of concern for those such as Garrison. Because of that, Garrison, Edmund Quincy, Wendell Phillips, and Chapman tried to persuade Douglass not to start his own paper. They even offered him a opportunity to write for the National Anti-Slavery Standard on a regular basis, but he eventually decided to go out on his own.13

The history of African-American run newspapers up to this point did not show much chance of success for Douglass’ new venture. Freedom’s Journal was launched in 1827 and lasted only until 1829. This paper is considered to be the first press in the United States founded by African-Americans. Samuel Cornish and John Brown

12. McFeely, 147.
13. Ibid.
Russwurm founded this paper in 1827 and the partnership would eventually end over the colonization issue as Cornish was opposed to it and Russwurm supported it. After only six months, Cornish left the paper and Russwurm eventually abandoned it himself to leave the United States for Africa in 1829.

Cornish eventually came back to the newspaper business in 1837 when he launched *The Weekly Advocate*, which eventually became *The Colored American*. This paper lasted until 1841, and during this time James McCune Smith also helped edit the paper. Another important paper that helped to shape Douglass' own newspaper career was *The Ram's Horn*. Willis Hodges, a black businessman in New York City, started this paper in 1846 because of voting discrimination in the state of New York. New York had a provision in the state constitution that required African-Americans to own $250 in property in order to be granted the right to vote. Hodges started a very public campaign to end this practice, but became frustrated with the New York *Sun* and their opposition to changing the law. This paper is important because of the fact that it did not solely focus on abolition, but rather equality for all people. Although *The Ram's Horn* did experience some success, it too faded from existence in mid-1848.

During the 1840's, there were numerous other short-lived newspapers run by African-Americans, but none that were sustained for a lengthy period of time. Most of these papers were plagued by small subscription bases and isolated to the cities that they

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15. Ibid, 7.
called home. The climate was not right to start a paper, but Douglass forged ahead even though he was not well prepared to do so. He faced many of the same problems that the other papers did, but his paper was able to sustain itself in different incarnations through the Civil War.

Starting a Paper in Rochester

When Douglass returned from his twenty-one month tour of the British Isles, he was determined to launch a newspaper of his own. The only real questions were when and where? While he was abroad, Douglass began making the necessary plans to start a paper as he had solicited funds from some of his friends in Europe. He had secured approximately $2000 specifically to purchase a printing press and had put aside almost $4000 from his public speaking. Douglass was making the arrangements to start a paper, but he still had to determine where.

Douglass settled on Rochester, New York for several reasons. First, this would provide some separation from Garrison and the Massachusetts abolitionists. Publicly, Douglass had said that he chose the location in order to avoid interfering with the circulation of The Liberator and the National Anti-Slavery Standard. He also picked Rochester because of its proximity to Gerrit Smith as the two had developed a friendship because of shared thoughts on the abolitionist cause. Smith resided approximately ninety miles away in Peterboro, New York. This gave Douglass proximity, but still some independence, as he did not want to trade Garrison for Smith. A third reason for Douglass as he chose Rochester was symbolic as the city was an important final stop on the

18. Ibid.
19. McFeely, 147.
20. Douglass, 703.
Underground Railroad as escaped slaves made their way to Canada. Finally, Rochester was logical because of an active group of abolitionists in the region. We know of Gerrit Smith and James McCune Smith residing in the region, but there was also a very active female abolitionist presence in Rochester. Elizabeth Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Amy Post, and Sojourner Truth all called Rochester home at some point during this time.

While Douglass was preparing to move to Rochester, he also began gaining some practical experience in the newspaper business. Garrison and the American Anti-Slavery Society were still trying to persuade him not start his own paper. If he was intent on wading into the business, Garrison wanted to give him an outlet that would not put him into direct competition with his ventures.\(^\text{22}\) Garrison gave him the chance to write on a regular basis for the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and Douglass began contributing a column in each edition of the *Standard*. Over the next two months, he wrote a total of six columns for the paper mostly detailing his speaking tour as well as some of his speeches.\(^\text{23}\)

Writing for the *Standard* was not Douglass' only foray into the newspaper business before launching his own paper. He also contributed to *The Ram's Horn* and was even listed as an assistant editor for a few issues.\(^\text{24}\) In the columns in this paper, he touched on the controversy over voting rights as well as the applicability of the Bill of Rights for African-American residents of the United States. After he founded *The North Star*, Douglass alluded to discussion of merging *The Ram's Horn* with his paper although it never took place. On October 28, 1847, he wrote to his friend Amy Post announcing his

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\(^\text{24}\) Ibid, 104.
plans when he said, “I have finally decided on publishing the North Star in Rochester and to make the city my future home.” According to the prospectus of the paper published in several other anti-slavery papers, the purpose would be “to attack slavery in all its forms and aspects; advocate Universal Emancipation; exact a standard of public morality; promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the colored people; and to hasten the day of freedom to our three million enslaved fellow-countrymen.” By publicly declaring these as his objectives, Douglass was marking out a distinct territory for his paper. He was going to go beyond abolition and address equality and education. He was positioning his paper as a vehicle to both educate and advocate for the causes he believed in.

Using the Press to Advance the Cause

With the publication of The North Star in 1848, Douglass was venturing into a brave new world. No longer was he just responsible for writing and delivering speeches, he was now responsible for running a business. For three years, he, along with others, published The North Star. In publishing The North Star, Martin Delany and William C. Nell joined Douglass. Delany was born to a free black mother and had been active in anti-slavery activities for many years. Delany was listed as a co-editor until 1849, but only contributed a few articles. William C. Nell provided valuable newspaper experience having written for The Liberator for over fifteen years and was considered to be a true reporter.

25. McFeely, 149.
27. McFeely, 151-152.
In 1851, Douglass merged this paper with the paper for the Liberty Party, an abolitionist political party, and renamed it *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. This move was done at the urging of Gerrit Smith who was heavily involved in the publication of both papers and was a financial contributor to both as well. Douglass published this paper until the dawn of the Civil War when the paper was renamed *The Douglass Monthly*. After the Civil War, his paper ceased operations. For a brief period of time after the Civil War, Douglass also was involved with the publication of the *New National Era*, but by this point his interests had shifted in other directions. Having worked as a newspaperman for almost twenty years by this point, Douglass left a lasting legacy on the history of African-American journalism. His work also represents an important use of popular culture for adult education. His editorials helped to advocate for causes he believed in and to shift the debate in the directions he thought they should go. He used his newspaper work to branch out beyond just abolitionism into equality for all.

Although Douglass was a good writer and his papers were effective as advocacy pieces, his newspaper career was somewhat spotty because he never could get the hang of the business side. He often neglected the business aspects of running a paper, which would frequently put the paper in dire financial situations.\(^{28}\) He frequently had to depend upon the generosity of others such as Gerrit Smith, Amy Post, Julia Griffiths, and other abolitionists to get by. In his letters to Smith, he frequently discussed the financial problems. As early as March 1849, Douglass admitted to Smith that he had already spent most of the money he had saved to start the paper and the paper was $2000 in debt.\(^{29}\) In 1856, even after merging with the *Liberty Party Paper*, he was still in debt and told Smith

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28. Ibid, 164-165.
that he did not think the paper could be sustained much longer. Because of the $1500
debt he had now, Douglass was considering merging the paper with other papers to try to
avoid going under.\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Writings about and for Education}

With \textit{The North Star}, Douglass had a new platform and an expanded message. He
was beginning to speak out about more than just slavery and abolition. He was beginning
to also advocate for African-Americans to do more for themselves and for a way for them
to be fully integrated into society. In \textit{The North Star}, Douglass wrote about the subject of
education and training for African-Americans. He also began to speak out about the
subject of improvement of self as a means to improve society. Although he would
continue to work for societal transformation for the rest of his life, we can see a clear
transition in Douglass’ public statements.

The strength of his papers was always the editorials and one editorial that
exemplifies Douglass’ new message was published in the July 14, 1848 edition of \textit{The
North Star}. In “What are the Colored People doing for Themselves?” he wrote about
what black Americans need to do to help themselves and to not just depend on white
Americans.\textsuperscript{31} He was asking a question that he then answered in the editorial by spelling
out some things that he thought African-Americans need to do in order to better
themselves. He began by detailing some of the problems that he saw among his people.
He wrote, “if there is one evil spirit among us, for the casting out of which we pray more
earnestly than another, it is that lazy, mean and cowardly spirit, that robs us of all manly
self-reliance, and teaches us to depend on others for the accomplishment of that which we

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\item[30.] Douglass to Smith, May 23, 1856, Gerrit Smith Papers.
\item[31.] Foner, 1:314-320.
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should achieve with our own hands."32 He respected what white Americans were doing to help elevate his people, but he clearly was trying to push his own people to do more for themselves. He continued his line of questioning in this editorial with a question that synthesizes his educational tone in this editorial when he asked a question that he felt every African-American should ask, "what am I doing to elevate and improve my condition, and that of my brethren at large?"33 In this one statement, Douglass has shown how his work was designed for both personal and societal improvement.

Douglass also wrote about why black Americans must do more to help secure the freedom of all their people. He wrote "one of the first things necessary to prove the colored man worthy of equal freedom, is an earnest and persevering effort on his part to gain it. We deserve no earthly or heavenly blessing, for which we are unwilling to labor."34 To Douglass, without a substantial contribution from his own people, why would anyone else care enough to work to end slavery. One area where he thought African-Americans could do more to help end slavery was an issue that he had discussed many times before and that is through the churches. Douglass was often critical of organized religion in the United States and his criticism was not limited to white churches. In this same editorial, he said this about black religious leaders, "unfortunately, those who have the ear of our people on Sundays, have little sympathy with the anti-slavery cause, or the cause of progress in any of its phases. They are too frequently disposed to follow the beaten path of their fathers. The most they aim at, is to get to heaven when they die. They reason thus: Our fathers got along pretty well through the

32. Ibid, 314.
33. Ibid, 315.
34. Ibid, 316.
world without learning and without meddling with abolitionism, and we can do the same.”

Douglass knew that for African-Americans to do more for their own cause, it would take a lot of work and spirit. He wrote, “what we, the colored people, want is character, and this nobody can give us. It is a thing we must get for ourselves. We must labor for it. It is gained by toil—hard toil.”

Douglass also touched on issues of equality beyond just abolitionism when he stated, “though born on American soil, we have fewer privileges than aliens. The school-house, the work-shop, counting-house, attorney’s office, and various professions, are opened to them, but closed to us.”

Finally, he closed with a statement about education and its power to help elevate his people: “the means of education, though not so free and open to us as to white persons, are nevertheless at our command to such an extent as to make education possible; and these, thank God, are increasing.”

This was not Douglass’ only writing on the subject of education. He was an advocate for an education in trades as well as traditional education to elevate his people. To him, learning a trade was the first step towards equality, as it would help his people move out of more menial jobs. In a March 4, 1853 editorial in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* titled “Learn Trades or Starve!” he advocated exactly what he believed to be the value of learning a trade and how that would help out his people.

According to Douglass, “These are the obvious alternatives sternly presented to the free colored people

35. Ibid, 317.
36. Ibid, 318.
37. Ibid, 319.
38. Ibid.
of the United States. It is idle, yea even ruinous, to disguise the matter for a single hour longer; every day begins and ends with impressive lesson that free negroes must learn trades, or die.\textsuperscript{40} He viewed learning trades as essential for his people to not only acquire skills to make a living, but also to show their value for all of society. “We must show that we can do as well as be; and to this end we must learn trades. When we can build as well as live in houses; when we make as well as wear shoes; when we can produce as well as consume wheat, corn, and rye—then we shall become valuable to society,” Douglass wrote.\textsuperscript{41} He continued his argument for the value of learning trades as well as education in general when he concluded, “what we, as people, need most, is the means for our elevation—an educated colored man. . .”\textsuperscript{42}

The debate over learning trades continued into the next edition of the paper when he penned another essay on learning trades. In this editorial, Douglass discussed why he was advocating for skilled trades. He said, “the more we think upon the subject, the more strongly we are convinced that our hope of elevation and improvement, and, indeed, of our very existence, depends mainly upon, and will be in proportion to, the extent, we adopt mechanical, and abandon menial employments.”\textsuperscript{43} To Douglass, you were not really free if you were still doing the same work as when you were a slave. Although he believed in traditional education for African-Americans, he believed that “the means of living must precede education; or in other words, the education of the hands must precede that of the head.”\textsuperscript{44}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 223.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 224.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 225.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 236.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 237.
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Douglass was also an advocate for creating an industrial school for African-Americans. In January 1854, he wrote an editorial about a proposed industrial school for free blacks that would include a mental as well as trade education. In this editorial, he said, "this mode, or measure, is the establishment, in this country, for the benefit of our caste-stricken people, of an Institution which shall combine the double advantage of a good, mental education, with a practical knowledge of three or four of the best handcrafts."\textsupercite{45} This concept is very similar to many of the labor education movements in the United States that combined a broad education for adults who were engaged in labor positions. In the end, he reverted back to his position of self-help and what that would mean for his people when he said, "a better demonstration of self-help could not well be made by the colored people of this country than by the starting of an Industrial college by themselves."\textsupercite{46} Douglass would return to the subject of education after the Civil War as he advocated for equality for the freed slaves and this will be covered in the next chapter. As his newspaper affiliations were mostly over after the Civil War, this educational work mostly took the form of speeches.

\textit{Writings to Change the Abolitionist Movement}

Douglass would use his newspapers to help to move the abolitionist movement in his direction. In his papers, he discussed subjects that were controversial within the movement as an effort to educate and transform those within the movement. One such subject was the issue of colonization where slaves would be emancipated and returned to Africa. There were those within the abolitionist movement, such as Horace Greeley, who thought colonization could be legitimate compromise on the issue of slavery. Douglass

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  \item \textsupercite{45} Ibid, 272.
  \item \textsupercite{46} Ibid, 274.
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was opposed to this concept and some of his earliest speeches were on the subject. When he was lay pastor and exhorter in the New Bedford African Methodist Zion Church, he helped to persuade his fellow church members that colonization was not the action that they should favor. Once he founded *The North Star*, he returned to the subject and wrote about it from time to time.

According to Foner, “Douglass’ vigorous denunciation of colonization is an outstanding example of the contribution he made as an editor to clarifying problems confronting the Negro people.”47 As his newspaper audience was both white and black, he was clearly trying to persuade and educate both sides about the colonization issue in order to stop the concept from gaining any traction. To Douglass, this was his country too and his people should not be forced to leave. For decades, colonization had been an idea discussed, but never gained any real momentum. From the 1820’s forward, the American Colonization Society had worked to send freed and escaped slaves to Africa and even helped to found the Republic of Liberia. As the tone of the debate over slavery became more controversial, those seeking a compromise renewed the discussion of colonization.48 One proponent of the idea was Henry Clay, who represented Kentucky for decades in the House of Representatives and the Senate. Soon after founding *The North Star*, Douglass began to take on the issue of colonization.

Beginning on January 26, 1849, Douglass started denouncing the concept of colonization and equating it in terms similar to slavery. He frequently called it a “red herring” and “a ruse to divert the attention of the people from that foul abomination."49

47. Foner, 1:97.
48. Ibid.
49. Foner and Taylor, 125-126.
In this same editorial challenging Clay, Douglass also staked claim to the idea that his people had helped to build this nation too and should not be forced to leave. He wrote “for two hundred and twenty-eight years has the colored man toiled over the soil of America, under a burning sun and a driver’s lash—plowing, planting, reaping, that white men might roll in ease… and now that the moral sense of mankind is beginning to revolt at this system of foul treachery and cruel wrong, and is demanding its overthrow, the mean and cowardly oppressor is mediating plans to expel the colored man entirely from the country.”

Douglass also challenged Clay in his editorials, writing “It is an insult, and insolent and tyrannical assumption on the part of Mr. Clay, or anyone else, to tell us, or any part of the Colored people of this country, that he wishes us to go anywhere. We are at home here… Our right to stay here is as good as that of Mr. Clay, or any man-stealer in this land; and God helping us, we will maintain this right before all the world.”

To Douglass, the very idea of colonization was so insulting that it should not be discussed because it was just as bad as slavery.

In addition to attacking colonization on moral grounds, he also used economic arguments to try to persuade his readers as to why it was not a valid concept. In November 1849, he wrote “we [black Americans] are rapidly filling up the number of four millions; and all the gold of California combined, would be insufficient to defray the expenses attending our colonization.”

Moving beyond arguing that the expense to expatriate all African-Americans would be too great, Douglass also discussed that the economic impact to the United States would be too great. He wrote “we are, as laborers,

50. Ibid, 126.
51. Foner, 1:98.
52. Foner and Taylor, 148.
too essential to the interests of our white fellow-countrymen, to make a very grand effort to drive us from this country among probable events.\textsuperscript{53} The economic arguments that Douglass was using here are very similar to the current debate over what to do with the many undocumented aliens from Latin America.

Douglass was also trying to inform free African-Americans who were reading his paper who might be inclined to think that colonization was a good idea. To them he wrote, "brethren, stay where you are, so long as you can stay. Stay here and worthily discharge the duties of honest men, and of good citizens.\textsuperscript{54} He wanted free blacks to continue to work in this country so that when all slaves were free, there would be a group for them to look to for guidance and inspiration. The issue of colonization was one that bridged the gap between abolitionism and politics. For Douglass, the political aspects of abolition could not be separated from the moral. To achieve abolishing slavery, hearts and minds would have to be changed, but so would political leaders.

\textit{Writing to Reach His Enslaved Brethren}

In 1850, Douglass penned a letter to American slaves and published it in \textit{The North Star}. Certainly, this letter was more symbolic than anything as very few American slaves would be able to lay hands on \textit{The North Star} and even fewer would be able to read its contents. His target audience was the abolitionist movement as well as freed slaves in the North. In this letter, he was telling the story of what life was like for escaped and freed slaves in hopes that some slaves might be motivated to escape themselves. Early on in this letter, Douglass also attacked some in the abolitionist movement for what he viewed as inconsistencies. He wrote, "the abolitionists, on whom it is safe to rely, are

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Foner, 1:99.
almost all of them, members of the American Anti-Slavery Society, or of the Liberty Party. There are other abolitionists: but most of them are grossly inconsistent; and hence, not entirely trustworthy abolitionists. So inconsistent are they, as to vote for anti-abolitionists as civil rulers, and to acknowledge the obligation of laws, which they themselves interpret to be pro-slavery.”  

In this one section, Douglass at the same time bridged the gap between the two wings of the abolitionist movement by mentioning the American Anti-Slavery Society (William Lloyd Garrison) and Liberty Party (Gerrit Smith). He also took this opportunity to chastise those who supported compromise on the issue of slavery expansion and fugitive slave laws.

Douglass also used this letter as a chance to tell his enslaved brethren about what life is like in the North. He stated, “we get wages for our labor. We have schools for our children. We have opportunities to hear and to learn to read the Bible—that blessed book, which is all for freedom, notwithstanding the lying slaveholders who say it is all for slavery.” He also used this editorial to continue his work criticizing northern churches for their failure to bring about change in their southern counterparts. He wrote, “the priests and churches of the North, are, with comparatively few exceptions, in league with the priests and churches of the South…” Douglass’ conflicted relationship with religion was still evident when he wrote this in 1850 as he spoke about his love of the Bible, but mistrust of organized religion.

He also challenged his fellow escaped slaves in the North for not doing enough to help others escape from slavery. In commenting on free African-Americans not doing

55. Foner and Taylor, 158.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid, 159.
enough to help those in bondage, he wrote “candor requires the admission, that some of us would not furnish them [compasses], if we could; for some of us have become nonresistants. . . .”\textsuperscript{58} Clearly, Douglass expected his fellow free blacks to do more on the issue. He also had a message for American slaves on how to proceed should they escape from slavery, specifically about being cautious once they reach the northern states. He wrote “we regret to be obliged to say to you, that it is not everyone of the Free States, which offers you an asylum. Even within the last year, fugitive slaves have been arrested in some of the Free States, and replunged into slavery….It is true even in New York and New England, there are individuals, who would rejoice to see the poor flying slave cast back into the horrors of slavery.”\textsuperscript{59}

Douglass closed with three specific charges for American slaves that he hoped they would consider when they escaped slavery. First, on the subject of religion, he suggested “if you will join a sectarian church, let it not be one which approves of the Negro-pew, and which refuses to treat slaveholding as a high crime against God and man.”\textsuperscript{60} He wanted African-Americans to join churches which would treat all members equally. Second, he addressed politics by urging his brethren to “join no political party, which refuses to commit itself fully, openly, and heartfully, in its newspapers, meetings, and nominations, to the doctrine, that slavery is the grossest of all absurdities. . . .”\textsuperscript{61} Finally, on the subject of education, he urged American slaves to “send not your children to the school which is the malignant and murderous prejudice of white people has gotten

\textsuperscript{58.} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59.} Ibid, 160.
\textsuperscript{60.} Ibid, 161.
\textsuperscript{61.} Ibid.
up exclusively for colored people.”  

Obviously, he did not think too much of the concept of separate but equal. According to Douglass, “valuable as learning is, it is too costly, if it is acquired at the expense of such self-degradation.”

Conclusion

Douglass’ tenure as a newspaperman was successful in many areas, but also a challenging time for him. He was able to transfer his tremendous oratory skills to print and his editorials were very good. Unfortunately, he was not a very talented businessman and he struggled at this part of the newspaper business. Although he had a solid subscription base of close to 2,000 for The North Star and Frederick Douglass’ Paper, Douglass often had to depend on the generosity of those such as Gerrit Smith to keep his papers up and running. Even with these problems, he was able to effectively use his newspapers to advance abolition and the other causes he believed in.

Douglass’ work in the newspaper business is a good example of using popular culture to educate adults. He worked to inform, persuade, and educate his readers about the topics and causes that he thought to be important. His radical pedagogy and strong opinion statements on the issues that he viewed to be important were a way for him to reach supporters as well as detractors. Going back to the quote that began this chapter, he used his papers as an effective way to advocate for the cause. He also became more independent with his newspapers and was not obligated to any one interest. In his papers, Douglass first began to speak out about the importance of education for free African-Americans, which was a topic he would continue to talk about through the Civil War. Although he often wrote about the importance of an education in skilled trades, he also

62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
thought this should be combined with a mental education thus anticipating and bridging the divergent views of Washington and DuBois. He also used his paper to advocate for causes beyond just abolition such as women’s rights. Finally, Douglass used his editorials to advance the political debate over slavery and stir discussion over controversial subjects such as the Compromise of 1850 and the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. His use of his editorials and speeches as a bully pulpit to advance his causes through politics is an important topic for further exploration.
CHAPTER VI

POLITICAL ACTIVISM AS ADULT EDUCATION

"Fellow-citizens, let us entreat you, have faith in your own principles. If freedom is good for any, it is good for all. If you need the elective franchise, we need it even more. You are strong, we are weak; you are many, we are few; you are protected, we are exposed. Clothe us with the safeguard of our liberty, and give us an interest in the country to which, in common with you, we have given our lives and poured out our best blood." 1

Douglass used his speeches and writings on political matters to educate and persuade his audience. From the time before the Civil War when he mostly spoke about issues related to the abolition of slavery to discussing the rights of newly emancipated slaves, he used his pulpit to speak out on these issues. In doing so, he changed the abolitionist movement and helped turn the tide against slavery. Using the political process to end slavery was one of the causes of the split between Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. He used all of the platforms available including his speeches, his presses, and his private meetings with public officials to educate and to persuade his audience about his point of view. Douglass was trying to advance himself, his race, and the United States by fighting for freedom and progress. This type of adult education is what can be called political literacy and is designed to both advance a cause and create a better-informed citizenry.

Before the Civil War, Douglass used his speeches and writings to challenge policy makers who either wanted to compromise on the issue of slavery or who favored expanding the institution. He spoke and wrote about elections, candidates, legislation, war, and any other issue that he felt was important to the cause. During the Civil War, he was an advocate for issues and methods that he felt would end the war quickly, but also

1. Douglass as quoted in Foner, 3:420.
on how to ensure that we moved towards healing after the war was over. Douglass’ path took him to the White House to meet with President Lincoln and other public officials. After the Civil War, he became less critical in his public statements, especially about the Republican Party, as he sought political appointments. Eventually, he became the United States envoy to Haiti and Marshall for the District of Columbia. He used political activism as another vehicle to challenge assumptions, change society, and elevate the nation.

Politics and Adult Education

Adult education and politics are connected in many ways. Political organizations use adult education to help inform their members about issues and concerns. These same organizations also use adult education to inform the general public and public officials about their issues. They seek to raise awareness and to persuade through adult education. Today, public officials, political parties, labor unions, and interest groups try to educate their members and general public about their causes. This type of adult education for improving civic engagements is an important part of understanding how Douglass was involved in adult education. Although the methods have changed as technology has evolved, Douglass’ was very good at using his bully pulpits to advance his causes in the political arena. This area is where Douglass excelled and how he used adult education in this phase of his life. He worked to educate and inspire the public to action to help whichever cause he was working on at the time.

Cunningham is a leading author on the issue of social justice in adult education. Her chapter in the Handbook is an excellent overview on the purpose of adult education. Cunningham’s view is that we must be aware of both social and personal dimensions in
adult education. We must recognize the social justice role in all aspects of adult education. This view is important for understanding how political activism is adult education too. Her chapter is an effective guide for why we should have a socially responsible practice. Cunningham also points out that having a participatory society is a way to balance hegemonic forces and adult education can have an important role in this effort.

Education through politics is one way to work towards more equality. Our practice must look at power issues and must be critical when needed. We also must allow for differing voices to be heard. Within this type of education, there will be a conflict between individual needs and societal ones. This conflict is something that adult educators must be aware of. Much of social justice adult education is non-formal in nature, but that does not mean it does not have value such as what Douglass was engaged in during his career. Learning opportunities take many forms. Cunningham makes many excellent points about what we can and should do for adult education.

Political adult education can come in the form of education about specific issues or it can be more general. For example, an interest group can use adult education to raise awareness among their members about a specific issue in order to get their members to become engaged in the political process. On a more basic level, this same organization can use adult education to ensure that its members fully understand the fundamentals of the political process so that they may be fully involved and ready when they are needed to take action. This type of education is often called political literacy and involves

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helping to make an informed citizenry. As adult educators, we are aware of the many
different types of literacy that exist, but political literacy is one that is largely absent from
adult education literature. Of course, political literacy does have the potential for negative
uses as hegemonic forces within society could use it to manipulate oppressed groups.

Political literacy can be defined in many different ways. Cassel and Lo have
defined it simply as the “potential for informed political participation.”\(^3\) It has also been
defined as “the basic concepts and facts that constitute a necessary condition for
comprehending the contents of public debate.”\(^4\) Finally, political literacy has also been
defined as “the knowledge and understanding of the political process and political issues
which enables people to perform their roles as citizens effectively.”\(^5\) The key element for
political literacy, and literacy in general, is the combination of knowledge and the
capability to take action. In this case, to be political literate, a person must understand the
current state of affairs and also understand how and when to take action. While the
foundation for political literacy is typically formed through civics education during
youth, true political literacy cannot happen without the opportunities for action, which
can only happen during adulthood.

A citizen being informed about how their government works and the actions that
government takes is central to the very concept of democracy. Without the population
having a degree of political literacy, our government ceases to function as a true
instrument of the people. This fact is especially true for oppressed groups, as they need to
understand how to take on a greater role in the political process. Political literacy can

\(^3\) Carol A. Cassell and Celia Lo, “Theories of Political Literacy,” *Political Behavior* 19
(1997), 318.
\(^4\) Ibid, 320.
\(^5\) Ibid.
come from many different sources and is influenced by a variety of factors including "an internal psychological force, an external force imposed by social roles, or influenced directly by agents from social institutions." Each of these influencers has a role in developing our political literacy. For Douglass, he was influenced by each of these three factors. For his educational work in the area of political activism, he was obviously an agent of social institutions (abolitionist movement and the media) and worked through these institutions to promote political literacy.

**Relationship with Lincoln**

Douglass and Abraham Lincoln had a complicated relationship. Their relationship shows how Douglass continued to evolve as he increased his national presence. He was willing to compromise on certain points in order to achieve the greater good. At one point before the 1860 election, Douglass said that he could never support Lincoln for president. After Lincoln’s death, he provided a moving eulogy to him that paid a great tribute to his work. Douglass met with Lincoln in the White House and was the first African-American to meet with a sitting president in that building. His support of Lincoln was a pragmatic decision that was based on the realities of the political system. Although one was black and one white, the two shared a common heritage. They were both self-made men who came from incredibly humble origins. Douglass was the self-educated escaped slave who became the leading voice of the abolitionist movement. Lincoln was the man from Illinois who married into wealth, but came from a poor, frontier family.

Although Douglass was an abolitionist reformer at heart, he also realized that a single-issue party would be unlikely to win a national election so he eventually threw his

support behind the Republicans in 1860. He had this to say about the party and the need compromise on certain issues to move forward, “while I see...that the Republican party is far from an abolition party, I cannot fail to see also that it carries with it the antislavery sentiment of the North, and that a victory gained by it in the present canvass will be a victory gained... over the wickedly aggressive pro-slavery sentiment of the country.”

Here he was willing to compromise in order to achieve the potential for greater good. He continued elaborating on his hope for a Republican victory when he proclaimed

“Abolitionist though I am, and resolved to cast my vote for an Abolitionist, I sincerely hope for the triumph of that party over all the odds and ends of slavery combined against it.”

Reflecting about the election of Lincoln when he wrote his final autobiography in 1893, Douglass paints a portrait of a three-way election with two main sides. On one side you have the candidacies of Stephen Douglas and John Breckenridge representing the northern and southern branches of the Democratic Party, respectively. Stephen Douglas stood for the right of each state and territory to decide the issue for themselves while Breckenridge held the southern line that the rights of slaveholders had no boundaries.

About Lincoln and the Republicans, Douglass wrote that they “held that the Federal Government had the right and power to exclude slavery from the territories of the United States, and that that right and power ought to be exercised...with a view to its ultimate extinction.” Douglass was describing this struggle as bigger than just the issue of slavery, although that was his primary concern. It was about the struggle for the federal

7. Foner, 3:381.
8. Ibid.
government to have the power to enforce laws throughout the nation. Writing about the 1860 election in the *Douglass' Monthly*, he stated, “it was a contest between sections, North and South, as to what shall be the principles and policy of the national Government in respect to the slave system of the fifteen Southern States.”

After the election, and the subsequent secession of seven slave states before Lincoln’s inauguration, Douglass had a lower profile as he too was trying to make sense of what the election meant for the cause of abolition. Lincoln’s first inaugural address on March 4, 1861 was an opportunity for both sides to gauge Lincoln for how he would handle the secession crisis. Douglass wrote about Lincoln’s speech in his paper, which was one great orator evaluating another. He described the speech as a “little better than our worst fears, and vastly below what we had fondly hoped it might be.” In what would be one of his routine criticisms of Lincoln, he also wrote about that speech, it “conceals rather than declares a definite policy. No man reading it could say whether Mr. Lincoln was for peace or war...” Clearly, Douglass was not completely sold on Lincoln, but he was leaving the door open and over time, the two would develop a mutual respect for each other.

Once the war began, Douglass turned his attention to the conduct of the war and the treatment of African-American soldiers in the Union army. These efforts eventually brought him to the White House to meet with Lincoln in July 1863. This meeting served as sort of turning point in the two men’s relationship. Because he was acquainted with Salmon Chase and William Seward, two members of Lincoln’s cabinet, he was able to

10. Foner and Taylor, 413.
11. Ibid, 433.
12. Ibid.
get an appointment with Lincoln. Douglass was moved by the way he was received by Lincoln and remarked, "happily for me, there was no vain pomp and ceremony about him. I was never more quickly or more completely put at ease in the presence of a great man than in that of Abraham Lincoln." 13 Douglass had three main points he wanted to discuss with Lincoln, which were equal pay for African-American troops, protection for African-American troops who were captured, and commendation and promotion of these troops when they performed admirably. 14 While Lincoln could not provide any immediate remedy to Douglass' requests, just listening to the concerns in the White House was progress. Douglass summed up his thoughts on his meeting with the President when he wrote, "in all this I saw the tender heart of the man rather than the stern warrior and commander-in-chief of the American army and navy, and while I could not agree with him, I could but respect his human spirit." 15 The two men would meet again in 1864 as Union forces were making substantive progress towards ending hostilities. The relationship between these two men was short, but meaningful. Speaking in 1876 in memory of Lincoln, Douglass said, “It mattered little to us what language he might employ on special occasions; it mattered little to us, when we fully knew him, whether he was swift or slow in his movements; it was enough for us that Abraham Lincoln was at the head of a great movement…” 16 Even though Douglass often criticized Lincoln for being a little too deliberate in his actions, after time to reflect, he showed his respect and admiration for the actions that Lincoln took during the Civil War. In working with Lincoln, both he and Lincoln were educated. Douglass learned more about patience and

15. Ibid, 787.
the political process, while Lincoln gained a better understanding of how the Civil War must end up being about ending slavery.

Political Speeches and Writings

During the buildup to the Civil War, Douglass almost exclusively spoke and wrote about how to end slavery and framed his efforts to promote political literacy in that area. He was engaged in every major political debate that occurred during this time and worked to educate those within and outside the abolitionist movement on the issues. He issued calls to action to his readers and debated political leaders in his newspapers. He traveled around the country giving speeches on the political issues that he deemed to be important. Later on, he began to shift his focus to the conduct of the war itself and what to do with the millions of African-Americans after emancipation. He also championed other causes such as women’s rights and temperance. Douglass used his papers and his public speeches as ways to advance these causes and did so in a way that informed and persuaded his audience.

Speeches and Writings about Abolition

Douglass recognized that politics could help to speed up the process of ending slavery and used it as one of his tools. This was one of the ways that he broke away from William Lloyd Garrison and his branch of the abolitionist movement. Because of the fact that during the 1850’s his major platform was his newspapers, this was where he would often lead the charge on political issues related to the abolitionist movement. This effort continued Douglass’ work educating through popular culture. One issue that drew the ire of Douglass was the Compromise of 1850. Henry Clay championed this package of legislation, which included a stronger fugitive slave law as well as the possibility of
westward expansion of slavery through popular vote in the Utah and New Mexico territories. Slaveholding interests gave up the potential for a proslavery territory in part of California as well as an extension of the Missouri Compromise. This legislative package is generally credited with delaying the onset of the Civil War.

Of course, Douglass was not in favor of any compromise on the issue of slavery. In February 1850, he wrote an editorial lambasting Clay and all of those who favored compromising on this issue. Douglass recognized that this issue was becoming the topic of discussion in the halls of power and would dominate the political landscape until it is finally resolved. He wrote, “the vexed question of slavery has forced itself into the councils of the nation; and, like the rod of the Hebrew deliverer, it has swallowed up all other topics. Scarcely a day has passed since the meeting of the present Congress, but the hated subject has been the theme of fiery discourse.”

Douglass did praise Clay in this editorial, writing “it is at this juncture that the crafty Clay, with his characteristic temper and skill, has thrown himself on the turbid waters of debate.” About Clay’s proposal he wrote that it “gives everything to Liberty, in words, and secures everything to Slavery, in deeds. He is most generous in giving away that which he does not possess.” He then went on to describe each proposal and section of the legislation and to critique each one, thus informing and trying to persuade his readers. In this editorial, he lightly praised the man who proposed the legislation, but criticized his actions. He went into great detail to educate his readers about why the compromise was wrong from both a moral perspective and substantive one.

17. Foner and Taylor, 153.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
Later, Douglass turned his attention to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. This legislation, which created the Kansas and Nebraska territories, was the next great political debate where the fight over slavery was waged. This legislation allowed for popular sovereignty over the issue of whether or not to allow slavery in these new territories and repealed part of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. One of the architects of this legislation was Lincoln’s future opponent, Stephen Douglas. Douglass wrote about this legislation while it was being debated in 1854 and described it as “the hell-black scheme for extending slavery over Nebraska, where thirty-four years ago it was solemnly protected from slavery forever...”\textsuperscript{20} He also recognized that this legislation marked a shift in the American political system because it would lead to the creation of a new political party that would quickly rise to prominence. This party, the Republican Party, would become the party of Lincoln and Douglass. He wrote “Let the old parties go to destruction, whither they have nearly sunk the nation. Let their names be blotted out, and their memory rot; and henceforth let there be only a free party, and a slave party.”\textsuperscript{21}

Douglass also spoke about the Kansas-Nebraska Act. On October 30, 1854, he delivered an address in Chicago on the subject. He began this speech by stating the importance of the topic “A great national question, a question of transcendent importance—One upon which the public mind is deeply moved, and not my humble name—has assembled this multitude of eager listeners in Metropolitan Hall this evening.”\textsuperscript{22} After first praising Stephen Douglas, he then went on to criticize the legislation Douglas was advancing. He said, “if Hon. S. A. Douglas, your beloved and
highly gifted Senator, has designedly, or through mistaken notions of public policy
ranged himself, on the side of oppressors and the deadliest enemies of liberty, I know of
no reason... which would prevent me, or prevent any one else, from thinking so, or from
saying so.”23

He also tried to establish that the concepts of liberty and slavery can not coexist
within the United States in an effort to persuade his audience that the citizens of the
nations must make the choice. He proclaimed, “It is, I think, pretty well settled, too, that
one or the other of these must go to the wall. The South must either give up slavery, or
the North must give up liberty. The two interests are hostile, and are irreconcilable. The
just demands of liberty are inconsistent with the overgrown exactions of the slave
power.”24 Here is a central point of Douglass’ argument; if those opposed to slavery
continue to compromise with slave interests, the institution of slavery will continue to
expand to every corner of the nation. Douglass closed his argument by appealing to the
future and remarking on the current state of the anti-slavery movement. He said,
“victories have been won by slavery, but they have never been won against the onward
march of anti-slavery principles. The progress of these principles has been constant,
steady, strong, and certain. Every victory won by slavery has had the effect to fling our
principles more widely and favorable among the people.”25

As a new political party was forming to advance the anti-slavery cause, Douglass
could see the pendulum swinging back towards the abolitionist movement. The
Republican Party, although not united around the concept of an immediate end to slavery,

23. Ibid, 300.
24. Ibid, 301.
25. Ibid, 310.
was in favor of stopping the spread of slavery. The formation of this party, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, would cause Abraham Lincoln to return to politics where he would quickly become a national figure. In 1858, Lincoln was the Republican candidate for Senate in Illinois where he would wage battle against Stephen Douglas over the rising slave power in the United States. Although Lincoln lost this contest, he was well positioned to step onto a greater national stage in 1860 when he would win the Republican nomination for President and defeat a divided Democratic Party in the November election. Over the winter of 1860 and into 1861, seven southern states seceded from the Union. Four more would join these states to form the Confederate States of America. On April 12, 1861, the Confederates fired upon Union forces at Fort Sumter in South Carolina and the Civil War was officially under way.

*Speeches and Writings about the Civil War*

During the Civil War, Douglass focused much of his attention on the conduct of the war itself and how to use African-American soldiers. He often discussed making ending slavery a stated goal of the war. He often spoke and wrote to encourage African-Americans in the north and south to join the Union army in order to bring a swift conclusion to the war. He was also trying to secure rights for African-American soldiers and ensure that they were treated fairly during the war. His activities on this subject would take him to the White House to meet with Lincoln. Charles Douglass, Douglass’ own son, enlisted in the Army during the Civil War so Frederick had a personal stake in this effort, but it is clear that he felt that African-Americans could contribute to the war effort.
As early as May 1861, Douglass began his efforts to persuade those in power to include African-Americans in their war plans. He published an editorial in the *Douglass' Monthly* aimed at making an end to slavery the principal aim of the war. He wrote, “fire must be met with water, darkness with light, and war for the destruction of liberty must be met with war for the destruction of slavery. The simple way, then, to put an end to savage and desolating war now waged by the slaveholders, is to strike down slavery itself, the primal cause of that war.”

Douglass wanted those in power to proclaim ending slavery to be the ultimate goal of the war. He continued, “freedom to the slave should now be proclaimed from the Capitol, and should be seen above the smoke and fire of every battlefield, waving from every loyal flag!” In addition to advocating for emancipation, he also was trying to get African-Americans to become part of the very army that was waging the battle for freedom. “We have no hesitation in saying that ten thousand black soldiers might be raised in the next thirty days to march upon the South. One black regiment alone would be, in such a war, the full equal to two white ones,” Douglass stated.

In addition to boasting about the effectiveness of black soldiers, he also appealed to ideas of justice when he wrote, “every consideration of justice, humanity, and sound policy confirms the wisdom of calling upon black men just now to take up arms on behalf of their country.” Douglass’ language in this phrase is quite interesting as it appealed to both ideas of justice and strategy. It is also interesting how he was positioning African-Americans as wanting to defend *their* country instead of just *the* country.

27. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
Douglass also issued a series of calls to African-Americans to enlist so that they too can help to secure freedom for their brethren. In 1863, he made a major push to persuade African-Americans in both the North and South to enlist in the Union army. He spent time traveling around the country encouraging them to enlist. He also went to Union bases in occupied territories of the South to reach out to escaped slaves who had made their way to these camps.\footnote{McFeely, 223-237.} Douglass wanted his people to do their part to secure their freedom and freedom for their enslaved brethren who in some cases were being forced to take up arms to defend the very people who were enslaving them. Although Douglass felt that the call for African-American soldiers should have happened at the beginning of the war, he argued that the most important thing was that the call had taken place. He was clearly trying to persuade some in the African-American community to spend less time criticizing policy and more time contributing. In a March 1863 broadside titled “Men of Color, To Arms,” he urged his people to do more and said, “stop not now to complain that it was not heeded sooner. It may or may not have been best that it should not. This is not the time to discuss that question. Leave it to the future...Action! Action! Not criticism, is the plain duty of this hour.”\footnote{Foner and Taylor, 526.} Although he wanted to limit criticism at this time, he also expressed his thoughts about how to win the war. He wrote, “a war undertaken and brazenly carried on for the perpetual enslavement of the colored men, calls logically and loudly for colored men to help suppress it.”\footnote{Ibid.} He also issued a line that he would often repeat as he was trying to persuade others to action or to come around to his opinion. “Only a moderate share of sagacity was needed to see that the arm of the
slave was the best defense against the arm of the slaveholder. Hence with every reverse to the national arms, with every exulting shout of victory by the slaveholding rebels, I have implored the imperiled nation to unchain against her foes, her powerful black hand,” Douglass wrote. In other words, he thought that the nation should not fight this war with one very motivated arm tied behind its back.

This was not his only writing or speech on this subject. In *Douglass’ Monthly*, he wrote a nine point plan explaining why African-American men should enlist in order to try to persuade them to join the 54th Massachusetts Regiment, which was the first Union regiment for black soldiers. In this well organized argument, he appealed to his audience’s masculinity, patriotism, revenge, the need to learn how to use weapons, courage, racial pride, and personal pride. On the need to learn how to use weapons to defend themselves, their country, and their race, he wrote, “you should enlist to learn the use of arms, to become familiar with the means of securing, protecting and defending your own liberty.” He also saw this service as a way of proving that African-Americans deserved the rights and privileges of citizenship and were willing to defend these rights too. “Whether you are or are not, entitled to all the rights of citizenship in this country has long been a matter of dispute to your prejudice. By enlisting in the service of your country at this trial hour, and upholding the National Flag, you stop the mouths of traducers and win applause even from the iron lips of ingratitude. Enlist and make this your country in common with all other men born in the country or out of it.”

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33. Ibid.
34. Ibid, 528-531.
35. Ibid, 529.
36. Ibid.
that was that this was a war to emancipate slaves whether it was expressed as such or not. In this editorial he posed the question to his readers, “can you ask for a more inviting, ennobling and soul enlarging work, than that of making one of the glorious band who shall carry Liberty to your enslaved people?”

In July 1863, Douglass delivered a speech in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to promote enlistments by African-Americans as he continued his recruitment efforts for the nation. In this speech, he continued his argument that service to the nation in putting down this rebellion was a way for African-Americans to not only gain freedom, but also equal rights. “I say at once, in peace and in war, I am content with nothing for the black man short of equal and exact justice…Nothing can be more plain, nothing more certain that the speediest and best possible way open to us to manhood, equal rights, and elevation, is that we enter the service.” As he continued to try to encourage African-Americans to enlist in the armed forces, he also was arguing for equal rights for his people under the Constitution. In Douglass’ mind, the current federal government was one that would stand for rights for freed slaves and this shows his respect for how Lincoln was running the government. He stated, “What that Government is to us today, and what it will be tomorrow, is made evident by a very few facts. Look at them, colored men.” He then went on to show the progress made by current government and included items such as the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and in the territories, no foreign slave trade, recognition of the independence of Haiti, and the issuing of the

37. Ibid, 530.
38. Ibid, 534.
39. Ibid, 536.
Emancipation Proclamation. To Douglass, “citizenship is no longer denied us under this government.”

Rights for Freed Slaves

On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared all slaves in areas of the country in rebellion against the United States were free. Even before the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass began speaking out about rights for freed slaves and how best to integrate these freed slaves into society. During the Civil War and Reconstruction, he often spoke and wrote about this topic. Of course, his discussions designed to encourage African-Americans to serve in the Union army often were based on the idea of struggling for equality. He also aimed his words at white society in an effort to try to secure freedoms once emancipation took place as he tried to use his public statements to educate them, as well as African-Americans, about the subject of equality.

As early as January 1862, Douglass began to make his case and to set up the discussion for a post-Civil War United States. In this month, he issued an editorial in the Douglass’ Monthly titled “What Shall be done with the Slaves If Emancipated.” In this editorial, he walks the line between separatism and integration. At one point, he answers his question by stating, “our answer is, do nothing with them; mind your business, and let them mind theirs. Your doing is their greatest misfortune. They have been undone by your doings, all they now ask, and really need of at your hands, is just let them alone.”

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40. Ibid.
42. Ibid, 189.
He does elaborate on this concept of being left alone later in this editorial and describes it in terms of being left to have the same rights and privileges of whites. “If you see him on his way to school, with spelling book, geography and arithmetic in his hands—let him alone. Don’t shut the door in his face, nor bolt your gates against him; he has a right to learn—let him alone,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{43} He continued, “don’t pass laws to degrade him. If he has a ballot in his hand, and is on his way to the ballot-box to deposit his vote for the man whom he thinks will most justly and wisely administer the Government which has the power of life and death over him, as well as others—let him alone.”\textsuperscript{44} With these two statements, Douglass has described where the struggle for equality would be waged for the next 100 years as African-Americans fought for an equal education and the right to vote. Towards the end of the editorial, he summed up the answer to the question in the title of the editorial, “What shall be done with the Negro if emancipated? Deal justly with him.”\textsuperscript{45} Although he does stand on the edge of separatism in the editorial, at the end he only asks to be treated justly within the culture and society of the United States.

Later in 1862 in a speech delivered in Boston, Douglass continued many of these same arguments about freeing the slaves and leaving them alone. In this speech, he remarked, “we ask nothing at the hands of the American people but simple justice, and an equal chance to live.”\textsuperscript{46} He continued his argument for treating the freed slaves justly by saying, “pay them honest wages for honest work; dispense with the biting lash, and pay them the ready cash; awaken a new class of motives in them; remove those old motives

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid, 190. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 218.
of shriveling fear of punishment which benumb and degrade the soul, and supplant them by the higher and better motives of hope, of self respect, of honor, and of personal responsibility."

Douglass was trying to educate and persuade his audience that the freed slaves would do best if they were just treated as anyone else would want to be treated. He concluded by situating the struggle of African-Americans with the future of the nation when he stated, “my friends, the destiny of the colored American, however this mighty war shall terminate, is the destiny of America.”

As the war progressed and the Union army occupied territory in the South, escaped slaves would often travel to Union bases seeking refuge. In many cases, the military would establish schools for the people who flocked to these camps. The students at these schools were very often adults. Douglass was very supportive of these schools and fought against any efforts to limit them. In describing the schools in general he stated, “nothing connected with the advance of the army in the south was more gratifying to the genuine friends of the Union, than the upspringing in its wake of these little nurseries of moral and intellectual knowledge.” In this particular editorial, Douglass is criticizing the military governor of North Carolina, Edwin Stanley, for closing these schools. Stanley felt they violated the old slave codes of the state, which banned slaves from learning to read. He was trying to help ease public sentiment in North Carolina and thought abiding by some remnants of the old slave code would help with this effort. Douglass felt that closing these schools was an “outpouring of indignation.”

47. Ibid, 222.
49. See Williams’ Self-Taught for a discussion of these schools.
51. Ibid.
Douglass did not solely focus on just the rights of freed slaves after the war was over; he also discussed the need to repair the entire United States after the war was finished. Already looking towards the end of the war, in a November 1862 editorial, he wrote about a plan for reconstruction. He knew that this task would not be easy and noted, “today we have to put down a stupendous rebellion. Tomorrow we shall have to reconstruct the whole fabric of Southern society, and bring order out of anarchy. It is a tremendous undertaking.”52 He also could see that the entire hierarchy of southern culture would have to be changed because it was based around the power of slaveholders. He wrote, “the war will leave Southern Society like a ship driven by the storm, without rudder or compass.”53

He knew that to do so would require new leadership and a reshaping of governments in the South. “It would be absurd and ridiculous to expect that the conquered traitors will at once cordially cooperate with the Federal Government. They must be set aside for a new class of men, men who have hitherto exercised but little influence in the State,” he wrote.54 Douglass had a plan to help ease the South into this new world and that was education for the people. He stated, “for this, we shall have to educate the people. The arduous task of the future will be to make Southern people see and appreciate Republican Government, as a blessing of inestimable value, and to be maintained at any and every task. They have got to be taught that slavery which they have valued as a blessing has ever been their direct calamity and curse.”55 Without a great deal of specifics, he is proposing an education program to change how the citizens of the

52. Ibid, 290.
53. Ibid, 291.
54. Ibid, 291-292.
55. Ibid, 292.
South feel and think about government and society or what could also be called a political literacy program.

Douglass also spoke about the right to vote for freed slaves even though he knew this subject to be controversial even in the North. Many abolitionists were fine with freeing the slaves, but did not fully support equality for them. In December 1863, he took this message directly to the American Anti-Slavery Society at their annual meeting in Philadelphia. Here he spoke about many subjects related to the continuing need for abolitionist work even though war was being waged in part to end slavery. About the right to vote, he said, "I know it will be said that I ask you to make the black man a voter in the South. Yet you are for having brutality and ignorance introduced into the ballot-box. It is said that the colored man is ignorant, and therefore he shall not vote. In saying this, you lay down a rule for the black man that you apply to no other class of your citizens... If he knows enough to be hanged, he knows enough to vote. If he knows an honest man from a thief, he knows much more than some of our white voters." 56

Douglass knew that securing the right to vote would be a challenge for freed slaves and was continuing to fight for this right.

He also took his cause to African-Americans in an effort to educate them about the issues that they were going to face after securing freedom. At the Colored National Convention in Syracuse, New York in October 1864, Douglass delivered an address on the future of African-Americans titled "The Cause of the Negro People." 57 In this speech, he addressed issues such as the state of the war, the work of both of the main political parties, and took the opportunity to look at potential problems that would take place after

56. Ibid, 382.
57. Ibid, 408-422.
the Civil War was over. He urged those in attendance to not rest until slavery was
completely eradicated. His main message in this speech was political equality. According
to Douglass, “we want the elective franchise in all the States now in the Union, and the
same in all such States as may come into the Union hereafter. We believe that the highest
welfare of this great country will be found in erasing from statute-books all enactments
discriminating in favor or against any class of its people, and by establishing one law for
the white and colored people alike.”58 He argued that up to 200,000 African-Americans
were serving in the Union forces and this service alone should qualify African-Americans
for the right to vote. He also argued that because so many did answer the call to service,
they would be left open to retaliation in the South if they could not have a say in their
government.59

After the Civil War was over, Douglass continued arguing for the rights of all
African-Americans. As he proclaimed in The New National Era in 1872, “freedom from
the auction block and from legal claim as property is of no benefit to the colored man
without the means of protecting his rights.”60 In April 1865, he delivered a speech before
the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society titled “What the Black Man Wants.” In this
speech, he was continuing his work as an advocate for the enfranchisement of African-
Americans. “Without this, his liberty is a mockery; without this, you might as well almost
retain the old name of slavery for his condition; for in fact, if he is not the slave of the
individual master, he is the slave of society,” he said.61 He had made voting rights his

58. Ibid, 418.
59. Ibid, 422.
60. Foner, 4:156.
61. Ibid, 158.
principal mission now that freedom had been obtained and this would be his major cause in the next few years.

Rights for Women

Even as Douglass was fighting to secure freedom for his enslaved brethren, he still championed other causes. The issue that most frequently drew his attention was rights for women. The strong women he met in the abolitionist movement influenced Douglass on this issue, but he also viewed women getting equality as a way to ensure his own people would as well. When he founded The North Star, he included on the masthead, “Right is of No Sex.” From the founding of this paper and extending throughout his life, he frequently wrote and spoke about rights for women and often attended women’s rights conventions. In a speech before one of these conventions, Douglass summarized his thoughts on this subject by saying, “it 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.”

In an 1848 editorial in The North Star, titled “The Rights of Women,” Douglass addressed this issue. Douglass had attended the Woman’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York in July 1848 and wanted to write about the key issues from the convention. Douglass wrote about how rights for women and emancipation are tied together. Douglass said, “while it is impossible for us to go into the subject at length, and dispose of the various objections which are often urged against such a doctrine as female

63. Foner and Taylor.
equality, we are free to say that in respect to political rights, we hold woman to be justly entitled to all we claim for man.\textsuperscript{64} Douglass was using his publishing presence as a vehicle to promote women's rights and to show that these rights are as important as emancipation.

He described the concept of women's suffrage as one that is so basic that it should not even have to be debated. "Now we know of no truth more easily made appreciable to human thought than the right of woman to vote, or, in other words, to have a voice in the Government under which she lives and to which she owes allegiance," he wrote in 1870.\textsuperscript{65} He also thought that having women contribute to the political process would make the outcomes better. He wrote, "man in his arrogance has hitherto felt himself fully equal to the work of governing the world without the help of woman. He has kept the reins of power securely in his own hand, and the history of nations and the present experience of the world show the woeful work he has made of governing."\textsuperscript{66} This was a cause that Douglass believed in and frequently commented on in both speeches and in his papers. He attended and spoke at the conventions for women's rights and helped to promote the cause in his newspapers. It was just another example of how Douglass used his public platforms to educate through his speeches and writings and how he thought the political process was one that he could use to educate others.

Conclusion

Douglass used the political process to advance the causes that he held to be important. The political process is one that lends itself well to adult education and can be

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Foner, 4:231-232.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 236.
improved by adult education. Adult education can be used to strengthen the political process by making better-informed citizens and by helping to mobilize support around a given issue. This political literacy is an issue that deserves better attention within adult education. Political organizations and interest groups also use adult education to help their cause. Improved use of adult education within the political process can help to promote social justice. As American citizens are becoming less engaged in the political process, more can be done to encourage and promote political literacy.

Douglass used his speeches and writings on political issues as a way of educating his supporters as well as his fellow African-Americans. Politicizing the abolitionist movement was the main way that Douglass differed from Garrison and what eventually gave the movement its greatest success. He took on controversial subjects such as voting rights for freed slaves and for women. Douglass’ relationship with Lincoln helped to forge his political identity. In the end, he wanted an even playing field for African-Americans instead of one set of rules for whites and another for blacks, and he viewed politics as way to achieve that goal.
CHAPTER VI

HOW IN LINE WITH ADULT EDUCATION WAS FREDERICK DOUGLASS?

“We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future.”

Douglass’ career as a public speaker, journalist, and social and political activist is well established and has been chronicled in the preceding chapters. His work to educate his adult audiences through religion, social movements, popular education, and political activism is essential in having a fuller understanding of his life. In addition, his involvement in the Sabbath Schools while still a slave is important to his adult education work as he worked to educate his fellow slaves not only in how to read the Bible, but also achieve literacy. His work in adult education cuts across many different parts of the field and helps us understand how those who we do not normally consider to be adult educators were often involved in adult education. Douglass was an adult educator even if he did not realize it. He was not interested in speaking to children as he delivered speeches and wrote his newspaper articles to both white and black adults. In doing so, he was trying to educate them about the issues he deemed to be important, inspire them to change, and change the United States.

There are many relevant adult learning theories and methods that are useful in solidifying the connection between his life and adult education. In addition, a final area of study related to Douglass will be his work in the Lyceum Movement. The Lyceum was an important eighteenth century adult education organization and Douglass’ involvement in this organization shows how he was connected to adult education in a more traditional

1. Douglass as quoted in Foner and Taylor, 193.
manner. His relationship with adult education’s past is useful in understanding our history as a field and in plotting a path for the future. As Douglass told us in the epigraph that starts this chapter, the past is only useful when it helps to guide the present and the future. We can learn a great deal from Douglass’ life as well as his work in the Lyceum as it relates to adult education.

Douglass and the Lyceum

Although the history of the American Lyceum is not lengthy, the organization had a tremendous impact on adult education and American society. From the humble origins in Millbury, Massachusetts, the Lyceum, as envisioned by Josiah Holbrook, grew rapidly into a national network of adult education providers. Its reach extended to every part of the United States. This growth led to what some have called the “contagious spread” of the Lyceum to every part of America. Its work spread to the new towns in the West and the South, but by far the area with the most dynamic Lyceums was the Northeast. The history of this organization is also the history of not only adult education during the period, but education in general and to a large extent the history of the country. The legacy of the Lyceum is still felt today in the profession and practice of adult education. It solidified the role of the lecture as a major form of education. The Lyceum was at the forefront of using published materials as a type of distance education. It is this durable legacy that Hayes had in mind when he called the Lyceum “one of the most influential self-improvement societies.”

Josiah Holbrook was the father of the American Lyceum. Grattan has said about Holbrook that in the field of adult education very few have completely devoted themselves to the idea of educating adults as much as he did. He was born in Derby, Connecticut of somewhat affluent parents. Holbrook entered Yale in 1806 and graduated in 1810. While at Yale, he was influenced significantly by one of his professors. Ben Silliman was a professor of chemistry and mineralogy at Yale and even after Holbrook graduated from Yale, he continued to attend lectures by Silliman in the area around New Haven. Silliman himself was interested in adult education. He was involved in an endeavor that could be considered a university extension program, although not officially part of Yale University. Under the auspices of the Society for Promoting Useful Information, Silliman would travel around Connecticut giving lectures and demonstrations on useful information.

The Lyceum began as a mutual improvement society with a goal of providing practical information for everyone, as an organization to provide continuing education for teachers, and as an instrument to promote public schools. People would gather together to learn from each other through demonstrations, lectures, and discussion sessions. Over time, the Lyceum became something more along the lines of entertainment rather than education, which along with other factors led to its decline. Along the way, the list of people who participated in the American Lyceum reads like a Who’s Who of Nineteenth Century culture and political figures. Some of the names of those active are: Webster, Douglass, Garrison, Emerson, Thoreau, Sumner, and Holmes. The role of prominent speakers eventually led to the rise of the popular lecture and to the paid lecture circuit. At

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its heart, the Lyceum was most greatly influenced by the mind and initiative of Josiah Holbrook.

Throughout its history, the Lyceum always had a mixture of lecture as education and lecture as entertainment. Over time, that balance shifted more towards the use of lecture as entertainment. The Lyceums in the western United States really pioneered the use of popular lectures and more specifically the professional lecturer. Over time, the marketplace reshaped the Lyceum into something completely different from what it originally was. The organization shifted from mutual improvement to lecture as education to lecture as entertainment. The rise of lecture as entertainment also gave birth to the idea of a professional lecturer. People were now willing to pay money to listen to lecturers solely for entertainment purposes although there was still an educational value to these lectures. The new lectures also relied increasingly on controversial subjects, which was a dramatic change from the Lyceum's history. Early on, the motto of the Lyceum could be described as "useful to all, and offensive to none." 6

Local Lyceums struggled with the issue of controversial subjects. In Holbrook's original model, there was a tradition of avoiding controversy in the name of learning. The Lyceum would put learning over partisanship. There are really two different viewpoints on how the Lyceum dealt with controversial issues such as slavery. 7 There is a traditional view held by historians such as E.P. Powell who believed that the Lyceum helped kill slavery by having a forum for the discussion of the issue. The contradictory view held by

6. Ibid, 793.
scholars such as Vern Wagner is that the Lyceum avoided these subjects with the exception of during the Civil War when the only topic of conversation was slavery and saving the Union.

History tends to show that controversial topics for lectures and discussions was really a local issue. For example, during the years leading up to the Civil War, the Chicago Lyceum had zero lectures on slavery. The New York Lyceum was much more engaged on the issue. From 1851-1858, there were approximately thirteen lectures in New York on slavery with an additional thirteen sponsored by both the Lyceum and the New York Anti-Slavery Society. Controversial subjects remained somewhat of a double-edged sword for the American Lyceum. On one hand, they could embrace controversial subjects such as what Wagner refers to as the “sisterhood of reforms” of peace, abolition, temperance, and women’s suffrage. Having lectures on these subjects may alienate some audience members, but they also would have a certain entertainment value that could lead to even greater attendance at Lyceum lectures. On the other hand, Lyceums could shy away from these subjects and maintain the original intent of Holbrook by structuring their programs as useful information for the masses that would not offend potential audience members. It was not an easy decision for Lyceum leaders. The decision also shows the complex nature of program planning in adult education that was a crucial aspect of the Lyceum and remains so for adult educators today.

Frederick Douglass deserves special attention due to his impact on the Lyceum, especially as it relates to the African American community. There were two tracks for African Americans to participate in the Lyceum. In some communities, mostly urban areas, African Americans had established their own Lyceums. In other areas, they could
participate in the community Lyceums. During and after the Civil War, Douglass was closely involved in the Lyceum movement in America. In fact, during the 1860’s and 1870’s his main source of income was serving as a paid Lyceum lecturer. In his Lyceum lecturing, Douglass, according to Ray, emphasized education’s role in transforming society. Education is emancipating in its own way and would help one maximize one’s freedom. His two most famous Lyceum lectures were “The Races” and “Self-Made Men.” Douglass said about education in his famous speech “Self-Made Men,” “after all, let us remember that neither self education nor education as generally received, will amount to much unless joined to some noble purpose.”

Self-Made Men

Douglass’ “Self-Made Men” had the most educational value of any of his works and it was also one of his most popular. Douglass first gave this speech in 1859 during a tour through Illinois and Wisconsin and continued to give this lecture for the rest of his life. Unfortunately, the earliest surviving text of this speech is from when he delivered the speech in 1860 in Halifax, England. Ironically, he gave this lecture at the Mechanics Hall in Halifax, which was the meeting house for the Mechanics Institute, a sister organization to the American Lyceum. His pedagogical model in this speech was teaching from examples, those great lives, which can teach the audience something about individual responsibility. According to Ray, Douglass stressed the lives of both great white and black Americans in this speech. His ability to combine education and entertainment made him a significant figure of the American Lyceum during the mid-

nineteenth century. The concept of self-made men likely appealed to Douglass because he was one himself as he rose from slavery to become the most notable African-American of his day.

Douglass delivered his speech on Self-Made Men on numerous occasions during his life and it became one of his stock speeches that he would give whenever the opportunity arose. As mentioned above, the first surviving text is from Douglass delivering the speech in England, but the message remained the same throughout the more than two decades he gave this lecture. The central theme of this speech is that successful individuals are often those who have had to work for things themselves although he does point out that luck and timing will also play a role in these individual’s success. As he frequently gave this speech before the Civil War, and our text is from 1860, Douglass also tried to answer some his critics in this speech. Some had criticized him for not focusing solely on abolitionist issues in his public statements. About this topic he remarked, “I usually speak in public on the subject of slavery, and it is supposed by some in my country that a coloured (sic) man has not thoughts worth listening to on any other subject. Partly with a view to show the fallacy of this notion, and partly to give expression to what I think sound and important views of life, I have prepared this lecture.”

Douglass had several key points about self-made men that he was trying to convey to his audience. These points concerned who are self-made men, the theory of their success, their advantages in the United States, and some criticisms of self-made men

10. Ibid, 289.
in general.\textsuperscript{11} A major part of Douglass speech is devoted to examples of important self-made men in history. He praised Hugh Miller, who was a mechanic by trade, but gained an international reputation as a journalist and geologist. Miller learned about these two areas completely on his own.\textsuperscript{12} Douglass also praised Benjamin Bannecker, who was an African-American astronomer, surveyor, and mathematician. Bannecker began to study these subjects as an adult and did so on his own. He would eventually help to plot out the District of Columbia.\textsuperscript{13}

Douglass recognized that the idea of self-made men was one that was important in the United States. He said, "America is, most unquestionably and pre-eminently, the home and special patron of self-made men. In no country in the world are the conditions more favourable (sic) to the production and sustentation of such men than in America."\textsuperscript{14} Of course his own life influenced his thoughts on this subject, as he is a quintessential American self-made man. He thought that the reason for the prominence of self-made men in the United States was caused by a greater appreciation for hard work and that individuals were "measured by their own individual merits."\textsuperscript{15} This speech is one of the most valuable in understanding Douglass' role in adult education because in it he directly promotes the concept of adults continuing to learn regardless of their occupation or trade. A blacksmith, mechanic, or slave can rise up to the highest levels based on hard work and this is a concept that although not unique to the United States is much stronger here. It is a concept that Douglass used to try to educate and inform his audience about as he

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 293.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 294.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 295.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 297.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, 298.
wanted to promote hard work to achieve one’s goals. He also showed a predilection for merit and hard work being how we evaluate people.

*The Races*

Douglass first delivered this lecture in late 1859 and gave it several times from 1860-1861. In this speech, he discussed the relationship between white and black Americans. He trenched into his familiar territory of portraying slavery as being corrupt when compared to ideas of justice and liberty as well as distorting the teachings of the Bible.\textsuperscript{16} He also tried to dispel the many false ideas about African-Americans being unable to reason and lacking intelligence. Douglass was trying to show his audience that not only do African-Americans deserve to be freed from slavery, they also deserve equality. “The negro thinks, reasons, and remembers. He acquires and transmits his mental acquisitions to after-coming generations...He has a moral nature making the subject of Law and government human and divine. And he is not destitute of that divine faculty, that enables him to comprehend the idea of immortality and to grasp the sublime and glorious idea of a God of justice and mercy,” he stated.\textsuperscript{17}

Douglass then went on to make an argument for unity of the races based on morality. Here he makes an important argument that he often relied upon, which was that slavery is wrong on moral ground, but morality extends to the concepts of liberty and justice. Morality does not just relate to doing right and wrong, but also to the very core of the founding of the United States. He viewed these rights of unity and equality as being a common law that all people are entitled to. He summed up his theory of unity and equality as compared to the current state by saying, “one solution of it favors, Universal

\textsuperscript{16} Ray, 207.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 209.
Man, and another favors the interests of a class of men who gain their fortune by the flood of souls.”

Douglass and Adult Education Theory and Methods

Although Frederick Douglass’ life predates much of our contemporary adult learning theories, there are still many theories that are applicable to his life and work. Theory provides a useful framework for organizing discussion around an issue. In addition, grounding Douglass’ work within adult education theory helps to connect Douglass to the field and to make the case that he was in fact participating in adult education. These theories are helpful in making the connection between Douglass and the field of adult education. Some of these theories are most applicable to Douglass’ own education while others are directly related to his work in the areas of religious adult education, social movements, political activism, and journalism. Although many adult learning theories could be considered relevant to Douglass’ Self-Directed Learning, Narrative Learning, Freire’s Liberating Theory, Transformational Learning, and Critical Theory are the most relevant.

Related to the discussion of which theories are most applicable is the discussion of what methods Douglass employed in his work. There are many different adult education methods that are appropriate when examining his work. Since most of Douglass’ educational work came in the form of his speeches, the lecture is the most relevant method. As Farrah has described the lecture, it is a legitimate form of adult education when used properly. Farrah lists four main parts of using lecture effectively in

adult education. First, Farrah recommends saying a lot about a little. Simply, the recommendation here is to keep the lecture focused on a few main points that you cover thoroughly. Second, Farrah suggests using many examples. Next, someone who effectively utilizes lecture in adult education will keep moving throughout the lecture. Finally, Farrah recommends variety of delivery, tone and body language during the lecture. While it is impossible to fully understand how successful Douglass was with each of these points, Douglass did limit his speeches to a few key points and he utilized numerous examples. Although Douglass also used the printed word for adult education, the lecture was his most effective tool. He was an immensely popular speaker during the nineteenth century and this is evident through the immense number of recorded speeches of his that exist.

There are many different purposes of adult education, but a central tension has and continues to be over whether adult education should mostly benefit the individual or society. At different times in his life, Douglass was an advocate for both purposes although his overall emphasis was on social transformation. Douglass recognized that changing individuals would lead to societal change, but he also recognized the importance of changing society as a whole. He never lost sight of the fact that he was trying to make a place in the United States for African-Americans.

Chapter I discussed how Merriam and Brockett have synthesized the various typologies related to goals and purposes of adult education and these typologies are

useful in showing how Douglass' work relates to adult education. Douglass' work relates to many of the categories in the typologies. For example, the category that Bryson refers to as Relational and Darkenwald and Merriam call individual self-actualization is relevant for much of Douglass' work. Although Douglass did often speak and write about improvement of the self, his main message was aimed at improving society. Bryson has called this type of adult education political while Darkenwald and Merriam label it adult education for social transformation. Darkenwald and Merriam's description of this type of adult education is most relevant because they situate it in terms that are much more radical, thus more appropriate for Frederick Douglass' work. According to Merriam and Brockett, adult educators in this area “have a more radical agenda of empowering adults to bring about change, rather than fitting into the status quo.”

Self-Directed Learning

Self-Directed Learning (SDL) is the concept where the learner has the main responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning. Merriam et al state that there are three goals of SDL. The first goal is “to enhance the ability of adults to be self-directed in their learning.” This goal comes largely from the work of Malcolm Knowles and has its roots in humanistic psychology. The second goal is “to foster transformational learning.” This goal comes primarily from Mezirow and also Brookfield. The third goal is to “promote emancipatory learning and social action.” In Douglass' own education, one can see how he achieved each of these goals as he took on

20. Merriam and Brockett, 19.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
his own education, embraced the transformational power of education, and used his work to promote social action.

Tough built upon the research of Cyril Houle and gave us the first comprehensive description of SDL although he called it “self-planned learning.” Tough developed an interview tool to help adult educators better understand SDL. Tough’s model is a linear one where the learner would advance through successive steps in order to meet their goal through SDL. Brockett and Hiemstra developed what would be considered an interactive model of SDL, which is generally not as structured as the linear model. The Personal Responsibility Orientation model they developed includes a role for the facilitator with regard to needs assessments, locating learning resources, and evaluation strategies. The personal responsibility dimension of their model focuses on the learner’s desires and preferences. Brockett and Hiemstra also consider the social context to be important.

Grow has developed a model that would be considered instructional. The focus of this model is on how instructors in more formal settings can utilize SDL methods in their programs. Grow’s model is called the Staged Self-Directed Learning (SSDL) model. As the name implies, there are distinct stages of learners. Stage one is the dependent learner. Stage two is the interested learner. Stage three is the involved learner. Stage four is the self-directed learner. At each stage, Grow discusses roles for the facilitator. For example, the instructor would serve as more of a delegator to allow for independent projects and student-directed discussions.

28. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 117-118.
There are numerous myths about SDL. Brockett and Hiemstra list ten such myths. One myth is that self-direction means isolation. SDL does not take place in a vacuum. There is a crucial role of the instructor to serve as motivator and a resource during the learning process. The social context of all learning must also be considered in SDL. Another myth is that self-direction is an easy way out for teachers. This myth is not a reality because to be successful in SDL the facilitator must have an active role throughout the process. A third myth is that self-directed learning is limited to white, middle class students. Brockett and Hiemstra list numerous studies that report the successful use of SDL with African-American adult students. A final myth is that SDL will degrade the quality of instruction. SDL is not right for every learner and that is why a teacher is necessary to ensure that quality is maintained throughout the process.

SDL impacts the practice of adult education in many ways. One of the purposes of adult education is to develop lifelong learners. SDL is a very useful instructional method for this purpose. SDL is also growing in numerous fields for continuing professional education. In addition, SDL can be used for human resource development. A more self-directed learner can become a more self-directed employee thus improving the effectiveness of the organization. Technological advances also have the capability to improve access to and the effectiveness of SDL.

SDL is relevant for Douglass’ life for two main reasons. First, although others aided Douglass, his own education was almost entirely self-directed. Although Douglass was technically a child when he first started learning to read, he was performing many adult roles in that he was responsible for taking care of himself as well as being a caretaker for a white child. Second, other than Douglass’ work with the Sabbath schools...
while he was still a slave, the rest of his adult education work was performed in informal settings such as speeches and lectures. By engaging in this type of adult education, Douglass was working to change public opinion and educate his audience through his speeches and to get them to reexamine their own lives. Adults should be responsible for their own learning and self-directed learning is a key way of helping adults control their own learning.

_Narrative Learning_

An important part of Douglass educational work involved Douglass’ using his own personal story to educate others. Douglass’ life, especially early on, was about telling his story. When he began to rise to fame as an abolitionist orator, he did so by telling the story of his time in slavery. Certainly, the skills he had in telling his story helped him to achieve fame, but the story was the foundation. Douglass’ fame increased in 1845 when he expanded his story telling and wrote his first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Although it only began to gain prominence in the 1990’s, learning through narrative and story telling is a legitimate form of adult education, which Douglass utilized throughout his life.²⁹ Storytelling helps the learner connect to the subject and it inspires critical thinking especially when the story is particularly compelling with good versus evil storylines.

In their most simple form, narratives are just stories, but according to Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, these stories are important to adult learning because “stories enable us to make meaning of our lives.”³⁰ By Douglass telling his story, he was making meaning in his own life as well as enabling others to do the same. There are many

²⁹. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 209.
³⁰. Ibid, 208.
different types of narrative learning, but there are two that are most relevant to Douglass’ life. First, cultural narratives “are those that define the sociocultural milieu in which we live.”\(^{31}\) The second relevant type of narrative learning is the individual narrative. Douglass’ story was about the individual, but it provided meaning because it was transferrable to society as a whole.

There are many different ways of using narratives in adult education. Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner list three main ways, which are storying the curriculum, storytelling, and autobiography.\(^{32}\) Although storying the curriculum, which involves treating the course material as a story, is not very relevant to Douglass’ life, both storytelling and autobiography are germane. As mentioned above, in his speeches and writings, Douglass engaged in a mixture of storytelling and autobiography. He would use these stories to show the evils of slavery as well as to put it into historical context. Douglass would use his own story, but also other stories, such as parables from the Bible, to illustrate his points. Douglass used narrative learning through all areas of his life including his work to educate others in religious adult education, social movements, political activism, and popular education.

*Transformational Learning*

Transformational or transformative learning is an important part of adult education and is very important in understanding Douglass’ role in adult education. Arguably, it is the purest conceptual theory in adult education involving both transforming the individual and society as whole. In *Learning in Adulthood*, Merriam et al state that “learning is about change—dramatic, fundamental change in the way we see

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) Ibid, 209.
ourselves and the world we live in." Since first proposed by Jack Mezirow in 1978, transformational learning theory has helped change both the theory and practice of adult education. According to Mezirow, “transformative learning is the process of effecting change in a frame of reference.” Many others have contributed to the field, such as Paulo Freire with his writing and research into the socio-cultural aspects of transformational learning. The concept of transforming lives through education should continue to be an important part of adult education in the 21st Century.

There are several concepts that are central to the theory of transformational learning. According to Merriam et al, a frame of reference is a “structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter impressions.” There are two dimensions to our frame of reference that Mezirow referred to as meaning structures. These meaning structures are how learners filter new experiences and provide context in relation to their lives. The two dimensions to meaning structures are habits of mind and points of view. The habit of mind serves as a filter to interpret experiences. The point of view is the more general group of feelings and attitudes. A point of view will change more easily than a habit of mind. Transformative learning can take place through a change in either the more immediate point of view or through the more long-term habit of mind. The change in the meaning structures, or disorienting dilemma, does not have to be a single, dramatic event, but can be a longer process taking place over time.

33. Ibid, 130.
34. Ibid, 133.
35. Ibid, 132.
36. Ibid, 133.
From Jack Mezirow’s writings, there are four main phases to transformational learning. The first of these is experience, which is more than just what an individual observes and encounters. The adult educator should view experience as a resource and a learning opportunity. Experience for transformational learning is more of a disorienting dilemma. This disorienting dilemma leads to the second component of the transformation process, which is critical reflection. The disorienting dilemma is an event, or events, that are so powerful, they shake the very foundation of the person’s being. Critical reflection is the process of evaluating experience as it relates to our meaning structures. The third component is discourse. Discourse is when we seek out a variety of beliefs to test our own premise. This discourse is not necessarily a debate, but more of a dialogue. The final stage is action when taking on the new way of thinking. One can see in Douglass’ own education and his educational work how each of these steps played a part.

The concept of critical reflection needs special attention due to its importance in transformational learning. Critical reflection of one’s experiences is the gateway that leads to transformational learning. It is a central concept in the process of transformational learning. Critical reflection is the necessary ingredient that separates a basic experience from an experience that can lead to transformational learning. The critical reflection process is one that allows us to make sense of our experiences. Stephen Brookfield wrote extensively about critical reflection and thinking calling it the tool that leads us to scrutinize how we view power relationships.

37. Ibid, 134.
Mezirow also described four conditions that will help aid in the process of transformational learning. The first of these is the presence of others. The key to this condition is that the transformation does not take place in a vacuum, but rather with the aid of others. It is also recognition of the fact that there are other viewpoints in the world that may differ from one’s assumptions. The second condition is the opportunity for reflective discourse that will help test both old and new assumptions. A mentoring community is the third condition. Mentoring relationships are crucial because these will provide a place for the reflective discourse. Finally, there must be an opportunity for continued action to provide an outlet to test and retest one’s changing viewpoints.

Groups and other individuals have an important role in transformational learning. The important role that discourse plays in the process of transformational learning means that there is a place for the group dynamic. In fact, the presence of others throughout the transformational learning process is essential to the testing out of new points of view and habits of mind. The thoughts and opinions of others are also important to the beginning of the transformational learning process. An event or disorienting dilemma may often come from other members of society, whether from coworkers, family, or friends. As Mezirow said in his first condition, others are crucial to the process of transformational learning. The group dynamic and discourse also can lead to societal transformation.

Societal transformation through adult education is an important, but often underemphasized part of adult education. Certainly Paulo Freire is one of the leading theorists in adult education, but to a large extent the focus of transformational learning
literature is on individual change and not on societal change. Education has the capability to transform society, not just individuals. One could say that by changing individuals, we are changing society, but if we are only transforming individuals to fit into a society that is increasingly more unequal and unjust, are we truly living up to the potential of adult education? Without specifically asking this question, Douglass wrestled with this issue during his life and would work to change both the individual and society.

From a holistic standpoint, transformational learning is a very important part of adult education theory. It has the potential to change both lives and society. Educators in general, but especially adult educators, need to provide learners with an environment that is conducive to transformational learning. Jack Mezirow gave us the foundation of the transformational learning theory and provides useful guidance on how to implement it not only in adult education, but in education in general. What Mezirow does for individuals, Friere does for societal transformation. Learning is about change. It can be dramatic change that changes the core of who we are as individuals and who we are as a society, which is what Douglass tried to do in his speeches and writings.

Transformational learning is important when evaluating Douglass’ life and his own educational work. In Douglass’ own life and development of thought, he clearly experienced the four phases of transformational learning outlined by Jack Mezirow. For instance, when Hugh Auld denied Douglass of the right to learn to read by forbidding Sophia Auld from teaching him, Douglass had a disorienting dilemma. This caused critical reflection about being denied this opportunity and the power of being able to read. Douglass engaged in discourse with the white boys he would meet on the streets of
Baltimore and would use them to obtain literacy. Finally, Douglass took on a new way of thinking and committed himself to escaping from slavery.

Once Douglass escaped to freedom, most of his work should be considered transformational. Douglass challenged conventional thought in his speeches and writings. He was trying to provide the disorienting dilemma, the crucial first step in transformational learning. He also engaged in discourse with others as they discussed issues of the day. For example, when Douglass was a class leader and lay pastor in the New Bedford Zion Methodist Church, he pushed others in discussions about issues such as the colonization movement. Douglass was clearly interested in transforming society as well as individuals. He pushed for change within society as a whole as well as within the abolitionist movement.

Freire’s Liberating Education

In line with this more radical view of the purpose of adult education, it is important to consider the work of Paulo Freire when evaluating how Douglass’ work can be considered adult education. Freire, the Brazilian educator, worked during the mid-twentieth century to liberate oppressed farmers in his native country. To Freire, adult education empowers both individuals and society and the two twin aims of adult education can not be separated. Freire made a key distinction between his type of education, which he called problem-posing education, and traditional education, which he referred to as banking education. In banking education, the teacher is the source for information and hands down information to passive students. In problem posing
education, the teacher and student work together to explore their sociocultural situation. This type of education leads to an ongoing process of conscientization where the learner becomes more aware of the oppressive nature of society and takes on a role in social change.

As one can see in Douglass’ own life, he became aware of how the slave society was oppressive to him, he escaped, and he then sought to change society. Douglass’ work makes the connection between transforming individuals and changing society. He understood that the two elements are intertwined and that a change in one can result in a change with the other. According to Freire, the purpose of education is praxis or “the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.” As Douglass worked both within and outside the abolitionist movement, he was trying to cause men and women to reflect on the problem of slavery and to act to correct it.

**Critical Theory**

The overall theme of critical theory is power, or more appropriately oppressive power. Critical theory holds that throughout life there are oppressive institutions that work to hold back certain members of society. The system is oppressive and serves to reproduce the status quo where those of the wrong race, class, or gender are not allowed to advance. Critical theory is also a critique of existing economic structures and the power dynamics that are caused by these structures. Any theory that has at its central core overturning a system is going to have many points of debate. From a practice standpoint, a point of debate is the feasibility of teaching from a critical standpoint. The discourse caused by teaching this way can frustrate practitioners and could make it unmanageable.

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40. Ibid.
41. Ibid, 141.
Douglass fought the powers of the day both in the North and the South and tried to change the power structure so that his people could be part of it.

Brookfield has published on the theory. He has developed a framework centered on ideology. Brookfield also lists seven “learning tasks” associated with critical learning theory. The first of these is challenging ideology. Brookfield considers this the “basic tool for helping adults learn to penetrate the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequity and oppression that lurks beneath.” The second task is contesting hegemony. The third task is unmasking power to “recognize the play of power in our lives.” Next, is overcoming alienation. The fifth task is learning liberation in order for a learner to become knowledgeable on how to free themselves from oppression. The next task is reclaiming reason. The final task is practicing democracy.

Critical theory has somewhat of a symbiotic relationship with race, class, and gender, which were all issues that Douglass touched on in his work. With regard to class, the general focus in critical theory has been on changing from capitalism to socialism. Class theory has Marxism at its core. Paulo Friere has written extensively in this area. He has said that those who are not in power tend to be marginalized and those same people must work to transform the structure. While Douglass was still a slave, he recognized that the poor, white children in Baltimore were living a life not much different than slavery. Some have discussed that during this period, those in poverty and slavery led similarly

42. Ibid, 257.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
difficult lives. One author has discussed the connection between Abraham Lincoln’s upbringing and Douglass’ early life to show how similar they were.\textsuperscript{45}

Gender critical theory focuses on changing a system of patriarchy that infects every level of society. Within feminist class theory, there are researchers who have focused on patriarchy from an individual level, a system level, and the cultural level. Douglass worked within the world of critical theory in all three of areas of race, gender, and class. He was a vocal proponent of changing the system that oppressed individuals on the basis of their race, gender, or class. Class, gender, and race all focus on power and how it works to oppress their selected group. These were all issues that Douglass embraced in his speeches and writings, trying to educate his audience for the transformation of society and individuals.

Conclusion

Analyzing the theory behind someone’s work or behind a particular program is useful for many reasons. As mentioned in the introduction, this analysis helps to provide a framework to better understand what has happened or what someone has done. Theory helps us to make sense out of the world we live in, or in the case of Douglass, it helps us to make sense of Douglass’ work and how he relates to adult education. Understanding how Douglass’ work fits into contemporary adult education theory helps to understand how he contributed to the history of the field. Another benefit of examining the theory behind what Douglass did is that it shows how theory fits into practice. Even though the theories did not fully exist in Douglass’ time, it is helpful to understand how someone could have implemented the theory. Finally, understanding how Douglass’ work fits into

contemporary adult education theories gives us a way to organize the aims and objectives of what Douglass did in the context of adult education.

Since Douglass predates most of our adult education theory, it is difficult to find theories that directly correlate to his work. In spite of that, there are several theories that aid in the understanding of how Douglass’ work relates to adult education. Because of his own education, Self-Directed Learning is important to understanding Douglass both as an adult learner and as an adult educator. Narrative adult learning is also very useful in coming to terms with Douglass the adult educator, because that is where his greatest contribution was especially early in his life in freedom. Adult education for personal and societal transformation is the area where Douglass’ work most directly connects to the field of adult education. When we read Douglass’ speeches and writings, we can see how he was clearly trying to transform both the individual and society. Douglass wanted to bring about change. He advocated change through each of the four areas of religion, abolitionism, journalism, and political activism. Many times the four areas were intertwined in Douglass’ speeches and writings. Finally, because Douglass so often discussed power relationships, critical theory is an important tool for understanding Douglass’ connection to adult education. Theories and methods must go together. From a methodological standpoint, Douglass was effective in educating others because he recognized what method would work the best for him. All of these different adult learning theories provide insight into how Douglass has contributed to adult education and how his work fits into the history of the field.

Frederick Douglass passed away on February 20, 1895 at his home in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C. after delivering a lecture at a meeting of
the National Council of Women. His life was one of great purpose as he rose from slavery to freedom to fame and notoriety. Certainly, part of his notoriety was due to the fact that he was a masterful self-promoter, but it was also because of his tremendous skills as an orator and writer. He was able to combine style and substance to elevate both his race and his nation. He championed the causes that he believed in even if they were unpopular. Although his contributions to adult education are mostly in informal areas, there are still significant contributions. He used his public persona to work to educate his adult audience in the areas of religious adult education, social movements, popular education, and political activism. He was as effective as he was popular. He stirred people’s emotions and inspired them to act. His important legacy is that he played such a prominent role in changing the abolitionist movement. Gerrit Smith, James McCune Smith, and others certainly helped to change the direction of the abolitionist movement, but none had the star appeal of Douglass. They could not reach the audiences that Douglass could. Through his speeches and newspapers, he was able to reach thousands of individuals to educate them about the issues, which were often political issues that he felt would change the United States.

As adult educators, we often struggle to define ourselves because we are so diverse, but also because public understanding of exactly what adult education is tends to be limited. The life of Frederick Douglass helps to shed new light on opportunities for adult education during the 19th Century and extends the body of knowledge on the state of the field during this century. His life helps us to understand the past as it relates to improving the present and the future of the field of adult education. We can look to the life of Frederick Douglass and see how he used adult education to help end slavery and
fight for equality. Even during the most trying times imaginable, he helped other adults transform their lives, which eventually led to a transformed society.
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