

# An Antislavery Journey: Garrison and Douglass in Pennsylvania, 1847

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A landmark in the antislavery crusade was the recruitment of Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave, in 1841. He became an instant success as an orator. In 1847, when William Lloyd Garrison returned from a triumphant lecture tour in Great Britain, he decided to go to Ohio, which he had never visited. He had "long been importuned," he wrote in the *Liberator*, "by our friends at the West, to make them a visit."<sup>1</sup> He would take Douglass with him. They would meet in Philadelphia and go out through Pennsylvania; Stephen S. Foster would join them in Pittsburgh. They would return via upstate New York. When this project was announced, invitations poured in from antislavery societies along the route, asking the pair to visit. They accepted only four invitations from Pennsylvania. An ill-fated one came from "citizens of Harrisburg, Penn."<sup>2</sup>

Douglass, aged twenty-nine, like Garrison, had just returned from a prolonged stay in Great Britain. There he had arranged to purchase his freedom and to raise funds with which to start his own antislavery newspaper. He had made a tremendous impression in Britain as well as the United States through the publication of his first autobiography in 1845. Douglass had previously lectured in Pennsylvania and Ohio in 1843.

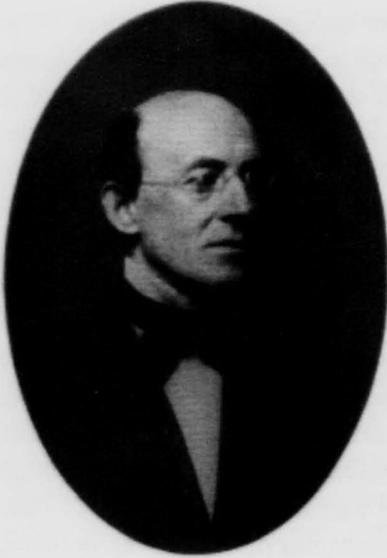
Garrison, aged forty-two, had lectured in Philadelphia and its vicinity many times before, but he had never been to the interior of the state. He had attended the convention which met in Philadelphia in 1833 and organized the American Anti-Slavery Society. He had written its Declaration of Sentiments, which called for immediate emancipation of the slaves and the granting of equal rights to blacks.

Garrison and Douglass now planned to attend the sessions of the Western Anti-Slavery Society in New Lyme, Ohio, a village forty miles

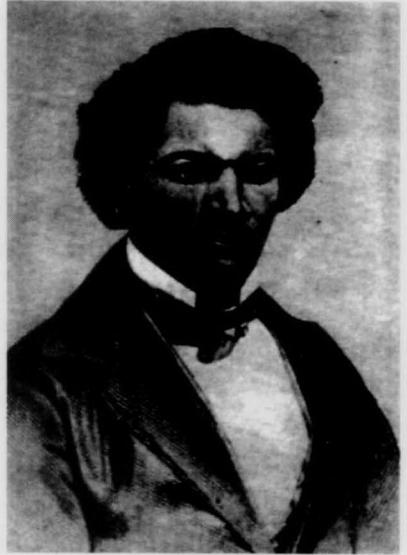
I am indebted to Eric Ledell Smith for useful questions and comments on an earlier draft.

1. *The Liberator* (Boston) 19 March 1847, quoted in Walter W. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of William Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 227-28. Garrison regarded Ohio as "the West."

2. *The Liberator*, 30 July 1847, quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 59.



*William Lloyd Garrison in the 1840's(?) from Walter M. Merrill, Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of William Lloyd Garrison. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963 frontispiece – no indication of date.*



*Frederick Douglass in 1845 from Benjamin Quarles, Frederick Douglass. New York: Atheneun, 1970, pp. 82-83.*

north of Youngstown and forty miles east of Cleveland, in the Western Reserve. It had been settled by New Englanders, and was named for Old Lyme, Connecticut. The Western Anti-Slavery Society was a Garrisonian outgrowth of the Ohio State Anti-Slavery Society. Its organ was the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*. Garrison observed that a large proportion of abolitionists in this section of the country supported the Liberty Party, which hoped to end slavery through political action. Perhaps he had in mind winning them back to "moral suasion," which by this time meant persuading northerners to break all ties with South, such as returning fugitives, on the grounds slavery was morally wrong.<sup>3</sup>

3. On the rise of the Liberty Party in Ohio see Vernon L. Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty party in the Old Northwest, 1838-1848* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990)). On Garrisonian abolitionism in Ohio see Douglas Gamble, "Moral Suasion in the Old Northwest: Garrisonian Abolitionism, 1831-1861," Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1973. I am indebted to Dr. Merton L. Dillon, Professor Emeritus at Ohio State, for this citation.

The two men, one the premier white abolitionist and the other the premier black abolitionist, began their tour by attending the tenth annual convention of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society at Norristown from August 4 to 6, 1847. Garrison arrived in Philadelphia on Tuesday, August 3, and was met by J. Miller McKim, office manager of the Pennsylvania society, who escorted him to the home of his dear friends, James and Lucretia Mott, where he was greeted warmly. The Motts were the dominant figures in the Pennsylvania society and made it a bulwark of Garrisonian abolitionism.

The convention's sessions were held in a Baptist church. Two or three hundred persons came out from Philadelphia to Norristown each day to attend. In addition to Garrison, McKim, and the Motts, those present included Charles C. Burleigh, who had preached abolition through much of Pennsylvania during the 1830's; Sydney Howard Gay, editor of the New York *National Anti-slavery Standard*; Robert Purvis, a black, the current president of the Pennsylvania society and a leading figure in the Underground Railroad; and, of course, Douglass, who arrived on the second day and became "the lion" of the convention.

Douglass had a charismatic personality. He was tall and fine looking, had a magnificent physique, a melodious voice, and an attractive platform manner. People liked to see him as well as hear him. He could easily be heard by a large crowd in a day when there were no microphones. He spoke without notes. He knew how to appeal to people's hearts as well as to their minds.<sup>4</sup>

Garrison was a better writer than speaker. His features were plain, and he habitually dressed in black. He was noted for his bald head and steel-rimmed spectacles. He had a sober demeanor and little sense of humor. He was gentle in manner and did not employ in his speeches the invective for which the *Liberator* was notorious. He was optimistic by nature and had limitless faith in the ultimate triumph of the antislavery cause. The pair was a study in contrasts. In public, they seem to have gotten along quite well together, but shortly after their Pennsylvania trip they went their separate ways.

The convention adopted a resolution pledging \$300 to the American Anti-Slavery Society to be used for the publication of tracts. Garrison

4. Quarles, *Douglass*, 60-61. On Garrison and Douglass as speakers see Robert T. Oliver, *History of Public Speaking in America* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1965), 231-32 (Garrison) and 146-53 (Douglass).

and Douglass were among the speakers supporting this resolution. "Ladies and gentlemen," Douglass began, "I am glad to speak on this resolution; I am much impressed with the importance of money; impressed with its importance as the means of spreading intelligence. In proportion as information is spread, in that proportion will rise the tide of public sentiment towards the point which, when attained, will be the success of our enterprise." Toward the end of this speech Douglass endorsed Garrison's demand for dissolution of the Federal Union: "No Union with Slaveholders."<sup>5</sup>

Another resolution asked the executive committee of the society to prepare and circulate petitions to the state legislature asking repeal of the provision of the Pennsylvania State constitution of 1838, which denied the suffrage to blacks. Again Douglass was one of the speakers. "I do not feel very well qualified to speak on the resolution before the meeting," he declared modestly, "but I will express my pleasure in seeing it introduced here." He saw the necessity of introducing it and keeping the matter before the community — "that one day the colored man is to enjoy all the rights which are essential to citizenship — that we will not be contented till all our rights as men are recognized."<sup>6</sup> Although Douglass did not personally attach much importance to the voting power he thought the right was worth contending for.

In one of his speeches Garrison spoke of the progress of the antislavery cause. It was now midnight for the abolitionists, but it was "not a midnight of gloom, but of hope, a glorious canopy of constellations above us, and the mountain tops already promising the morning dawn." Garrison was much given to hyperbole. In the fifteen years since the crusade had begun, much had been gained. In the beginning abolitionists had been greeted as "incendiaries, fanatics, and madmen." By the mid-1840s he claimed they no longer alarmed "the intelligent, sober part of the community." In the beginning colonizationism was in the ascendant. "Where is it now?" Laws had been changed. Massachusetts had repealed its state law forbidding inter-racial marriage. Some state laws requiring discrimination in transportation had been repealed. State laws protecting fugitive slaves had been passed. Black men were publishing their own newspa-

5. John W. Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 1, Vol. 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 5 August 1847, 84-86.

6. *Ibid.*, 98.

pers. "Was it not marvelous that the antislavery agent received most cordially and listened to most attentively was a black man [Douglass]?"<sup>7</sup>

In a similar vein Douglass reported the progress which African Americans had made in Lynn, Massachusetts, the place of his residence. Five years earlier he could not walk in the streets without insult on account of his complexion. He could not ride on a railroad or in an omnibus. He could not send his children to school. He could not attend a lyceum, all because this badge of his color was upon him. Now the state of things was changed. No class of people was now more respected, more kindly treated, or cordially met than men of color. This change had been wrought by a revolution in public opinion won through the work of the abolitionists.<sup>8</sup>

Among other speakers was Lucretia Mott, who Garrison thought spoke "with excellent propriety and effect."<sup>9</sup> The Pennsylvania society believed in equal rights for women as well as for blacks.

Garrison reported that the meetings were "uniformly crowded by an array of men and women, who, for thorough-going anti-slavery spirit, and solidity of character, are not surpassed by any in the world." The meetings were not disturbed in any manner except that one evening after dark a few panes of glass were broken by some rowdy boys while Douglass was speaking. "It was a grand meeting, nevertheless," Garrison wrote, "and the house crowded with a noble auditory to the end."<sup>10</sup> He thought the convention would have a powerful effect on the prosecution of the cause for the coming year.

After the last session of the antislavery society, on August 6, a group of Philadelphia blacks held a reception for Douglass. Despite rain, a large crowd gathered that evening at Bethel A.M.E. Church. This church was one of the two oldest black churches in Philadelphia. It was founded by

7. *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 12 August 1847. The *Freeman* (Philadelphia) was the organ of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. Begun by Benjamin Lundy in 1836 under the title *National Enquirer*, it became the *Pennsylvania Freeman* in 1838, when John Greenleaf Whittier took over as editor. It continued under various editors, including Miller McKim, until it merged with the (New York) *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in 1854.

8. *Douglass Papers*, 5 August 1847, 2: 85

9. William Lloyd Garrison to Helen E. Garrison (wife), 3 August 1847, Walter M. Merrill, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, Vol. 3, *No Union with Slaveholders, 1841-1849* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1973), 505. All the letters cited herein were addressed to his wife. On James and Lucretia Mott, see Margaret Hope Bacon, *Valiant Friend: The Life of Lucretia Mott* (New York: Walker and Co., 1980).

10. *The Liberator*, 20 August 1847.

Richard Allen in 1794, who later organized the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in 1816. Robert Purvis chaired the meeting and introduced Douglass with the tribute: "For your unfaltering fidelity to Truth and Freedom, we thank and bless you, and may Heaven's choicest blessing rest upon you."<sup>11</sup> Douglass next expressed his gratitude for his kind reception and took the opportunity to arraign the nation's churches for their proslavery attitude. "I regard every Slaveholder as a manstealer — the vilest of sinners, and all his professions of humanity and religion I throw to the winds."<sup>12</sup> We have it in our power to rouse the church to its duty. Let us pass such resolutions and adopt such addresses as the occasion demands and as we *can* adopt, and publish them and the church will be roused. We should brand as the enemies of God and man every church and minister, that supports or apologizes for Slavery, and regard them and speak of them, as we would were it *piracy* they were supporting."<sup>13</sup> Douglass praised Garrison as the black man's "bold" and "dauntless" benefactor.<sup>14</sup> His speech was sharpened by "the keenest satire" and interspersed with "sparkling wit." It brought tears and laughter from the crowd, and as he took his seat, the audience broke forth in "long and loud applause."<sup>15</sup> The meeting concluded with an address by Garrison, but the reporter felt that it was Douglass' speech that had "answered the almost extravagant expectations of the people."<sup>16</sup>

Early on August 7, Garrison wrote his wife an account of the meetings and remarked, "This morning, we leave in the cars for Harrisburg, which, though the capital of the State, is very much under the influence of Slavery. I do not anticipate a quiet meeting, but we shall bear our testimony boldly nevertheless."<sup>17</sup>

Before Garrison and Douglass started, an incident occurred which "evinced something of that venomous pro-slavery spirit which pervades the public sentiment in proportion as you approach the borders of the slave States." There was no distinction made at Philadelphia in the railroad cars on account of complexion, though colored persons usually sat near the doors. Douglass took a seat in one of the back cars before Garri-

11. *Douglass Papers*, 6 August 1847, 2: 91.

12. *Ibid.*, 92.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*, 93.

15. *Ibid.*, 91.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Garrison, *Letters*, 3 August 1847, 3: 505

son arrived, and while quietly looking out the window was suddenly accosted in "a slave-driving tone" and ordered to "get out of that seat" by a man accompanied by a lady and who "might have claimed the right to eject any other passenger with as much propriety." Douglass quietly replied that if he would make his demand in the form of a "gentlemanly request" he would readily vacate his seat. His "lordly commander" at once laid violent hands on him and dragged him out. Douglass submitted without resistance but told his assailant that he was behaving like a bully, whereupon the latter threatened to knock his teeth out. Garrison thought he was drunk. The man turned out to be a Harrisburg lawyer, and Garrison thought this was a foretaste of the violence they would experience in attempting to lecture in the capital city.<sup>18</sup>

Though the cars ("compared with our Eastern ones") looked as if they had been made a century earlier and were "uncomfortable," the ride was "far from being irksome," on account of "the all-pervading beauty and opulence" of the country through which they passed, "so far as a fine soil and natural scenery" were concerned.<sup>19</sup> They traversed the counties of Philadelphia, Chester, Lancaster, and a portion of Dauphin. Over the whole distance (106 miles) they saw but a single spot that reminded them of "our rocky New-England."<sup>20</sup>

Arriving in Harrisburg at 3 o'clock on Saturday, August 7, the pilgrims found at the railroad depot, awaiting their coming, Dr. William W. Rutherford, a prominent physician and an old subscriber to the *Liberator*, and his sister-in-law, Agnes Crane, both of them "true and faithful to the anti-slavery cause in the midst of a perverse and prejudiced people." Dr. Rutherford was instrumental in bringing Garrison and Douglass to Harrisburg. There were also "several of our colored friends," with one of whom, a Mr. Wolf, Douglass had made arrangements to stay. Garrison went home with Dr. Rutherford and received a cordial welcome from "his estimable lady."<sup>21</sup>

Although the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society had been founded by a state convention held there in 1837, Harrisburg was never a stronghold of abolitionism. It had a small antislavery society begun in 1836 but waning in the 1840s. Its leading figure was Dr. Rutherford, who lived at

18. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1847, 3: 506

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*, 9 August 1847, 3: 507.

11 South Front Street. His home was a station on the Underground Railroad for many years. He also had a barn in which he hid fugitives. According to Charles Blockson, an authority on Underground Railroad, "A large locust tree that grew in the road between Harrisburg and Hummelstown served as an unmistakable guide post to the Rutherford house for the weary and forlorn runaways."<sup>22</sup> The leading conductor for the Harrisburg Underground was Joseph C. Bustill, a black teacher. Also active in aiding fugitives was the family of T. Morris Chester, who became a Civil War correspondent for the *Philadelphia Press*. His mother was a former slave who had escaped from Maryland.<sup>23</sup>

The Dauphin County Court House had been reserved for Saturday and Sunday evening meetings. Hitherto, nearly all antislavery lecturers had failed to draw a crowd, but on this occasion the courtroom was filled, "some of the most respectable citizens being present." Garrison first addressed the meeting, and was listened to "not only without molestation, but with marked attention and respect," though his remarks were "stringent" and his accusations "severe."<sup>24</sup> Douglass thought that Garrison presented "a calm statement of facts" respecting slavery and the Slave Power, showing in how many ways it was a matter deeply affecting the rights and interests of the Northern people.<sup>25</sup>

Garrison spoke with little or no interruption for an hour and then introduced Douglass, who spoke for only a few moments when through the windows came a volley of "unmerchable" eggs, scattering the contents on the desk at which he stood and upon the wall behind him, filling the room with "the most disgusting and stifling stench." The audience appeared alarmed but disposed to stay, "though greatly at the expense of their olfactory nerves." Douglass, thinking he could stand it as well as they, proceeded with his speech. But in a very few minutes, they were interrupted and startled by the explosion of a pack of firecrackers, which kept up a noise for about a minute similar to the discharge of pistols and, "being on the ladies' side," created much excitement and alarm. When this subsided, Douglass proceeded, but he was again interrupted by another volley of rotten eggs. Then came cayenne pepper and "Scotch snuff."

22. Charles L. Blockson, *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania* (Jacksonville, N.C.: Flame International, Inc., 1981), 76-77.

23. *Ibid.*, 75-76.

24. Garrison, *Letters*, 9 August 1847, 3: 507.

25. *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York), 19 August 1847. Douglass had just been appointed a special correspondent for this paper.

Then more rotten eggs, one of which struck Garrison on the back of his head. A general tumult ensued, followed by a movement toward the doorway, which was soon completely wedged with people. The mob was now howling, "*throw out the nigger!* THROW OUT THE NIGGER!"<sup>26</sup>

Taking advantage of a few minutes of quiet, Garrison rose and announced, "Our mission to Harrisburg is ended. If there be not sufficient love of liberty and self-respect in the place, to protect the right of assembly and the freedom of speech, he would not degrade himself by attempting to speak under such circumstances, and he would therefore recall the appointment for Sunday night and go where he could be heard."<sup>27</sup> A Mr. Petrigen, private secretary to the governor, then rose and said that he for one wished to hear the guests speak but was obliged to defend the character of the people of Harrisburg. They had nothing to do with the mob and could not prevent it. Someone else asked, "Where were the police?" As the disorder continued and no one undertook to disperse the mob, Garrison announced the close of the meeting. Then stones began to fly, and one struck Douglass in the back. "Give it to him, give it to him," someone cried. "Let the damned nigger have it!"<sup>28</sup> Friends surrounded him, and he was able to get to the door. Garrison came along a little later and escaped injury. "Comment here is unnecessary," Douglass wrote in his account of the riot: "the atrocious character of the proceedings is sufficiently palpable, and Harrisburg one day will be ashamed of it."<sup>29</sup>

The people who interrupted the antislavery meeting were probably teen-aged boys. Professor Gerald G. Eggert, in his outstanding history of Harrisburg in the nineteenth century, remarks that throughout the pre-Civil War period, "gangs of white boys repeatedly teased and harassed blacks on the streets and frequently disrupted their church services." He also notes that local newspapers "either ignored them or alternately mimicked, ridiculed, patronized, and insulted blacks, making them butts of what passed for humor in their columns."<sup>30</sup>

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid. The account in the *Standard* is superior to that in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* (19 August 1847).

30. Gerald G. Eggert, *Harrisburg Industrializes: The Coming of Factories to an American Community* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 236-37.

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The Sunday evening meeting was cancelled, but on Sunday afternoon the intrepid reformers addressed a gathering in the Wesley Union Church. There were 886 blacks in Harrisburg according to the census of 1850. They comprised 11 percent of the city's population. Most came from farms in Dauphin and neighboring counties. Some came from Maryland and Virginia — "some manumitted slaves, some fugitives from bondage."<sup>31</sup> They supported three churches, an A.M.E., A.M.E. Zion, and a Presbyterian church.<sup>32</sup> Black churches were social and cultural centers for the community. They were also bulwarks of abolitionism and the Underground Railroad in the pre-Civil War period.

Many whites were present at the Sunday afternoon meeting, and the audience paid careful attention while Garrison and Douglass lectured blacks on the importance of "home, duty, and truth."<sup>33</sup> "Many grateful hearts will ever follow them," one observer wrote, "with blessings for their devoted labors for the colored people, and prayers for their safety and success in their toilsome journey. The tour in which they are engaged cannot fail to do good to the cause of the slave."<sup>34</sup>

On Monday morning, August 9, Garrison and Douglass left Harrisburg by train for Chambersburg, where they picked up a stagecoach bound for Pittsburgh on what became Route 30. The train stopped in Carlisle, where they were greeted by antislavery friends. Carlisle had a substantial black community and a strong antislavery society. It was the hometown of Miller McKim, executive secretary of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. "The approbation of these dear brethren," Douglass wrote, "was grateful to him [Garrison] who has devoted seventeen years of his life to this cause."<sup>35</sup>

Upon arriving at Chambersburg, the two men found that the ticket that Douglass obtained for Pittsburgh enabled him to go straight through

31. *Ibid.*, 236. For further information see Gerald G. Eggert, "Two Steps Forward and a Step and a Half Back: Harrisburg's African American Community in the Nineteenth Century," in Joe William Trotter, Jr. and Eric Ledell Smith, eds., *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives* (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 220-253. William Henry Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck, 1883) contains information on the Wesley Union Church (p. 349). It was A.M.E. Zion. Egle also has a biographical sketch of Dr. William W. Rutherford (p. 557). He was a member of the convention which organized the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in 1837 (*National Enquirer*, 11 February 1837).

32. Blockson, *Underground Railroad*, 76-77.

33. *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 19 August 1847.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, 2 September 1847.

on the two o'clock stage. Garrison was compelled to wait until the eight o'clock stage, which did not actually leave until eleven o'clock. The route over the Allegheny Mountains, "although a very beautiful and sublime one," Garrison wrote, was "very slow and difficult". With a crowded stage, on a very hot day, it was "quite overpowering."<sup>36</sup>

Douglass was subjected to numerous insults and "various petty annoyances." He could not get "a decent meal" along the way. All he had to eat was a few crackers he obtained at McConnellsburg. "O, what brutality!" Garrison exclaimed. "Only think of it, and then of the splendid reception given to him in all parts of Great Britain!"<sup>37</sup>

Douglass arrived at Pittsburgh between three and four o'clock on Wednesday morning and was met at the stage office by "our warm-hearted and energetic friend, J. B. Vashon, who took me immediately to his hospitable home." (Vashon was a well-to-do black barber.) Waiting there was a brass band and a reception committee of twenty white and black friends. "This gratifying reception," Douglass wrote, "was more than compensation for the dastardly insults to which I was subjected during my rough journey to that place. To make up for the starving to which I had been subjected, friend Vashon soon introduced me to his table laden with the good things of this life."<sup>38</sup> Members of the committee were disappointed that Garrison did not arrive with Douglass. He did not arrive until Wednesday evening, "entirely exhausted, but soon recovered myself by a good warm bath."<sup>39</sup>

On Wednesday afternoon, before Garrison's arrival, Douglass spoke to a large audience in the Temperance Hall, "and I trust a good impression was made in behalf of our righteous cause."<sup>40</sup> All told five meetings were held in Pittsburgh. The day meetings were held in the open air and were very well attended. The evening meetings were held in the Temperance Hall, "a large room, but by no means sufficient to hold the numbers that pressed to hear."<sup>41</sup> "What a commentary on the religion of Pittsburgh it is," Douglass remarked, "that every church in the place was closed against us." If churches had been opened to the abolitionists, he noted sarcastically, "the philanthropic Garrison may possibly be regarded as reli-

36. Garrison, *Letters*, 13 August 1847, 3: 509.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 2 September 1847. On Pittsburgh's black leaders see Trotter and Smith, eds., *African Americans in Pennsylvania*, 407-08.

39. Garrison, *Letters*, 13 August 1847, 3: 509.

40. *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 2 September 1847.

41. *Ibid.*, 9 September 1847.

gious as the pious man-butcher Zachary Taylor!"<sup>42</sup> General Taylor had defeated a Mexican army under Santa Anna, three times the size of his own, at Buena Vista in February 1847. (Becoming known as "the Hero of Buena Vista," he was elected President in 1848.) He was a slaveholder and abolitionists considered the Mexican War a plot by the South to extend slavery. Douglass noted that the Pittsburgh papers treated himself and Garrison with respect, "and that is something, in this age and country, so conspicuous for its meanness and brutality toward those struggling in the cause of human rights."<sup>43</sup>

At one of the Pittsburgh meetings, an invitation was extended to anyone who wished to open the proceedings with prayer. A clergyman took advantage of this offer, read a chapter from the Bible, and commenced an extended prayer. A theological student moved that the minister be given an opportunity to "explain himself." Garrison, Douglass, Dr. Martin Delany, and Stephen S. Foster resisted this motion on the grounds that it would be tying the hands of the assembly and compelling them to listen to a dissertation foreign to the purposes of the meeting. One of the abolitionists remarked that it was true the meeting was based on freedom of speech, but it was called for antislavery discussion. If any man wished to controvert positions taken by the opponents of slavery, he was welcome, but if he merely wished to occupy time in discussing the most approved method of raising potatoes, he could not expect the audience to listen with much patience. Garrison called the reverend gentleman "insane."<sup>44</sup>

In any event, Douglass was called to address the meeting. He deferred to Garrison, who in turn called on Douglass. Douglass said that if persons had been sold, as he had been from the public auction block, and held in bondage as he had been, he would not think the charges that had been leveled against the community and the churches were too harsh. Noting that President Tyler and General Taylor were slaveholders, he declared that the term "slaveholder" was an accepted one in this country. He saw slaveholding as a sin. It was a violation of the Golden Rule and the principles of the Declaration of Independence. He repudiated the charge of atheism that had been leveled against him and declared that he was a firm believer in Christianity and "the truths of Scripture."<sup>45</sup> On this note the Thursday morning session ended.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., 2 September 1847.

44. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, 14 August 1847.

45. Ibid.

Douglass spoke again in the afternoon session. He argued that the northern states upheld the institution of slavery as much as the South. He had thought once of leading a slave insurrection, but had thought better of it because there were thousands in the North bound by the Constitution to aid their Southern brethren in putting it down. The Constitution compelled the surrender of fugitive slaves to their masters and forbade citizens to aid them with food and clothing, in violation of Scriptural precepts. He thought the Constitution was a proslavery document and wondered how men could swear allegiance to such a sinful instrument. They should neither vote nor hold office under it. If the North did not support it, slavery could not exist. State after state had been added to the Union to strengthen slavery. "And we have now an accursed war inflicted upon us in support of slavery."<sup>46</sup> Shortly before, General Winfield Scott had landed an army at Vera Cruz and fought his way overland to Mexico City, which he occupied on September 14.

Douglass hoped to see the day when there would be no "Jim Crow" seats in churches, railroads, steamboats, or at "public tables." As for clergymen who excused or tolerated slavery and who communed with slaveholders, they "gave the lie to their profession, [and] were hypocrites, deceivers, [and] wicked men."<sup>47</sup> Garrison then spoke, declaring that his general positions were the same as those of Douglass. He then traced the history of the antislavery movement, which he had begun in 1831.

At the evening session Douglass spoke of his experiences in Europe, contrasting his treatment there with his reception by the American public, particularly on his way to Pittsburgh. He expressed his hope that antislavery sentiment would grow in the West as it had in the East. He noted the mixture of European blood in the veins of two-thirds of the African Americans and the difficulty he had in discovering persons of pure African blood in the day's audience.<sup>48</sup>

The *Pittsburgh Gazette*, which reported the day's sessions, noted that the evening crowd was "immense" and that everything had gone smoothly. The crowd gave three cheers for Garrison, Douglass, and Foster when the speeches were over. Summing up their Pittsburgh visit, Garrison thought it a triumph. "I have seen nothing like to it on this side of the Atlantic.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

The place seems to be electrified, and the hearts of many are leaping for joy."<sup>49</sup>

A by-product of the visit was Douglass' acquaintance with Dr. Martin R. Delany, editor of the *Mystery*, who assisted him with the founding of his own paper, the *North Star*, a little later. Douglass called him a "truly noble specimen of a man."<sup>50</sup> Delany was a physician who studied medicine at Harvard for a while but did not graduate. He is famous for his book *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People* (1852) and for his efforts to promote the settlement of American blacks in the Niger River Valley of Africa.

In retrospect Garrison thought Pittsburgh a "busy, though dingy and homely city," resembling the manufacturing towns he had seen in England. Leaving the smoky city on Friday morning, August 13, Garrison and Douglass took an Ohio River steamboat to the town of Beaver, Pennsylvania and an omnibus some three or four miles to New Brighton, the last stop on their tour of the state. Accompanying them were several black abolitionists: John B. Vashon and his son George B. Vashon, who was to become a lawyer; David Jones Peck, a young doctor; and Dr. Delany. No dinner was served, Douglass noted, "for the very American reason that a goodly number of persons on board were colored."<sup>51</sup>

At New Brighton they had "a most cordial welcome" from Milo A. Townsend, his family, and others. "Milo is one of the truest reformers in the land," Garrison wrote, "and wields a potent reformatory pen, but his organ of hope is not quite large enough. There seems to be no branch of reform, to which he has not given some attention."<sup>52</sup> New Brighton was

49. Garrison, *Letters*, 13 August 1847, 3: 509.

50. *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 9 September 1847. See also Cyril E. Griffith, *The African Dream: Martin R. Delany and the Emergence of Pan-African Thought* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975).

51. *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 9 September 1847. George B. Vashon, son of Garrison's host, John B. Vashon, was the first black to graduate from Oberlin College (1844). He became president of Pittsburgh's Avery College (for blacks). Dr. David Jones Peck had just become the first black graduate of an American medical school, Chicago's Rush Medical College. (Garrison, *Letters*, notes, 3:512-13). His father, John Peck, had been a barber in Carlisle before moving to Pittsburgh. While in Carlisle he converted Miller McKim to abolitionism. McKim resigned from the Presbyterian ministry and became a travelling agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society. From 1840 to 1862 he served as executive secretary and office manager for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. See Ira V. Brown, "Miller McKim and Pennsylvania Abolitionism," *Pennsylvania History*, 30 (January 1963), 56-72.

52. Garrison, *Letters*, 16 August 1847, 3: 510. Merrill identifies Townsend as "a Quaker abolitionist, schoolmaster, and editor." His paper was the *New Brighton Times*. (Garrison, *Letters*, notes, 3: 513).

a town of eight hundred inhabitants. Outstanding antislavery agents had lectured there, Douglass among others, in 1843. Stephen and Abby Kelley Foster had been married there, in Townsend's home. Nevertheless, "the people generally remain incorrigible," Garrison observed. The reason, he thought, was that they were much "priest-ridden." The Hicksite Quakers had a meeting house there, but they were "generally pro-slavery in spirit."<sup>53</sup> No place could be obtained for the abolitionists to hold their meetings (the churches were closed against them), excepting the upper floor of a flour store, which was crowded to excess, afternoon and evening. Several hundred individuals were present, and many others were not able to gain admittance. In the evening there were some symptoms of proslavery rowdiness outside the building, "but nothing beyond the yelling of young men and boys."<sup>54</sup> Over the heads of the people, across the beams, were piled up barrels of flour. Mice were nibbling at the flour, causing it to drop down on the audience. Garrison commented that perhaps the mice were trying to make the speeches more "flowery."

Garrison and Douglass both lectured at considerable length. Dr. Delany also spoke, dealing with the subject of prejudice against color "in a very witty and energetic manner."<sup>55</sup> Douglass was quite hoarse and spoke with difficulty. Among others at the meeting was Sara Jane Clarke, known as "our Anti-Slavery Poetess," who had long been interested in the cause and who was "a handsome and interesting young woman."<sup>56</sup> She was a writer and lecturer who used the pseudonym "Grace Greenwood."<sup>57</sup> Garrison, Douglass, and Townsend spent an hour with her family and discovered that her mother had known Garrison's wife as a child in Brooklyn, Connecticut.

Leaving New Brighton on Saturday, August 14, Garrison and Douglass took a canal boat to Youngstown, Ohio. They attended the sessions of the Western Anti-Slavery Society at New Lyme and then headed west to Oberlin, a town that contained Oberlin Collegiate Institute, founded by abolitionists speaking at a number of small towns along the way. Their pace was just as hectic as it had been in Pennsylvania. Starting back east, they arrived at Cleveland, where Garrison fell seriously ill with an ailment

53. *Ibid.*, 511.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Notable American Women*, s.v. Lippincott, Sarah Jane Clarke.

diagnosed as "bilious, intermittent fever tending toward typhoid." It is likely that he was suffering from nervous exhaustion. He had to remain in Cleveland for six weeks. Douglass went on ahead to keep their engagements in upstate New York, arriving in Massachusetts some weeks ahead of Garrison, who did not get home until the end of October.

What had Garrison and Douglass accomplished on their four stops in Pennsylvania on their way to Ohio? The answer is probably "not much." In Norristown and Philadelphia they had addressed several hundred members of a well-established antislavery society and a small group of blacks. In Harrisburg their meeting had been broken up by a group of rowdies. In Pittsburgh they may have made some new converts. They had held two meetings in New Brighton, a village near the western border of the state. In Ohio, on the other hand, they spoke at eighteen communities. The Western Reserve was a hotbed of abolitionism. At New Lyme, Oberlin, and Salem they addressed audiences of several thousand.

In their speeches Garrison and Douglass condemned slaveholding as a mortal sin, a violation of Scripture and the Declaration of Independence. They denounced the United States Constitution as a proslavery document. As early as 1843 Garrison had declared: "The compact which exists between the North and South is a covenant with death and an agreement with hell." Later he was to burn a copy of the Constitution in a public square. He and Douglass argued that without Northern support slavery could not exist. They scolded Northern voters for electing slaveholding Presidents. Douglass said in Pittsburgh that American Presidents had been getting worse and worse since the time of Washington, and that the incumbent, James K. Polk, was the worst yet. They decried the annexation of Texas and denounced the Mexican War as a scheme to expand slavery. They advised abolitionists not to join political parties. They advocated separation of the North from the South; they were for "disunion." They pleaded for the ending of discrimination against African Americans in the North. They opposed colonization of American blacks overseas and advocated giving them equal rights in this country. They counseled blacks to be industrious, thrifty, and virtuous. They arraigned white American clergymen and church members for supporting slavery and denounced communing with slaveholders. They pleaded for freedom of speech, press, and assembly. They begged for money to support their crusade.

How many minds had they changed? Probably few. The great majority of their hearers were already convinced abolitionists, though it is doubtful that many of them supported Garrisonian disunionism. Garri-

son already had the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society in his pocket. It was the chief locus of antislavery sentiment in the state, with a membership of about a thousand at its peak. Garrison and Douglass were not attempting to abolitionize the state. That had been tried by travelling agents like Charles C. Burleigh in the 1830s.<sup>58</sup> Pennsylvania abolitionists were like today's church members, already "saved," going to hear Billy Graham. Garrison was their Billy Graham. People who attended antislavery meetings were seeking inspiration and encouragement, a chance to meet and talk with like-minded individuals, and ammunition to use in discussing slavery with people who were ignorant, indifferent, or pro-slavery. Their meetings were "times of refreshing."

There was some controversy in the 1840s between those who wanted to limit their work to moral suasion and those who wanted to go into politics. The Garrisonians resisted political action. In 1845, the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society passed a resolution condemning the Constitution as "an unholy league with oppression" and advised its members not to vote or seek office under it.<sup>59</sup> However, New York abolitionists under the leadership of Myron Holley and Alvan Stewart had organized a new agency in 1840, the Liberty Party, dedicated to antislavery action within the limits of the Constitution. This party nominated James C. Birney for President in 1840, with Thomas Earle, a Pennsylvanian, as his running mate. They received only 343 votes in Pennsylvania and less than 7,000 in the entire nation. In 1844, Pennsylvania contributed only 3,123 Liberty votes of the 62,300 garnered by Birney and Thomas Morris. In 1848, 11,247 Pennsylvanians voted for Van Buren, the Free Soil candidate.<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, there were some signs of antislavery strength in the Commonwealth. In 1846, David Wilmot, a Congressman from Towanda, introduced an amendment to an army appropriation bill, which would

58. On Burleigh see Ira V. Brown, "An Antislavery Agent: C.C. Burleigh in Pennsylvania, 1836-37," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 105 (January 1981): 66-84. Burleigh was famous for his long hair and beard. At one of his meetings some yelled out, "Shave that tall Christ and make a wig for Garrison." Garrison was bald.

59. William Cohen, "The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society," M.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1960, p. 67.

60. Sister M. Theophane Geary, *A History of Third Parties in Pennsylvania, 1840-1860* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1938), 43-44, 110, 137. On the Liberty Party see also Edwin B. Bronner, *Thomas Earle as a Reformer* (Philadelphia: Privately printed, 1948), 50-65. The best general treatment of the rise of political abolitionism in the North as a whole is Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

have prohibited slavery in any territory acquired as a result of the Mexican war. The Wilmot Proviso was heatedly debated for the next several years. It passed the House but not the Senate. The Pennsylvania legislature endorsed it.<sup>61</sup> James Buchanan, on the other hand, leader of the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania, wanted to extend the Missouri Compromise (and thus slavery) to the Pacific Ocean. On March 3, 1847, some months before the Garrison-Douglass visit, the Pennsylvania assembly passed a new personal liberty law, which made it a crime "for any state Magistrate to hear a fugitive case, for a jailer to use a state prison to detain fugitives, and for anyone to capture an alleged fugitive from labor."<sup>62</sup> In effect this nullified the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution. Governor Francis Shunk signed the measure and was reelected in 1847, although he resigned in 1848 on account of illness.<sup>63</sup>

Outward appearances to the contrary, there may have been a good deal of tension between Garrison and Douglass on their tour. Douglass was planning to start his own antislavery newspaper, a project Garrison opposed. Garrison said that the subject was not mentioned on the tour, but it is hard to believe the pair could have avoided it.<sup>64</sup> Shortly after his return to Massachusetts, Douglass moved his family from Lynn, Massachusetts, to Rochester, New York and there, on December 3, 1847, he issued the first number of *The North Star*. It was made possible by funds he had collected in Great Britain. After that the two men quarreled and went their separate ways. Douglass became a political abolitionist, supporting the Free Soil and Republican parties. Garrison continued his moral crusade in the *Liberator* until December 1865, when the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution freed the remaining slaves. In the end slavery was abolished not through moral suasion but through political action.

While their tour of Pennsylvania had not been very productive, both Garrison and Douglass continued to come to the state from time to time. Garrison visited his Philadelphia cohorts occasionally. Douglass lectured in Pennsylvania during 1848 and 1857. The pair attended the thirtieth

61. Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1973), 141. See also Charles B. Going, *David Wilmot, Free-Soiler: A Biography of the Great Advocate of the Wilmot Proviso* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1924).

62. Klein and Hoogenboom, *Pennsylvania*, 146. For the full text of the act see *Laws of Pennsylvania*, 1847 Session, #159, 206-08.

63. Klein and Hoogenboom, *Pennsylvania*, 141.

64. Garrison, *Letters*, 20 August 1847, 3: 533.

anniversary meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia in 1863.<sup>65</sup>

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, put through Congress under the lash of Pennsylvania's Thaddeus Stevens in 1866 and ratified in 1868, promised African Americans due process and equal protection. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment (1870) provided that they should not be denied the right to vote. Disbanding their societies, the abolitionists considered their work complete. Was it?

65. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Frederick Douglass Autobiographies* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1994), 1058, 1062, 1065.

### Notice

Dr. Ira V. Brown, Professor Emeritus of American History at Penn State and a P.H.A. member since 1947, has issued a collection of his essays under the title *Proclaim Liberty! Antislavery and Civil Rights in Pennsylvania, 1688-1887*. It begins with the Germantown Protest and ends with the state's first Public Accommodation Law. Eight of the twelve articles have been published previously; four are new. To obtain a copy write to:

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