



The Art of Racial Politics: The Work of Robert Douglass Jr., 1833–46

THE VIBRANT BLACK COMMUNITY LIVING in Philadelphia during the 1830s counted among its members a wide array of professionals, including merchants, educators, master craftsmen, and artists. In 1833, an article published in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, a Baltimore-based abolitionist periodical, and subsequently reprinted in the *Liberator* noted the recent artistic turn taken by twenty-four-year-old Robert Douglass Jr., “the son of a very respectable colored gentleman” in Philadelphia. Douglass was already well established in the “business of sign and ornamental painting”—a line of work, the writers hastened to add, in which “few persons in our country, if any, have made greater proficiency”—and “evidence of his skill” could be observed not just in his shop but in the “many other parts of the city” where his creations were displayed.¹ In addi-

With much gratitude, I thank Martha S. Jones for her incisive feedback; Mary Kelley, Kevin Gaines, and Kristin Hass for their suggestions about earlier iterations of this article; Richard Newman for discussions that helped frame this work; and Tamara Gaskell and the anonymous readers of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* for their constructive criticism and editing. Short-term fellowships at the American Antiquarian Society, where Gigi Barnhill and Lauren Hewes provided knowledgeable guidance, and the Library Company of Philadelphia, where Phil Lapsansky and Erika Piola provided immeasurable assistance, made this article possible. I greatly appreciate my family’s support and encouragement, especially that of Yariv Pierce.

¹“Robert Douglass Jr.,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Feb. 1, 1833, 59; “Robert Douglass Jr.,” *Liberator*, Mar. 23, 1833, 48.

THE PENNSYLVANIA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY AND BIOGRAPHY
Vol. CXXXVIII, No. 1 (January 2014)

tion to ornamental works, the artist had recently taken up portrait painting and was now “eminently successful” in both pursuits. Douglass’s turn from sign-painting to portraiture would provide him with a livelihood—and connections to the abolitionist movement in the United States and Britain—for decades.

Between 1833 and 1846, his most prolific artistic period, Robert Douglass Jr. created images of black people and white abolitionists that challenged flagrantly racist messages commonly presented to nineteenth-century audiences. He also lithographed one image that was alleged to have attacked several prominent black Philadelphian men. Much of his work, however, subverted racial stereotypes popular in visual culture and offered his viewers messages that supported black social equality and the abolition of slavery. Historians have increasingly expanded the chronology of abolitionist activism, included African Americans among its participants, and studied the various strategies to secure black rights in the United States.² Scholars have also demonstrated the importance of print and visual culture in disseminating the message of abolitionism.³ An investigation of the life and work of Robert Douglass Jr. during the 1830s and 1840s provides insight into the intersection of racialized political discourse and artistic production, as well as an object lesson in how the scholarship of visual culture and African Americans’ involvement in nineteenth-century struggles for black rights intersect. Using art as propaganda, Douglass hoped to convert viewers of his work to abolitionism and inspire them to dismantle the peculiar institution. Very few of Douglass’s artworks survive, but layering what we know of his artwork with documentation of his civic activities—which sought to ameliorate racial prejudice and produce black citizens recognized by society as upstanding, moral, and intelligent—reveals the visual means by which a black abolitionist artist expressed his views concerning black emigration, the educational role

² Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York, 1991); Timothy Patrick McCarthy, *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism* (New York, 2006); Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); James O. Horton and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700–1860* (New York, 1998).

³ Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860* (New York, 2001); Grey Dundaker, “Give Me a Sign: African Americans, Print, and Practice,” in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society, 1790–1840*, ed. Robert Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010), 483–94; Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, NY, 1994).

of visual culture in the abolitionist movement, and the “genius” of black achievement in antebellum Philadelphia.

Representations found in a variety of media during the early nineteenth century worked against Garrisonian abolitionist principles that stressed black social and civil rights by depicting abolitionists and black people in a derogatory light.⁴ Some of the most widely circulated and visible of these images appeared in the streets and parlors on the Eastern Seaboard. In Boston, for example, by as early as 1816, several crudely printed pictures mocked free black Bostonians’ commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts. These “bobalition” prints derided African Americans by presenting them with cartoonish bodies and disproportionate clothing, speaking in stereotypical black dialect.⁵ Such caricatures, which taught and reinforced racist ideology, worried some African Americans, such as the black minister Hosea Easton, who lamented:

Cuts and placards descriptive of the negroe’s [*sic*] deformity, are every where displayed to the observation of the young, with corresponding broken lingo, the very character of which is marked with design. Many of the popular book stores, in commercial towns and cities, have their show-windows lined with them. The barrooms of the most popular public houses in the country, sometimes have their ceiling literally covered with them. This display of American civility is under the daily observation of every class of society, even in New England.⁶

These ubiquitous images taught the young and the old alike how and what to think about African Americans—specifically, to imagine African Americans to be incapable of social graces, intellectually inept, and unworthy of rights that white Americans enjoyed.

⁴ Scholars have increasingly identified visual culture as an important site to study antebellum racial consciousness. See Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 120–47; Elise Lemire, “Miscegenation”: *Making Race in America* (Philadelphia, 2002); Phillip Lapsansky, “Graphic Discord: Abolitionist and Antiabolitionist Images,” in Yellin and Van Horne, *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 201–30.

⁵ Corey Capers, “Black Voices, White Print: Racial Practice, Print Publicity, and Order in the Early American Republic,” in *Early African American Print Culture*, ed. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia, 2012), 107–26; John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Philadelphia, 2006), 378–92; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, NY, 2000), 171–82; Karen Weyler, *Empowering Words: Outsiders and Authorship in Early America* (Athens, GA, 2013), 68–75.

⁶ Hosea Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the U. States; And the Prejudice Exercised Towards Them: With a Sermon on the Duty of the Church to Them* (Boston, 1837), 41–42.



Edward Williams Clay, *Life in Philadelphia* series. Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Derogatory depictions of black men and women could be found in many forms and in many spaces: in popular literature, in prints hung in shop windows, and in musical scores. Perhaps the most popular of these were the *Life in Philadelphia* prints created by Philadelphia artist Edward Clay between 1828 and 1830, which mocked white and free black Philadelphians. Deeply influenced by the people that he saw in Philadelphia and the racist caricatures he viewed while in Europe, Clay communicated the idea that African Americans aspired to—but could not attain, and did not deserve—respect within the United States.⁷ One of the figures in his prints, Miss Chloe, says as much. When an African American man,

⁷ Martha S. Jones, "Reframing the Color Line," in *Reframing the Color Line: Race and the Visual Culture of the Atlantic World*, ed. Martha S. Jones and Clayton Lewis (Ann Arbor, MI, 2009); Martha S. Jones, "Edward Clay's *Life in Philadelphia*," in *An Americana Sampler: Essays on Selections from the William L. Clements Library*, ed. Brian Leigh Dunnigan and J. Kevin Graffagnino (Ann Arbor, MI, 2011).

Mr. Cesar, asks how she feels in the hot weather, Chloe, overdressed in an ostentatious gown and enormous hat, responds with a revealing malapropism: "Pretty well, I tank you Mr. Cesar only I aspire too much!" The elements of Clay's scene—stereotypical black dialect, misshapen bodies, and ill-fitting clothing—signaled to nineteenth-century viewers that black men and women deserved a station in life that was less than that which they desired. In adopting the fineries of white society, such as the cane held by Mr. Cesar and the fan and parasol carried by Miss Chloe, black men and women, argued Clay, brought derision upon themselves; they wrongly assumed that they could imitate the genteel society those accoutrements denoted. Though they might attempt to replicate genteel white culture, their failures further marked their status as outsiders.

Clay's satire hit close to home for the wealthiest African Americans in Philadelphia, a group that included the Douglasses.⁸ Robert Douglass Sr., upon his arrival in the United States from St. Kitts, had established a lucrative business as a hairdresser and perfume merchant in Philadelphia.⁹ He married Grace Bustill—the daughter of wealthy black Philadelphian Cyrus Bustill, who had established one of the first schools for African Americans in Philadelphia—and with her raised six children, of whom Robert Jr. and Sarah Mapps Douglass are the two best known today. Robert Douglass Sr. also heralded the cause of black education, despite the white racial prejudice in Philadelphia that severely sought to limit it. In 1831, he sat on Philadelphia's provisional board for the proposed manual labor Collegiate School along with other elite black Philadelphians Robert Purvis, James Forten, Joseph Cassey, and Frederick A. Hinton. Together they worked to raise money for a collegiate school that would allow "the sons of the present and future generation [to] obtain a classical education and [training in] the mechanic arts in general." The committee's appeal to "all who know the difficult admission of our youths into seminaries of learning, and establishments of mechanism," underscored several of the obstacles facing African Americans in Philadelphia, even those, such as the Douglasses, who ranked among Philadelphia's black elite.¹⁰

Certainly many elements of Robert Douglass Jr.'s life—his prominent abolitionist friends and his financially privileged family—hinted at his

⁸ Pennsylvania Abolition Society Census of 1837 as cited in Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 248.

⁹ Newspaper advertisements as early as 1818 list his perfume business with another prominent black businessman, Joseph Cassey, in Philadelphia. See "Equal to any, inferior to none," *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 19, 1818, 4.

¹⁰ "An Appeal to the Benevolent," *Liberator*, Sept. 24, 1831, 155.

exceptional qualities. When taking into account the social, economic, and racial landscape of 1830s Philadelphia, however, we see the parameters that shaped the trajectory of his life. From the educational barriers for black youth against which his father campaigned in 1831 to the bigotry in the textile, metal, and shoe industries from which black Philadelphians were largely barred, black Philadelphians experienced the maleficent consequences of racism regardless of family income. Robert Douglass Jr.'s occupation as an artist placed him squarely within the artisan class in which many black Philadelphians worked, though the proportion of black Philadelphian artisans shrank during the 1830s due to white employers' refusal to hire black apprentices.¹¹ During this decade, the most common occupations for black men were laborers, porters, dockworkers, and mariners.¹² Douglass's struggles to overcome the obstacles created by racial prejudice, his desire to foster the educational development of black Philadelphians, and his passion to improve the livelihood of black Americans were shared by most African Americans in the City of Brotherly Love.

Robert Douglass Jr. demonstrated his commitment to training elite African American men in Philadelphia when, in 1833, he founded the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons with Frederick A. Hinton, James Cornish, William Whipper, and five other black men. This literary society not only cultivated the knowledge of literature and science but also inculcated debating and public-speaking skills among its free black male members.¹³ Just five years later, more than 150 free black men claimed membership.¹⁴ Like many institutions founded by members of the free black elite during this era, the society had a strong moral and social mission to counter middle-class and affluent whites' beliefs that the African American community was degraded. Organizations such as the Philadelphia Library Company could give evidence that free African Americans in Philadelphia had "progressed in the melioration of their moral and physical condition."¹⁵ A visitor to one of these debating clubs admiringly reported

¹¹ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 251.

¹² Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color, of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts . . .* (Philadelphia, 1838), as cited in Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 251.

¹³ Joseph Willson, *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia. By a Southerner* (Philadelphia, 1841), 97. See also "To the Public," *Liberator*, Mar. 23, 1833, 43.

¹⁴ Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, *Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color in the City of Philadelphia*, 30.

¹⁵ "Colored People in Philadelphia," *Abolitionist: Or Record of the New England Anti-Slavery Society*, July 1, 1833, 107.

that, “the discussions were conducted with a degree of spirit and propriety, and displayed a cogency and acuteness of reasoning and an elevation and elegance of language for which he was little prepared.” He continued:

The subjects of discussion generally relate to their own rights and interests, and frequently result in decisions from which the prejudiced mind of the white man would startle with apprehension. A change is rapidly coming over this people. They are now numerous, united, and bitterly conscious of their degradation and their power.¹⁶

The three academic components that supported the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons—“an adequate library, a reading room, and a debating society”—provided opportunities for Douglass to develop his ideas of abolitionism and emigration while sharing and learning from other black Philadelphians.¹⁷

Douglass further promoted black progress by creating and disseminating abolitionist visual material. In 1833, he painted his earliest known image related to abolitionism, an oil portrait of William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison was a friend of the Douglass family who seems to have followed the young artist’s career with interest; in an 1832 letter to Robert’s sister, Sarah Mapps Douglass, he wrote: “I hear nothing from my friend Robert; but I trust he continues to progress in his art, meeting with increased notice and encouragement.”¹⁸ Douglass Sr.’s published approbation of Garrison’s election to the helm of the newly founded American Anti-Slavery Society, the friendship between Douglass Jr. and Garrison, and Douglass Jr.’s shared abolitionist sentiments likely factored into Garrison’s decision to sit for the portrait.

Though the original painting has been lost, Douglass created a lithograph of Garrison and arranged for it to be sold at six New York City addresses and two Philadelphia offices. It is unclear who taught Robert Jr. how to create lithographs; becoming a lithographer often required years of training under the guidance of a master artisan. The purchasing power and respectable reputation of the Douglass family no doubt contributed to Robert’s acquisition of this skill. Through the circulation of lithographs, Douglass increased Garrison’s personal visibility while also promoting the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “People of Color,” *Liberator*, Apr. 18, 1835, 63.

¹⁸ Walter McIntosh Merrill, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, vol. 1, *I Will Be Heard! 1822–1835* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 145.



1833 Lithograph of William Lloyd Garrison by Robert Douglass Jr. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

abolitionist sentiments for which Garrison was increasingly becoming known.¹⁹ Douglass's portrait was highly sympathetic to Garrison; the antislavery activist is attired in respectable, middle-class clothing, his glasses and high forehead broadcasting intelligence. Published in 1833, the year of the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass's print encouraged the same abolitionist sentiments that characterized the founding of abolitionist societies and publications. Douglass used the image of Garrison, whom people knew to be involved in fighting for the rights of African Americans, as a strategy to support abolitionism and encourage its expansion. Whereas the medium of oil painting did not lend itself to circulation or mass visibility, Douglass's lithographs of Garrison reached a

¹⁹ It is possible that Garrison desired to counter an 1833 print depicting him and other abolitionists as fanatics whose abolitionist activities would engender black-on-white racial violence. See *Immediate Emancipation Illustrated* (n.p., 1833), Library Company of Philadelphia. Many thanks to Erika Piola for pointing me to this print.

larger audience, disseminating abolitionist ideas and earning revenue from multiple patrons.²⁰

Douglass made and sold these abolitionist images to support himself as well as the abolitionist cause.²¹ He worked out of the same building, located at 54 Arch Street, in which his father worked as a barber and his mother sold millinery. Printers commonly displayed lithographs in their shop windows to draw looks from passersby.²² Exhibiting the prints in this way was not merely a business strategy to attract customers, however; it also functioned as a tactic in the abolitionist strategy to win over the hearts and minds of the public.²³ The audience for the print, sold for fifty cents at the Arch Street address and in New York, including at the office of the American Anti-Slavery Society, included abolitionists.²⁴ Douglass revealed his desired audience when he began his advertisement for the lithograph in the *Emancipator* by addressing it “To the People of Color and Their Friends.” Later that month, he made no such appeal in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a decidedly less antislavery newspaper than the *Emancipator*.²⁵ As the case of the Mississippi slaveowner who, curious about abolitionism, purchased several pictures—including a portrait of Garrison—demonstrates, the audience for abolitionist prints could be unexpected.²⁶ Increasing the acceptance of abolitionist ideologies depended on its heightened levels of visibility, circulation, and public discourse. Robert Douglass’s print of William Lloyd Garrison provoked all three.

An event in 1834 underscored both the recognition of Douglass’s artistic success and the racial discrimination that accompanied it. That year, Robert Douglass Jr. submitted a painting to be exhibited at the

²⁰ “Likeness of Wm. Lloyd Garrison,” *Emancipator*, Sept. 14, 1833, 3; “William Lloyd Garrison,” *Liberator*, Sept. 25, 1833, 3.

²¹ During the Civil War, Sojourner Truth raised money from her supporters by selling a series of *cartes des visite* that corrected misrepresentations of her. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York, 1996), 185–99.

²² Ludmilla Jordanova, *The Look of the Past: Visual and Material Evidence in Historical Practice* (Cambridge, 2012), 164–66; Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London* (New York, 2007), 211–35.

²³ Henry Ossawa Tanner, a renowned African American painter, recounted that he “used to pass” Douglass’s studio as a youth “and always stopped to look at his pictures in the window.” Rae Alexander-Minter, “The Tanner Family: A Grandniece’s Chronicle,” in *Henry Ossawa Tanner*, ed. Dewey Mosby (Philadelphia, 1991), 26n13.

²⁴ Steven Jones, “A Keen Sense of the Artistic: African American Material Culture in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *International Review of African American Art* 12, no. 2 (1995): 11.

²⁵ “A Card: To the People of Color and Their Friends,” *Emancipator*, Sept. 14, 1833, 79; “William Lloyd Garrison,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 25, 1833, 3.

²⁶ “Calling for Light,” *Emancipator*, Sept. 13, 1838, 80.

famous Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA). As both a museum and school of fine arts, PAFA's large collection of artwork and renowned artist-professors cultivated a rich training ground for promising artists.²⁷ PAFA accepted the oil painting, entitled *Portrait of a Gentleman*, and exhibited it later that year. It was the first such painting completed by an African American displayed in those hallowed halls.²⁸ The subject of this portrait is unknown, though at least two scholars suggest that Douglass may have painted the wealthiest and most prominent black Philadelphian at the time, James Forten.²⁹ If Forten or any other black man's likeness graced the canvas, the representation of a black man as a gentleman would have represented a political statement challenging the racist ideas expressed through racial violence, minstrel performances, and prints such as Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* series. It is more likely, however, that the *Portrait of a Gentleman* depicted William Lloyd Garrison, since Douglass described Garrison as a "gentleman" and is known to have already painted his portrait by the exhibition of 1834.³⁰ When Douglass attempted to enter PAFA to view his painting on display at the Philadelphia Artists' Exhibition, he was barred from entering on account of his race.³¹ Given this racial discrimination, it is unlikely that PAFA would have accepted a painting of a black man described as a "Gentleman."³² Many years after this incident, Douglass cited his earlier experience of "having to struggle against [the] peculiar difficulties [of racial discrimination]" in advertisements to encourage patronage of his work.³³

Evidence of the connection between Douglass's work in visual culture and his political interests includes his signature on an 1836 petition supporting the establishment of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society.³⁴ The circulation of the printed petition and appeals for individuals to sign it were indicative of the increasing momentum and visibility of the aboli-

²⁷ Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts: 200 Years of Excellence* (Philadelphia, 2005).

²⁸ Anna Wells Rutledge, ed., *Cumulative Record and Exhibition Catalogue: The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1807–1870* (Philadelphia, 1855), 107.

²⁹ Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York, 2002), ii; conversation with Phillip Lapsansky, Oct. 26, 2011, at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

³⁰ "William Lloyd Garrison," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sept. 25, 1833, 3.

³¹ "An Appeal to American Women, on Prejudice against Color," in *Proceedings of the Third Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 1st, 2d, and 3d, 1839* (Philadelphia 1839), 22–23.

³² Conversation with Steven Jones, Oct. 26, 2011.

³³ "R. Douglass, Jr.," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Mar. 14, 1844, 2; "R. Douglass, Jr.," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 9, 1844, 4; "R. Douglass, Jr.," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, July 18, 1844, 4.

³⁴ "Circular," *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*, Oct. 29, 1836, 31.

tionist movement during the 1830s. In appealing to “the principles which actuated our fathers in 1780, [that] have still a dwelling place in the bosoms of their descendants,” the petition referenced the 1780 Pennsylvania Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery.³⁵ The petition reminded its free black readers to “remember those who are in bonds as bound with them,” and that as long as slavery existed, their own freedom remained tenuous. As the petition noted, “in this present crisis, our cause is identified with theirs.”³⁶ Douglass and other signers of the petition argued that as long as African Americans lived in slavery, free people of color could only be partially free; free from the yoke of slavery, they remained burdened by socially and legally sanctioned racist structures.³⁷

Douglass continued his abolitionist involvement by joining the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society (PASS), which counted among its members many prominent black Philadelphians: James McCrummill, William Dorsey, Robert Purvis, Joseph Cassey, and several Forten family members.³⁸ The wives, sisters, and mothers of many of these men—Amy Matilda Cassey, Sarah Mapps Douglass, and Grace Bustill Douglass, among others—had founded the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society four months prior.³⁹ The members of these organizations sponsored antislavery speeches, hosted antislavery fairs, organized fundraisers, and drafted petitions to the state legislature.⁴⁰

A long history of abolitionist imagery already existed by the time Douglass painted Garrison's portrait. In 1787, Englishman Josiah Wedgwood designed a seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade that prominently featured a suppliant slave with uplifted, shackled hands grasped together in prayer below the inscription: “Am I not a Man and a Brother?” The next year, Wedgwood sent several reproductions of this work to Benjamin Franklin, then president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.⁴¹ Henry Thomson's 1827

³⁵ Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, ch. 1381, §4, 10 Stat. at Large of Pa., 67 (passed Mar. 1, 1780).

³⁶ “Circular,” *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*, Oct. 29, 1836.

³⁷ Dunbar, *Fragile Freedom*.

³⁸ Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787–1848* (Philadelphia, 1993), 83.

³⁹ Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY, 2006), 167.

⁴⁰ “At a meeting of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society,” *Liberator*, Feb. 7, 1835, 23; “Anti-Slavery Lectures,” *Liberator*, Feb. 7, 1835, 23; “Debate in the Senate,” *National Era*, Feb. 21, 1850, 30.

⁴¹ Cynthia S. Hamilton, “Hercules Subdued: The Visual Rhetoric of the Kneeling Slave,” *Slavery and Abolition* 34 (2012): 631–52, doi:10.1080/0144039X.2012.746580.

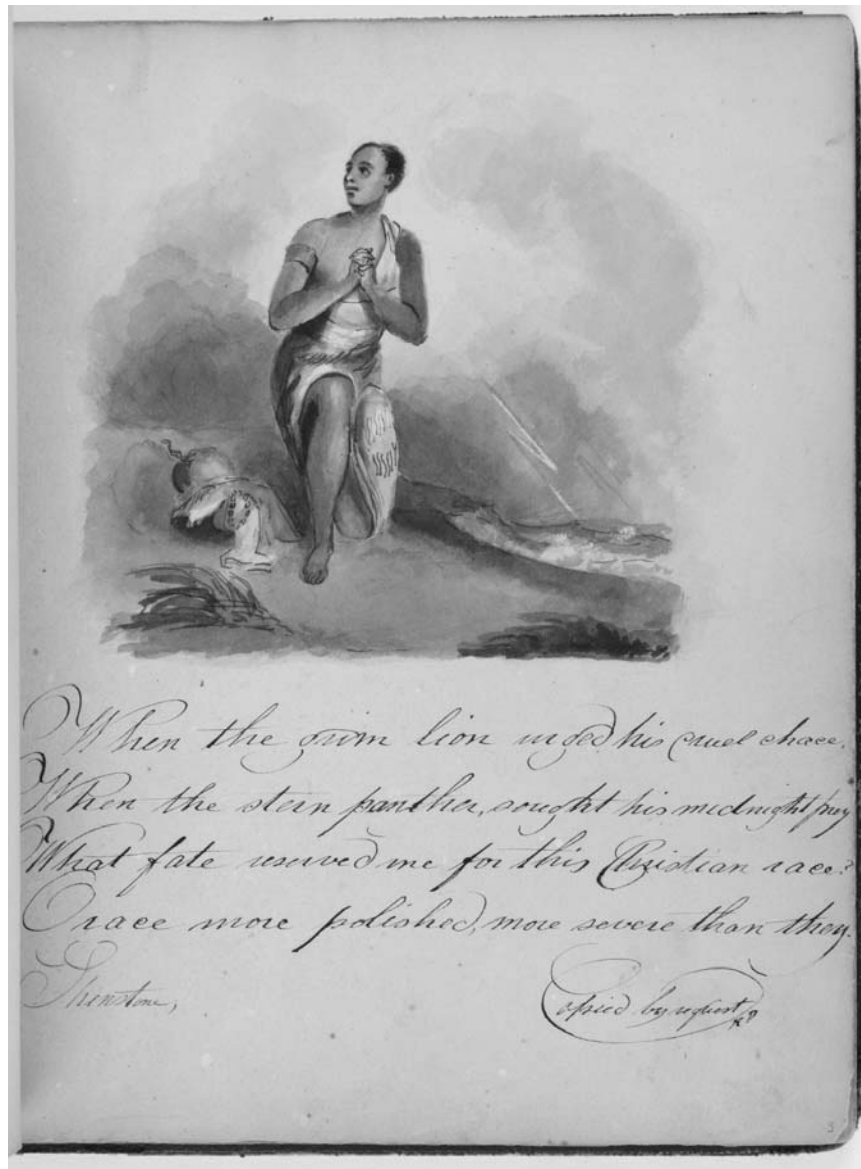
oil painting *The Booroom Slave*, which depicted a kneeling woman of African descent clasping her hands in prayer and looking skyward, bore a striking resemblance to Wedgwood's seal.⁴² Lithographs of *The Booroom Slave* circulated in the United States, and in 1833 Lydia Maria Child used it as the frontispiece of her book *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*. As visual documents were exchanged and disseminated throughout the Atlantic world, abolitionists in the United States adopted British abolitionist imagery to fit the context of US slavery. Robert Douglass Jr. was no exception.

Douglass appropriated imagery from other artists and publishers to increase the visibility of abolitionism and the sufferings of enslaved African Americans. In 1834, Douglass promoted antislavery sentiment when he created an image of a supplicant black woman in the friendship album of another black Philadelphian, Mary Anne Dickerson. Mary Anne, like her sister Martina, owned a friendship album—passed among her closest companions and colleagues living in cities along the East Coast—in which her friends (black and white men and women) wrote notes, painted flowers and figures, and embossed messages of sentimental friendship, religious fervor, and political activism. To be asked to write in a friendship album, especially on its first pages, was an honor that evidenced close ties and mutual respect. Though the threads of friendship have been obscured by time, someone in the Dickerson family believed Robert Douglass Jr. deserving of the honor of writing the introductory poem for Mary Anne Dickerson's album, which would be seen and respected by later contributors to the book.⁴³

Douglass evidently completed the pen-and-ink wash drawing with either the frontispiece of Child's book or another reproduction of Thomson's

⁴² Scholars have pointed to Thomson's painting as having been based on a story titled the "Booroom Slave," by Mrs. Bowdich. According to the date of the painting (1827) and the publication date of the story (1828) first printed in the London publication *Forget Me Not*, the opposite is true; the painting preceded the story, which ascribes various meanings perhaps originally unintended by Thomson. Bowdich's narrative assigns the African woman a name—Inna—and details her capture by and escape from slave traders in Africa. After her initial escape from the enslavers, God delivers Inna from her pursuers, and she seeks shelter along a rocky portion of the Atlantic Ocean "till the great ship was gone away." It is possible that the story reached Philadelphia in the original 1828 edition or in the May 1829 issue of the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*. See Hugh Honour, *Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. 4, *From the American Revolution to World War I*, part 1, "Slaves and Liberators" (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 130; Frederic Shoberl, ed., *Forget Me Not; A Christmas and New Year's Present for MDCCCXXVIII* (London, 1828), 37–76; "The Booroom Slave," *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no.3 (1829): 75.

⁴³ Dunbar, *Fragile Freedom*, 120–47.



The Booroom Slave in Mary Anne Dickerson's Friendship Album, page 3. Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

painting close at hand, given the identical subject matter and position of the figure. Four lines of calligraphic text appear under the image:

When the grim lion urged his cruel chace,
When the stern panther sought his midnight prey,
What fate reserved me for this Christian race?
A race more polished, more severe than they!⁴⁴

These lines are taken from a longer poem, "Elegy XX," by Englishman William Shenstone, that directly referenced slavery in the original 1744 verses. The poem highlights the incongruity of Christianity with slavery. Douglass's pairing of the poem with the image of the supplicant slave chastised Christians who either owned slaves themselves or tacitly supported the institution of slavery by allowing its existence. Though Douglass wrote beneath the verses that he had reproduced the image and poem "by request," he also subscribed to their messages of abolition. His entry challenges slavery on moral and religious grounds by means of moral suasion. Men and women active in the abolitionist movement who viewed this page would readily understand the plight of enslaved African Americans. Douglass's image of the innocent and persecuted African woman paralleled the experience of free African American viewers who often fled violent white mobs, battled legal incursions on their rights, and resisted efforts to stifle black achievement.

On the previous page, Douglass also penned a poem introducing the album to its future viewers. The wording of Douglass's introduction, which expresses to the album his hopes that "no misfortune . . . Befall thy Lady" and that those who would subsequently write in the album would take up "the pen of Genius . . . to compliment" Mary Anne, reveals that Douglass knew well the process by which friendship albums operated to connect friends and colleagues.⁴⁵ Knowing that other contributors to the album would later see the messages of abolition that she requested, Douglass crafted an image that acted as a vehicle to spread abolitionist sentiments to her friends and colleagues, not all of whom were ardent abolitionists.

Mary Anne's album reveals Douglass's position among the various networks linking elite free black men and women in populous East Coast

⁴⁴ Robert Douglass Jr., "When the grim lion urged his cruel chace . . .," Mary Anne Dickerson Friendship Album, 1834, p. 3, Library Company of Philadelphia.

⁴⁵ Robert Douglass Jr., Mary Anne Dickerson Friendship Album, 2.

cities. Douglass communicated the racial and religious politics in *The Booroom Slave* to individuals—Amy Matilda Cassey, William Cooper Nell, Ada Hinton, and Sarah Mapps Douglass, among others—who later received Dickerson’s album for perusal and inscription. Through his abolitionist art, Douglass aligned himself with other prominent Philadelphians who believed deeply in the cause of abolition and the rights of free black people. Amy Matilda Cassey and Sarah Mapps Douglass, for example, were active in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Amy Matilda’s husband, wealthy black businessman Joseph Cassey, sat on the provisional board for a black college with Robert Douglass Sr. Ada Hinton, another of the inscribers of Mary Anne Dickerson’s friendship album, had ties to the Douglass family. Her father, Frederick Augustus Hinton, had also served with Joseph Cassey and Douglass Sr. on the college’s provisional board. And Hinton and Douglass Jr. were founders of the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons.

The evocative power of Robert Douglass’s abolitionist portraits inspired a poem titled “On Seeing the Portraits of Abolitionists painted by R. Douglass Jr.,” published in two newspapers in 1837. The author, “L. A.,” detailed the moving experience of viewing Douglass’s portraits of Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, a Quaker abolitionist author active in Philadelphia before she moved to Michigan and founded the Logan Anti-Slavery Society. It is probable that Douglass painted Chandler’s portrait from another likeness, since she had moved to Michigan in 1830 and died three years before the publication of the poem’s emotional lines:

Who can believe the limner’s art
Can catch such motion of the heart?
But see, where Genius’ power confess’d,
Portrays the feelings of the breast;
Gives thrilling language to the eye;
And to the parted lip—a sigh!⁴⁶

The poem applauds the portrait and the emotions elicited by its stunning execution. Though only the portrait of Chandler is specifically referenced (an asterisk identifies her as the “pure sainted spirit” celebrated in verse), the poem’s title makes clear that Douglass had painted several images of

⁴⁶L. A., “On Seeing the Portraits of Abolitionists painted by R. Douglass Jr.,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation and Quarterly Anti-Slavery Review*, Oct. 1837, 63, and *Constitutional Advocate for Universal Liberty*, Nov. 9, 1837, 36.

abolitionists. "On Seeing the Portraits of Abolitionists painted by R. Douglass Jr." appeared in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* and the *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*. These newspapers spread the news of Douglass's abolitionist work within and beyond his hometown. The reception of Chandler's portrait testified to the emotive power of images in the service of abolitionism and to the artistic skill wielded by Douglass to achieve such ends.

Late in 1837, Robert Douglass Jr. communicated his plans to travel to Haiti, where he hoped he might advance his career as a painter. Sarah Grimké, upon receiving the news "Robt is going to Hayti to reside," expressed her hopes to Robert's sister Sarah Mapps Douglass that "his parents can cordially approve it."⁴⁷ While Grimké believed Douglass intended to "reside" in Haiti, his plan was for an extended visit. The colonization movement had attracted scores of followers and detractors, both black and white, since before the founding of the American Colonization Society in 1816, and briefly, in the mid-1820s, Haiti was a favored destination.⁴⁸ Extant documentation, however, does not place Robert Douglass Jr. among colonizationists; the people with whom he collaborated, the figures he depicted in his known artwork, and the organizations in which he participated either said nothing of the notion of colonization or adamantly rejected it.

Departing the port of Philadelphia at 2 p.m. on November 27, 1837, Douglass set out for Haiti with two fellow abolitionists, Lewis Gunn and Charles Burleigh.⁴⁹ According to the black newspaper the *Colored American*, the three traveled to Haiti for the purpose of "collecting and imparting such information as may be alike, useful to the natives, and to the friends of humanity in this country."⁵⁰ Perhaps not surprisingly, given Douglass's relationship with William Lloyd Garrison, the *Liberator* published the first letter that Douglass sent back to the United States after arriving in Port au

⁴⁷ Sarah Grimké to Sarah Mapps Douglass, Nov. 23, 1837, in *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké, 1822–1844*, ed. Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight W. Dumond, 2 vols. (New York, 1970), 1:483 (hereafter *Weld-Grimké Letters*).

⁴⁸ Much has been written about the colonization movement and the responses of free black people to it. See Leslie Alexander, "The Black Republic: The Influence of the Haitian Revolution on Black Political Consciousness, 1817–1861," in *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents*, ed. Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon (New York, 2009); Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, FL, 2005); Claude Andrew Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004).

⁴⁹ "Letter from Lewis C. Gunn," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Feb. 8, 1838, 86.

⁵⁰ "Our Friends in Hayti," *Colored American*, Mar. 3, 1838, 27.

Prince. An editorial note accompanying the published letter gave greater insight into Douglass's purpose. The newspaper described Douglass as "a colored artist of great promise . . . hoping to find that patronage which was denied to him in this land of Christian prejudice, republican slavery, and democratic lynch law."⁵¹

Haiti provided Douglass with a rich variety of subjects for painting. In the *Liberator* letter, Douglass recounted attending the extraordinary celebration of Haitian independence on January 1, 1838. His prose vividly communicated the joyous scene in which "people applauded," "trumpets flourished," and "artillery thundered" in an impressive display of black leadership and church spectacle in front of the Haitian Government House. Fortunate enough to secure a prime viewing position in the orchestra, Douglass closely documented the activities of the military personnel and paid careful attention to the clothing, decorations, and symbols featured in the ceremony. Douglass conveyed his deep impressions of the achievements of black people in Haiti. To his eye, "every thing was conducted in the most perfect order—no drunkenness or fighting, as with us on the 4th of July. I had never seen so many soldiers, and the perfect regularity of their movements amazed me. They were well armed, and, with few exceptions, well equipped, and the appearance of the 'Garde National' or military horse and foot, was truly splendid."⁵²

Douglass's praise of the conduct and appearance of the Haitians subverted negative conceptions of Haitians in popular culture. Especially after the slave revolt that led to Haitian independence from France, stories and images of primitive and barbarous black Haitians circulated in Europe and the United States. For example, upon learning that Douglass, Gunn, and Burleigh had traveled to Haiti, one Charleston, South Carolina, newspaper reported of their trip that it was a "silly errand," since "that fine Island is a sorry commentary on abolitionism—a *complete waste and desert*, as all the world knows, since it has fallen into the hands of the free negroes."⁵³ Many white Americans imagined the country to be violently overrun with people of African descent. The celebration, however, made an enduring, positive impression on Douglass. As he conveyed to his abolitionist readers in the *Liberator*: "What I have seen to-day, I shall not soon forget; for although too much of a peace man to approve of a military government,

⁵¹ "Commemoration of Haytien Independence," *Liberator*, Feb. 9, 1838, 23.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ "Items," *Charleston Courier*, Feb. 27, 1838, 2.

yet the height of what these people have arisen to, from the most abject servitude, caused in my bosom a feeling of exultation, which I could not repress.”⁵⁴ Douglass assumed that many of those gathered with him at the event were formerly enslaved people who had “arisen” to a more respectable station in life. The “feeling of exultation” stemmed from his pride in the accomplishments of these black people who were no longer under the yoke of slavery.

Within two weeks of arriving home in Philadelphia in July 1839, after spending a year and a half in Haiti, Robert Douglass Jr. embarked upon another international trip, this time to England.⁵⁵ The story of his passage to Europe survives due to Sarah Mapps Douglass’s friendship with the abolitionist Angelina Grimké Weld. In a letter to the English abolitionist Elizabeth Pease, Weld explained that Douglass traveled to England “to obtain further instruction and the means of improvement in his profession as a portrait painter.”⁵⁶ According to Weld, he was carrying letters of recommendation from Thomas Sully, one of the preeminent painters in the United States at the time, which confirmed the authenticity of his skill.

Several of England’s cultural institutions proved to be fertile ground for Robert Douglass Jr.’s artistry. In April 1840, he mailed a letter to his family in Philadelphia, later published in the *Philadelphia Freeman*, relating the good news that he had been admitted to the National Gallery and the British Museum, unlike at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He relished the opportunity to study paintings by Raphael, Titian, Correggio, Claude, Carracci, da Vinci, Vandyke, Rubens, Reynolds, and Benjamin West unmolested. He found comfort in the fact that the British “do not consider it a miracle that I should wish for an acquaintance with the ‘great masters,’ but do all in their power to assist me, and condemn the ridiculous prejudices of my own countrymen.” When he spoke to other artists studying there, he felt a “proud consciousness that I am received on terms of equality.” Douglass acquired more formal training by attending lectures on painting and sculpture given by members of the Royal Academy.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ “Commemoration of Haytien Independence,” *Liberator*, Feb. 9, 1838.

⁵⁵ Ancestry.com, *Philadelphia Passenger Lists, 1800–1945* [database online] (Provo, UT, 2006), micropublication T840, RG085, rolls # 1–181, National Archives, Washington, DC. See also: “The Passport Question,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 28, 1849, 2. The article quotes a letter dated July 13, 1839, in which Richard Vaux requests a passport for Robert Douglass Jr. Douglass had arrived on a ship from Port au Prince on July 1, 1839.

⁵⁶ Angelina Grimké Weld to Elizabeth Pease, Aug. 25, 1839, in Barnes and Dumond, *Weld–Grimké Letters*, 2:792.

⁵⁷ “The subjoined letter...,” *Philadelphia Freeman*, June 11, 1840, 2. The article notes that the letter was sent on April 29, 1840.

The World's Anti-Slavery Convention in June 1840 provided opportunities for Douglass both to improve his skills as a portrait painter and surround himself with prominent abolitionists. Held in London, the convention attracted over five hundred abolitionists from the Caribbean, North America, and Europe.⁵⁸ Among them were some of the most prominent and outspoken advocates of the abolition of slavery, including Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, George Thompson, and Thomas Clarkson. Douglass met with some of these individuals during his time in London; Lucretia Mott took breakfast with him and George Thompson, the fiery British abolitionist, on June 9 and later visited the artist on June 16. Though Mott did not detail her conversations with Douglass or Thompson, we can be confident that they discussed black rights—and perhaps women's rights as well, given the turmoil over women's participation at the convention.⁵⁹ Douglass also joined Mott when she visited Benjamin Robert Hayden, a well-respected British painter of the era, to have her likeness taken for his famous painting of the convention. Douglass accompanied Mott for her sitting and took instruction from Hayden.⁶⁰

Soon after returning home to Philadelphia from London, where he had enhanced his artistic skills and strengthened his abolitionist connections, Douglass made preparations to discuss and display the paintings he had completed in Haiti and England at two exhibitions, one of his Haitian paintings and a second that paired his Haitian works with those he painted in England. He delivered an address at a fundraiser for the Philadelphia Library Company in St. Thomas African Episcopal Church in March 1841 that provided insight into his thoughts on black emigration.⁶¹ Douglass explicitly rejected the idea that African Americans should

⁵⁸ Ira Brown, "Cradle of Feminism: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1833–1840," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (1978): 162; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation": American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840," *Pacific Historical Review* 59 (1990): 453–99.

⁵⁹ Initially, the meeting organizers invited women to the convention, but they later restricted invitations to "gentlemen" only. They barred women from being delegates in the convention and limited their presence to the gallery, where they watched the convention without debating or voting on the resolutions being discussed by the male delegates below. For more information, see Brown "Cradle of Feminism" and Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation," 453–99. See also Frederick B. Tolles, ed., *Slavery and "The Woman Question": Lucretia Mott's Diary of Her Visit to Great Britain to Attend the World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840* (Haverford, PA, 1952), 26, 34.

⁶⁰ Tolles, *Slavery and "The Woman Question,"* 34, 49.

⁶¹ Advertisement, "Unprecedented Attraction. Grand Concert" [1841], box 1G, folder 1, Leon Gardiner Collection of American Negro Historical Society Records (Collection 0008), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

emigrate to areas of Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. After speaking at length about the merits of educating black children, Douglass, continuing in rhyming verse, opined that those youth

... may thus successfully disprove
 Assertions foul, of those who would remove
 The native hence, to some far distant spot,
 Where death from climate soon would be [their] lot.
 But this is vain, no other spot on earth
 Is half so sweet as that which gave us birth:
 For *this our* Fathers also fought and bled;
 Here lie their bones, here shall be our last bed.⁶²

Conversations about black emigration from the United States had circulated in Philadelphia and other parts of the United States for decades. While several black leaders in Philadelphia initially supported emigration to Liberia and Haiti, the majority of black Philadelphians fiercely opposed the idea in the first three decades of the nineteenth century.⁶³ Nevertheless, approximately 160 black Philadelphians boarded a ship bound for Port of Spain, Trinidad, in January 1840, and in the winter of 1841, more black emigrants who had received free passage from the Trinidad Agency Office departed from Philadelphia.⁶⁴ In his speech, Douglass made clear his belief that emigration was useless; though his artwork celebrated Haitian leadership and achievements, he did not intend for it to advocate emigration. His cautionary words echoed the stories of black emigrants who had returned to the United States after dissatisfying emigration experiences. They also acted as a warning to those contemplating relocation.⁶⁵

In his speech, Douglass claimed the rights associated with the nation's revolutionary heritage for black people. African Americans should continue to reside in the United States because "For *this our* Fathers also fought and bled." The connection between the blood and bones of the "Fathers" and their African American descendants in Douglass's audience entitled them

⁶² Robert Douglass Jr., "Address," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 14, 1841, 4. Douglass's reference to "death from climate" echoes the problems regarding heat and disease anticipated by individuals thinking about emigration to colonies in the Caribbean and Africa.

⁶³ For a better understanding of the waves of support and condemnation of black emigration to Haiti, Liberia, and other locations, see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 233–45.

⁶⁴ "Emigration," *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Jan. 15, 1840, 28; "Trinidad Emigration," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Nov. 18, 1841, 3.

⁶⁵ "Trinidad Emigration," *Liberator*, Oct. 9, 1840, 163.

to make US soil their “last bed.”⁶⁶ While Douglass’s language immediately invoked the rhetoric of democracy during the revolutionary era, it possessed a double meaning. Generations of African Americans had fought and bled for freedom: freedom from slavery as well as the same freedoms enjoyed by many white Americans.⁶⁷

In March and April of 1841, Robert Douglass advertised an exhibition and lecture cataloguing the social and governmental history of the Haitian people. “Having returned to his Native City after a residence of 18 months in the Republic of Haiti,” the piece read, Douglass “purpose[d] [*sic*] delivering a Lecture on that interesting country, and some of its most distinguished personages . . . illustrated with accurate Portraits principally executed by R. D. Jr. while in the Republic.”⁶⁸ For the price of twenty-five cents, members of the audience at St. Thomas were treated to a visual display rich with information about the people of Haiti. The venues in which Douglass presented and promoted his lecture offer clues about his desired audience. Because Douglass advertised his exhibition in the abolitionist newspaper the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, many of those who came to view his paintings likely held abolitionist sentiments. It is also likely that the black congregants of St. Thomas, a hub of black Philadelphian life, learned of Douglass’s exhibition in church announcements or conversation. The choice to display his paintings at St. Thomas, as opposed to another black church, also hints at the artist’s agenda. Per capita, the congregants at St. Thomas were more than twice as wealthy as members of any other African American denomination in Philadelphia.⁶⁹ Perhaps there Douglass could secure the patronage and commissions that he sought.

Douglass selected paintings that showcased both black Haitian achievements in culture and politics and Douglass’s own artistic versatility.

⁶⁶ For more discussion of African American criticism of revolutionary era ideals, see Manisha Sinha, “To ‘Cast Just Obliquely’ on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 64 (2007): 149–60.

⁶⁷ For more discussion of black founding figures, see Richard Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, 2008). For black citizenship claims arising from military service in the American Revolution, see Rita Roberts, “Patriotism and Political Criticism: The Evolution of Political Consciousness in the Mind of a Black Revolutionary Soldier,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27 (1994): 587; Thomas Davis, “Emancipation Rhetoric, Natural Rights, and Revolutionary New England: A Note on Four Black Petitions in Massachusetts, 1773–1777,” *New England Quarterly* 62 (1989): 253; Charles Akers, “‘Our Modern Egyptians’: Phillis Wheatley and the Whig Campaign against Slavery in Revolutionary Boston,” *Journal of Negro History* 60 (1975): 397–410.

⁶⁸ “Haitian Collection,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Mar. 31, 1841, 3, and Apr. 7, 1841, 4.

⁶⁹ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 265.

On view to the lecture attendees were eleven paintings on varied subjects: portraits of President Alexander Pétion, President Jean Pierre Boyer, and General Joseph Balthazar Inginac; three portraits of “Haytien Ladies”; scenes documenting the funeral of Pétion and Haitian Independence Day of 1839; a still life entitled *Sketches of Haytien Fruits—Gazettes, Proclamations, &c.*; and a portrait of Douglass executed by his friend, the Haitian painter M. Colbert Lochard. Douglass’s painting of Haitian Independence Day likely resembled the festive scene he had described in his letter to his family. His advertisement described this large historical painting as containing “accurate views” of several governmental buildings and boasting “more than 200 figures” taking part in the festivities.⁷⁰

Douglass included a still life, *Sketches of Haytien Fruits*, that may be read as reflecting his investment in black cultural institutions. Readers of the advertisement for the lecture and exhibition may have initially assumed that this painting depicted agricultural products of the country, such as coffee. Because the painting is not extant, the meaning of the work must be deduced from the title. The description following the main title—*Gazettes, Proclamations, &c.*—clarifies the meaning and content of the painting. Douglass’s classification of Haitian newspapers and proclamations as the fruits of Haiti reveals his vision of the nation as a place of black success and empowerment. The fruits of black self-government and intellectual production were government documents, journalism, and culture. At the very least, Douglass’s title for this work suggests his belief that black leadership enabled the growth of culture and black cultural institutions. He had expressed the same ideas just a few weeks prior to the exhibition in his speech before the Philadelphia Library Company in which he extolled “a soil where knowledge warms the ground / [wherein] the glowing fruits of Genius will be found.”⁷¹

During a second exhibition in May 1841, Douglass displayed his paintings of black Haitian leaders alongside his copies of the masterworks he had studied in Britain. His radical pairing of these subjects made bold statements about black civilization and subverted notions of Haitians as uncivilized and brutish. Douglass again displayed his paintings of Haitian presidents Pétion and Boyer as well as another Haitian dignitary, General Inginac, whom he had seen at the Haitian Independence celebration.⁷² His

⁷⁰ “Haitian Collection,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Mar. 31, 1841, and Apr. 7, 1841.

⁷¹ “Address,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 14, 1841.

⁷² “Commemoration of Haytien Independence,” *Liberator*, Feb. 9, 1838, 23.

description of these individuals as “some of the great men of the Republic of Haiti” hinted at the reverence with which Douglass held these individuals.⁷³ Such images stood in stark contrast to the 1839 print “Johnny Q, Introducing the Haytien Ambassador to the Ladies of Lynn, Mass.” created by Edward Williams Clay, who was well-known for his *Life in Philadelphia* prints. Though the print mocked white women abolitionists, Clay used broken English, animalistic facial features, and references to the ambassador’s lips and body odor to ridicule him.⁷⁴ Robert Douglass Jr., however, painted these Haitian leaders in oil—a medium that represented culture, refinement, and wealth—and further elevated their status by pairing these paintings with Douglass’s copies of Italian and British works. Using visual culture, Douglass undermined the widely assumed racial and cultural hierarchy between black Haitians and white Europeans.

By the 1830s and 1840s, the belief that images held persuasive power that could affect their viewers in positive and substantial ways was widespread.⁷⁵ *Parley’s Magazine*, with a self-reported subscription base of twenty thousand customers, proposed that its pages would feature a plethora of images “selected not only with a view to adorn the work, but to improve the taste, cultivate the mind, and raise the affections of the young to appropriate and worthy objects.”⁷⁶ Commenting on a series of panoramas depicting Thebes and Jerusalem, the *Christian Observer* recommended “these beautiful pictures” for its readers “who are seeking for useful and intellectual recreation.” “If such intellectual and moral exhibitions were appreciated,” the article elaborated, “their influence on society, and especially on the young, would be felt extensively, and we might hope that to see the day when our citizens would have a disrelish for the demoralizing representations of the stage and other similar amusements.”⁷⁷ Looking at images was an activity whereby individuals could glean virtuous teachings, messages, and ideas. Images could, however, also be used for malicious purposes.

⁷³ “Benjamin West, P.R.A. John Kemble, Esq.,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 5, 1841, 3.

⁷⁴ For more about this print, see Lemire, “Miscegenation,” 62–63, 73.

⁷⁵ Brian Maidment, *Reading Political Prints, 1790–1870* (Manchester, UK, 2001); J. R. Oldfield, “Anti-Slavery Sentiment in Children’s Literature, 1750–1850,” *Slavery and Abolition* 10 (1989): 44–59, doi:10.1080/01440398908574974; Cynthia S. Hamilton, “Am I Not a Man and a Brother? Phrenology and Anti-Slavery,” *Slavery and Abolition* 29 (2008): 173–87, doi:10.1080/01440390802027780; David Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery, 1780–1860* (New York, 2004), 47–50; Claire Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790–1865* (New York, 2007), 50. *Fourth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, with Some Account of the Annual Meeting, January 20, 1836* (Boston, 1836), 20.

⁷⁶ “Children’s Department Parley’s Magazine,” *Emancipator, and Journal of Public Morals*, Feb. 18, 1834, 4.

⁷⁷ “Jerusalem and Thebes,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 14, 1841, 3.

Douglass, like his contemporaries, knew the combined power of print and visual culture. In 1841, he created lithographic images of several prominent black Philadelphian men that resulted in a lawsuit being brought against him. The depicted men included Frederick Augustus Hinton, Thomas Crouch, Benjamin Stanley, and Joseph Willson. All were editors and contributors to the *Demosthenian Shield*, a black Philadelphian periodical published by the Demosthenian Institute, an organization created by black men for the literary and general educational development of African Americans. Though scarce, the documents pertaining to this case reveal the contested nature of cultural representations of African Americans in the early 1840s. More importantly, they reveal the ways in which some African Americans keenly understood the detrimental influence of derogatory images and the lengths to which they would go to limit their damaging effects.

On September 1, 1841, Robert Douglass Jr. appeared before Alderman Griscom in Philadelphia and was held on \$1,000 bail. While the court docket does not specify the alleged crime, newspapers reported that Douglass had committed libel by caricature.⁷⁸ As one newspaper reported:

It appears that Douglass prepared a caricature, representing the members and editors [of the *Demosthenian Shield*] aforesaid, in ludicrous figures and characters, which he had lithographed. He procured a large edition [to be] struck off, which he proposed to sell to the aggrieved party, or otherwise he would offer them for sale. They not agreeing to what they considered a gross imposition, he did expose them to sale, and hence the suit against him for libel.⁷⁹

This is the first known instance of a derisive racial caricature depicting African American men created by a black visual artist.

A war of words between Willson and Douglass exchanged in the weeks before the lawsuit—in which each side published ad hominem attacks on the other's character—hints at Douglass's motivations in creating the lithograph. The surviving record captures Douglass's side of the exchange only. Judging from an article Douglass published in the *Public Ledger* in August 1841, however, Willson's writings about Douglass were very provocative. Evidently, Douglass felt that the *Demosthenian Shield*, with Willson at its

⁷⁸ "Local Affairs," *Philadelphia North American*, Sept. 2, 1841, 2; "The Gatherer," *New York Sun*, Sept. 9, 1841, 3; "City Gleanings," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Sept. 2, 1841, 2.

⁷⁹ "Local Affairs," *Philadelphia North American*, Sept. 2, 1841.

helm, printed malicious information about Douglass and, perhaps, his family. According to Douglass, in the fifth edition of Willson's periodical, Willson "impertinently" invited a conversation with Douglass and then "refused to insert [Douglass's response] in his columns [thereby] proving that if he possesses not a vestige of the eloquence of the ancient orator, yet he inherits all *his courage*." This abuse of editorial power and effective silencing of Douglass in the designated sphere of communication prompted Douglass's accusation: "But from the *shadow* of the shelt'ring 'Shield' / Dealest out thy blows at those who love the light." Douglass began his article with a quotation—"You'll find the thing will not be done / With ignorance and face alone"—that set the derisive tone for the remainder of his column. Sardonicly deeming the *Shield* "as invulnerable as 'Achilles,'" Douglass commenced a thirty-four-line stanza that hinted at the imagery he may have used to depict Willson in the libelous lithograph:

But for a caricature, oh hidden elf,
Sketch for the world a likeness of thyself.
Some say thou art a "Lion" but I know,
Now thou has *spoken*, it is but in show,
Oh' *such* a one, of old disguised did pass
He spoke, the world recognised but—an ass.
Erect now, I beseech thy lengthy ears
Patient take counsel, banish all thy fears.⁸⁰

If the caricature for which Douglass later found himself in court used the imagery contained in this poem, Willson may have been depicted as a cowardly donkey. Several lithographs of politicians depicted as donkeys circulated in the decade before Douglass's disparaging lithograph.⁸¹ The animal evoked ideas of feckless leadership and foolish interests. Douglass employed both ideas throughout his published poem, wherein he insulted Willson's intelligence, harshly judged Willson's writing ability, and mocked Willson's editorial competency.

⁸⁰ Robert Douglass Jr., "The Demosthenian Shield," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Aug. 3, 1841, 3. Italics in original. At least the first few issues of the *Demosthenian Shield* included "sketches" of prominent African Americans in Philadelphia. The second issue included a sketch of Robert Douglass Jr.'s father.

⁸¹ President Andrew Jackson was one politician depicted as or with a donkey in numerous prints during this era. See the following prints at the American Antiquarian Society: David Claypoole Johnson, *Great Locofoco Juggernaut* [Boston, ca. 1837]; James Akin, *The Man! The Jack Ass* [Philadelphia, ca. 1831–33]; *The Modern Balaam and His Ass* (New York, [ca. 1837]); *The Illustrious Footsteps* (New York, 1840); and Esop Jr., *Let Every One Take Care of Himself!* [New York, ca. 1833].

A negative representation of an individual, regardless of his or her race, could be severely detrimental to one's reputation, business, or livelihood when made public. Defamation of character, via newspaper, lithograph, or other medium, could quickly circulate among groups of people and damage the social status of the person represented.⁸² Lithographs allowed for particularly rapid transmission and dissemination. Hinton had previously been publically mocked in two prints—the first circulated in 1830 and the second in 1837—by Edward W. Clay.⁸³ His lawsuit against Douglass over the libelous caricature revealed that the main matter underlying the 1841 case was the assumption that the derogatory image would negatively influence viewers' perceptions of the depicted men.

Filing the charge was probably not the first measure the *Shield's* editors took to prevent the image's dissemination. Given the close business and personal relationships Douglass had with both Frederick Augustus Hinton and his daughter, Ada, it seems likely that Hinton and Douglass would have attempted to mediate the ire arising from the problematic image before filing suit. Nevertheless, any attempts to settle the matter out of court failed, and the objects of the artist's ridicule sought legal recourse to prevent Douglass from circulating the print and to award appropriate damages. Douglass found himself in court before a jury, which found him not guilty of libel by caricature. The judge dropped the charges but ordered Douglass to pay the costs associated with the trial.⁸⁴

Sometime before 1844, the successful free black musician and band-leader Francis Johnson sat before Robert Douglass Jr. to have a daguerreotype made.⁸⁵ Daguerreotypes were unique and expensive creations whose fragility discouraged their circulation from person to person. They could not be cheaply, quickly, safely, or efficiently replicated. By hand-copying daguerreotypes into lithographs, however, mass circulation of these images could be effected. Douglass's daguerreotype of Johnson became the model from which an artist named Alfred Hoffs created a lithograph that

⁸² One of the more famous examples of this in US history is the newspaper coverage that factored into the duel between Aaron Burr and Alexander Hamilton. See Joanne Freeman, "Dueling as Politics: Reinterpreting the Burr-Hamilton Duel," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 53 (1996): 289–318.

⁸³ Edward Williams Clay, *Life in Philadelphia* series, "What you tink of my new poke bonnet Frederick Augustus," ca. 1830, and "Philadelphia Fashions, 1837."

⁸⁴ "Cour 148 vs Robert Douglass Jr." (Sept. 28, 1841), General Sessions Court Docket, Sept. 1841–Jan. 1842, 74, Philadelphia City Archives; "Court of General Sessions," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Oct. 28, 1841, 1.

⁸⁵ The first advertisement for Douglass's daguerreotypes in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* appears in the March 14, 1844, issue.



Lithograph of Frank Johnson after a daguerreotype by Robert Douglass Jr., 1846. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Douglass then published and sold at his Arch Street storefront. Though Douglass's original daguerreotype has been lost, the lithograph copy provides clues about the image from which it was modeled.⁸⁶ The print shows a seated Frank Johnson squarely facing the viewer, grasping a bugle in one hand and resting his other arm on a table. Sheet music, a quill, and an inkwell arranged on the table beside Johnson inform the viewer of his skilled profession. The composer's slightly tilted head and the expression of ease and warmth on his face lend him an air of friendliness. The lithograph draws attention to Johnson's aptitude as well as to his professional success, further evidenced by his middle-class attire. This is an image of black success, respectability, and intelligence.

The timing of Douglass's commission of Johnson's lithograph lends insight into the possible reasons for its creation. Douglass published the portrait of Johnson in 1846, two years after the bandleader's death in Philadelphia.⁸⁷ Prior to publication of the lithograph, three days after Johnson's

⁸⁶ A number of daguerreotypes taken by Douglass of Cassius M. Clay have also been lost, though their existence has been confirmed from a short but glowing review in a Philadelphia newspaper. See "Daguerreotype Likenesses," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 29, 1846, 2.

⁸⁷ "Died," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Apr. 8, 1844, 2.

death, a group of men met to mourn the loss of the great composer. They elected a committee, on which Robert Douglass Jr. served, to draft and publish a “testimonial to [Johnson’s] worth” in the *Elevator*, the *Philadelphia Ledger*, and the *Philadelphia Sun*. In their printed tribute, they testified that Johnson “eminently and successfully proved that genius is sufficiently powerful to overcome *even prejudice*.”⁸⁸ A month later, on May 24, 1844, Douglass delivered a monody before a crowd at St. Thomas, the place of Johnson’s funeral and burial. Douglass lamented the loss of his friend to those gathered and twice referred to the “genius” of Johnson’s musical and mental prowess. The image’s reproduction in 1846, then, served as an act of remembrance. The mass reproducibility of Johnson’s lithographic image made it possible to remind a larger audience of Johnson’s accomplishments than Douglass’s single daguerreotype could. In this sense, the 1846 lithograph of Johnson served not merely as Douglass’s memorial of Johnson’s life but as a testimony to his accomplishments.⁸⁹

In that same year, the famed abolitionist Abby Kelley Foster visited Douglass’s Daguerrian Gallery to sit for several portraits. A note Douglass enclosed with one of these many daguerreotypes records that he had captured the images “for the purpose of being lithographed.” The “motive which [had] impelled [him]” to circulate these easily replicable, affordable, and durable portraits of Foster derived from his abolitionist principles: “If in regarding your portrait a single spirit is encouraged to enter upon the same glorious, although arduous labors, or excited to action for the advancement of the great and Holy cause in which you are so indefatigably engaged I shall be amply rewarded.” Persuading the viewers of the lithograph to empathize with the cause of abolitionism was one of Douglass’s prime motivations. He made clear his desire that viewers of his abolitionist images become “excited to action” for the cause of enslaved people’s rights.⁹⁰

In the widely circulated image, Foster’s modest clothing and thoughtful gaze lend her appearance an air of respectability that mirrored the

⁸⁸ “At a Special Meeting of the Young Men . . .,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Apr. 10, 1844, 2.

⁸⁹ Charles K. Jones, *Francis Johnson (1792–1844): Chronicle of a Black Musician in Early Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Bethlehem, PA, 2006), 243, 247–48. Additional clues about Douglass’s respect for Johnson and his fashioning of Johnson into an exemplar of black virtuosity can be found in an address that Douglass delivered at a concert held on March 29, 1841, at St. Thomas. See “Address,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 14, 1841.

⁹⁰ Robert Douglass Jr. to Abby Kelley Foster, May 12, 1846, Abby Kelley Foster Collection, American Antiquarian Society.



1846 Lithograph of Abby Kelley Foster after a daguerreotype by Robert Douglass Jr. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

cause of abolition she championed. The lithograph may have reminded its viewers of Foster's appearance and lectures in Philadelphia as part of her speaking tour earlier that year. Praise of the likeness in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* further increased the visibility of abolition, Foster's principles, and Douglass's artistic skill. Describing the portrait as a "handsome lithograph," the writer enthused that the work "[is] a likeness that will be recognised [*sic*] as far as it can be seen, by any one who has ever seen the original."⁹¹ Whether "the original [likeness]" referred to the daguerreotype created by Douglass or to Foster herself, the review encouraged readers to envision the veracity of Foster's appearance and, by extension, the accuracy of her abolitionist message. Douglass also advertised this "admirable Lithographic Portrait" in the *Public Ledger*, a newspaper that then did not brand itself as antislavery but which boasted a readership of close to forty thousand. For the readers of the *Public Ledger*, who held a diversity of

⁹¹ "Portrait of Abby Kelley Foster," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 25, 1846, 3.

beliefs regarding slavery, this advertisement marked yet another opportunity for Douglass to “[encourage others] to enter upon the same glorious, although arduous labors” as the abolitionist Abby Kelley Foster.⁹²

Douglass continued his dedication to the abolitionist movement by supporting the eleventh annual fair of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, which spanned three days in the middle of December 1846. The committee of arrangements, composed of such leading African American women as Amy Matilda Cassey, Margaretta Forten, Harriet Purvis, and Sarah Purvis, envisioned the annual fair to benefit enslaved African Americans. The event grossed the very large sum of \$1,432.68 and was deemed a great success.⁹³

As people from all over eastern Pennsylvania and several other states streamed in during the three days of the fair, Douglass’s artwork greeted them. As a reporter described it:

On entering the Salon the eye first rested on a large and beautiful picture of a Liberty Bell painted by Robert Douglass, an artist of this city, and generously presented to the Fair. Its station was at the head of the room, over the orchestra. It bore the inscription, PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT THE LAND. Underneath this picture, and in front of the orchestra, were inscribed in large characters the following sentences, “DUTY IS OURS; CONSEQUENCES ARE GOD’S. ARE WE NOT VERILY GUILTY CONCERNING OUR BROTHER?”⁹⁴

Hung at the front—the most visible and prominent position in the space—of the Grand Salon, the painting attracted visitors’ attention and invoked messages of religiosity, national pride, and abolition. After all, “proclaim liberty throughout the land” referred to the inscription on the iconic Liberty Bell residing only blocks away. That Douglass “generously presented” his painting implies that Douglass donated the visual centerpiece of the abolitionist fair, underscoring his dedication to the cause of emancipation and his involvement in disseminating its message to the public. During the fair, Douglass joined the other invited speakers—

⁹² “Abby Kelley Foster,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, June 2, 1846, 2; for circulation figures of the *Public Ledger*, see Dan Rottenberg, *The Man Who Made Wall Street: Anthony J. Drexel and the Rise of Modern Finance* (Philadelphia, 2006), 73.

⁹³ “Fair in the Assembly Building,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 10, 1846, 3; “Report of the Treasurer of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society,” in *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Philadelphia, 1848), 12; “The Fair,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 24, 1846, 2.

⁹⁴ “The Fair,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 24, 1846.

Lucretia Mott, Charles Burleigh, Edmund Quincy, and James Buffum—in orating about freedom from slavery before the gathered crowd.⁹⁵

Abolitionist periodicals encouraged people to speak in public, pray in private, and “if you use the press[,] use it to convince the community of the sin of slave-holding.” “Wherever you have influence, no matter how little,” one article cheered, “use it to excite sympathy for the bondsman’s woes, and to win converts to the right.” After all, “slavery lives in public sentiment, and public sentiment must annihilate it.”⁹⁶ Creating and displaying antislavery banners in public not only publicized the fair but also appealed to those who harbored abolitionist sentiments, bringing them closer to full conversion to the cause.

Robert Douglass Jr.’s dedication to art continued long after 1846, although few of his works are known to survive. He continued his involvement in the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored People and lectured about painting at that organization’s hall at the corner of Walnut and Sixth Streets.⁹⁷ In July 1847, Douglass finished a banner for the Blackwoodtown Division Sons of Temperance, No. 37, which was one of five commissioned banners on which he concurrently worked.⁹⁸ By December 1847, Douglass found himself in Jamaica, where he complemented the money he earned from commissions—chiefly watercolor paintings of local churches—by selling daguerreotypes and daguerreotype equipment.⁹⁹ Back in Philadelphia, he continued to create daguerreotypes in what he advertised as “the first sky-light Daguerreotype Gallery” in Philadelphia, wherein patrons could view and inspect daguerreotypes that he had made six years prior in order to judge their enduring “perfect[ion].”¹⁰⁰ Other Philadelphians viewed Douglass’s artwork at fundraisers, such as the one organized to raise funds for the abolitionist

⁹⁵ “It is highly gratifying to receive . . .,” *Liberator*, Jan. 29, 1847, 95; “The Fair,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 24, 1846.

⁹⁶ “What Can I Do Toward the Abolition of Slavery,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Dec. 18, 1845, 2.

⁹⁷ “Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Mar. 23, 1847, 2.

⁹⁸ “The Banners! The Banners!!” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, July 1, 1847, 2. Douglass also painted the fire engine of the Globe Engine fire company in Philadelphia. See “Globe Engine Company,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, Feb. 13, 1843, 2. The variety of Douglass’s artistic endeavors demonstrates both the subjects about which he was most passionate and those that helped provide him a living. The projects also reveal Douglass’s evolving business strategies and the difficulties of being a black artist in the United States before the Civil War.

⁹⁹ “Daguerreotype pictures,” *Kingston (Jamaica) Morning Journal*, Dec. 20, 1847; “No. 63 King Street,” *Kingston (Jamaica) Morning Journal*, Oct. 28, 1848; “Letter from Robert Douglass,” *North Star*, June 2, 1848.

¹⁰⁰ “The Arch Street Gallery of the Daguerreotype,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Sept. 20, 1849, 3. This dates his engagement with daguerreotyping to 1843 at the latest.

periodical the *North Star*. Two of Douglass's paintings—*Liberty pronouncing judgement* [sic] *against Slavery* and *The Slave Market in Constantinople*—drew the attention of those present and, in keeping with the subject and purpose of the event, hopefully encouraged more financial generosity on the part of attendees.¹⁰¹

Douglass continued to frequent antislavery gatherings, black conventions, and events hosted by the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored People throughout the 1850s.¹⁰² His artistic skill caught the eye of Martin Delany, who in 1852 extolled Douglass in his book concerning the current and proposed future of African Americans.¹⁰³ Douglass also continued to advertise his banner- and sign-painting skills in the 1860s and completed at least one banner for the African Methodist Episcopal Sunday schools.¹⁰⁴ He reviewed artwork at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia and published his assessments in the *Christian Recorder*.¹⁰⁵ That year, he completed an oil painting of Frederick Douglass, the location of which is currently unknown to scholars.¹⁰⁶ When not painting and designing banners, Douglass published numerous translations of Spanish and French language newspapers, and just four years before his death in 1887, he promised to submit to the *Christian Recorder* articles concerning “the heroes of our race who figured in the deliverance of San Domingo from [the] French.”¹⁰⁷ Such an endeavor recalled the artistic inspiration he drew from his 1837 trip to Haiti.

¹⁰¹ “North Star Fair,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Jan. 3, 1850, 2.

¹⁰² *Proceedings of the Colored National Colored Convention* (Salem, NJ, 1855), 7. Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, *Fifteenth Annual Report Presented to the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society by Its Executive Committee, October 25, 1852, with the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting* (Philadelphia, 1852), 53. Advertisement for November 2, 1858, meeting of Philadelphia Library Company of Colored People, box 1G, Leon Gardiner Collection of American Negro Historical Society Records.

¹⁰³ Martin Robison Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1852), 117–18. This published praise preceded the invitation that Delany extended to and then regretfully rescinded from Douglass to explore the Niger River valley before the expedition launched in 1859. Due to financial constraints and criticism from white Philadelphians, Delany reduced the size of the party. See Martin Robison Delany, *Official Report of the Niger River Valley Exploring Party* (New York, 1861), 13.

¹⁰⁴ “Douglass’ Studio,” *Christian Recorder*, Oct. 23, 1869, 4; “Sunday-School Anniversary,” *Christian Recorder*, Nov. 6, 1869, 3.

¹⁰⁵ R. Douglass, “The Centennial Exhibition,” *Christian Recorder*, Oct. 26, 1876, 8.

¹⁰⁶ R. M. Adger, *A Portion of a Catalogue of Rare Books and Pamphlets, Collected by R. M. Adger, Phila., Upon Subjects Relating to the Past Condition of the Colored Race and the Slavery Agitation in this Country* (Philadelphia, 1894), box 16, folder 6, Leon Gardiner Collection of American Negro Historical Society Records. The final item, No. 65, lists: “Large Painting of Frederick Douglass; by Robert Douglass. Philadelphia, 1876 . . . \$20.00.”

¹⁰⁷ “Our Christmas Supplement,” *Christian Recorder*, Dec. 30, 1880, 2; “Our Exchanges,” *Christian Recorder*, Sept. 14, 1882; “Prof. Douglass,” *Christian Recorder*, May 31, 1883, 2.

Robert Douglass Jr.'s paintings, lithographs, daguerreotypes, and banners were his contribution to the visual culture of the abolitionist movement. His antislavery activities and his commitment to the cultivation of the arts and education among African Americans in Philadelphia allow scholars to study how one black Philadelphian expressed his opinions concerning black emigration, black achievement, and the persuasive role of visual culture in the abolitionist movement. The images he created testified to his interconnected relationships with some of the most prominent men and women, black and white, of the abolitionist movement. While he deployed his artistic talents mostly for the cause of black advancement, he also wielded the power of print and visual culture against other black Philadelphians. Both uses of his artistic talents demonstrated the degree to which nineteenth-century Americans recognized the influence of images in their daily lives. Images could be a platform from which to argue for black rights, commemorate and honor black achievement, subvert racist ideologies, and slander colleagues. Just as Robert Douglass Jr. turned to visual culture to shape the powerful ideologies of race in antebellum America, so, too, may scholars look to images in their search to illuminate the histories of African Americans.

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