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Creating Political Authority

The Role of the Antebellum Black Press in the Political Mobilization and Empowerment of African Americans

From their beginnings in the 1820s, African-American newspapers have always been strong and vocal allies for the rights of blacks throughout the United States. This article delineates how and why these papers from the mid-1830s to the Civil War became important as platforms of political agency for those who were denied conventional means of political participation in the government. In particular, this study focuses on four avenues through which the newspapers were utilized to afford political agency to Africans Americans: the material and rhetorical support of black suffrage; the promotion and facilitation of public protest; the promotion of material and moral elevation; and the creation and promotion of a black national and historical identity. The success of the black press in these areas set a precedent for all subsequent African-American political struggles.

By the beginning of the Civil War, African-American newspapers had become an indispensable ally for African Americans in their struggle for equal rights throughout the United States with at least thirty-eight of these papers printed and distributed throughout the nation and beyond.[1] As self-proclaimed reformers, the African-American writers, publishers, and editors of the antebellum black press became the leaders of political mobilization efforts that cut across class, age, and gender, simultaneously fighting against slavery and the social and legal degradation of free blacks everywhere.[2] Thus, the founders of the black press created newspapers both of and for black Americans, which were instrumental in black identity formation and in defense of the fundamental rights of African-descended people everywhere.

This study delineates how and why the antebellum African-American papers of the mid-nineteenth century became important as platforms of political agency, intended for those who were largely denied conventional means of participation within the United States government. The time period begins in the mid-1830s, during a time of expanding public participation in politics, and ends on the eve of the Civil War.[3] As defined by many of the newspapers, the dual purpose of the antebellum black press was the elevation of free blacks and the emancipation of slaves. A legal form of bondage, slavery would by definition require legislative change to be eliminated. During a period when both legal and extra-legal discrimination against free African Americans was extreme, legislation was needed to protect any gains that might be made towards the betterment of free blacks. Beginning in the 1830s, when political action became increasingly significant in the lives of many white Americans, African-American newspapers stepped up to fill the void for blacks, who were denied true citizenship and equal political opportunity.

The importance of antebellum black newspapers has been thoroughly documented by a number of historians of the early black press. In addition to serving an essential role in the abolitionist movement, these papers strove to give a public voice to blacks, to alleviate prejudice in American society, and to generally improve the condition of African Americans throughout the nation.[4] Moreover, as this study demonstrates, the antebellum black press was fundamental in the political mobilization and empowerment of

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African Americans at both the community and national levels.

While many authors have alluded to the political significance of the press, no concise treatment of the role of the black press in the political agency of African Americans has been written. Beyond this, this research provides a poignant example of how African Americans took an active role in their own liberation in the years before the Civil War. Despite divisions within black society based on gender, class, and location, many African Americans in the antebellum period understood that the gravity of their situation would require a unified response. At different levels, the efforts of the leaders of the black press and the agents, subscribers, and readers worked in concert to create a political protest that would form the basis of black radical action for generations.

This study demonstrates how the relationships between the black press, its audience, and black political activities underscored the political relevance of the antebellum black press in the lives of African Americans. In particular, it focuses on four main avenues through which African-American newspapers were used to afford political agency to African Americans who were largely excluded from the democratic process: the material and rhetorical support of black suffrage; the promotion and facilitation of public protest; the promotion of material and moral elevation; and the creation of a black national and historical identity. Each of these points is examined in detail.

Two African-American newspapers were chosen as the focus of this study. These were *The Weekly Advocate*, later renamed *The Colored American*, and *The North Star*, later known as *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. They were selected because they were the premiere African-American newspapers of their day with broader national and international circulations and more subscribers and readers than other African-American publications. Both were published in New York, the only state to develop a lasting black press in the years before the Civil War.[5] Beyond this, both papers had unusually long life spans for this period. At a time when most African-American publications came and went in only a few months, the editors of these papers succeeded in keeping their publications afloat for years. Their longevity allows for a more intensive study of single sources over a greater time span. Finally, the selection of these two newspapers also was influenced by the relatively large number of extant copies still available; both *The Colored American* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper* have been preserved in paper form as well as on microfilm by a number of institutions. In the last several years, an enormous number of pre-Civil War newspapers have become available online on Accessible Archives. This database is searchable, allowing for specific dates, events, or themes to be easily located, thus greatly increasing the research potential of these documents.[6]

This study stresses the politically active elements of the content of the newspapers rather than simply the events that they described. Evidence for black political action and community unification was sought within their content and consisted primarily of: articles and editorials that demonstrated political actions initiated by the papers (rather than simply reported); advocacy or rejection of governmental practices or policies; and attempts to unify blacks both locally and nationally towards issues relating to legal and extralegal discrimination against free blacks and those enslaved. This study demonstrates that these factors played significant roles in the political mobilization and empowerment of free African Americans nationwide on behalf of themselves as well as those in bondage.

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The Weekly Advocate was begun on January 7, 1837, in New York City by up-and-coming black journalist Phillip Bell, who had previously been a subscription agent for William Lloyd Garrison's Boston abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*.[7] After floundering for financial support for two months, Bell tried to revitalize the paper with a new name, *The Colored American*, and a new editor, Samuel Cornish. He was a prominent Presbyterian minister and one of the originators of *Freedom's Journal*, the first African-American newspaper from 1827 to 1829. *The Colored American* had some success in the next few years and gained more subscribers than earlier African-American papers, but due to financial difficulties, it was forced to cease publication in 1842 as the longest-running African-American publication up to that time.

Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave and one of the most prominent voices in the fight for the rights of free and enslaved African Americans in the antebellum period, began publishing *The North Star* on December 3, 1847, in Rochester, New York. Like Bell, he also had been a subscription agent for *The Liberator*, beginning in 1841, and had served as co-editor of *The Ram's Horn*, another prominent African-American newspaper, for a short period in 1847.[8] In 1851, *The North Star* was merged with Gerrit Smith's party publication, *The Liberty Party Paper*, and re-titled *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.[9] Douglass incurred a large financial debt to keep his paper running and in 1860 was forced to convert the weekly paper to a monthly magazine titled *Douglass' Monthly*. It continued to be published until the emancipation proclamation became effective on January 1, 1863.

By the mid-1830s, political involvement was undeniably an important part in the lives of many white Americans. During this period, sweeping changes in governmental policy and suffrage laws succeeded in extending the franchise to a great number of American citizens. This was the era of Jacksonian democracy, a political movement beginning in the mid-1820s and most notably championed by Andrew Jackson, which argued for removing airs of aristocracy from American government and increasing the political rights of American citizens, at least white males.[10] Almost all adult white males gained voting rights, and political parties began to organize newly franchised voters in unprecedented numbers, leading to surprisingly close election returns nationwide.[11] African-American reformers of the era understood the power of the elective franchise, but African Americans were almost totally excluded from voting through both legal and extra-legal means, which left free blacks and slaves with virtually no direct political influence.[12] Black press leaders nevertheless saw the developing emphasis on political participation as an opportunity for positive change and attempted to use their unique public positions to employ the power of the

ballot on behalf of those denied representation.

When *The Colored American* was first published in 1837, it represented a new direction for New York's reform community. Rejecting the principles of non-resistance and apolitical reform that had characterized the anti-slavery movement in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the leaders of the new black press felt it was their duty to seek political answers to decidedly political problems.[13] Although only a small percentage of African Americans lived in states where they could legally vote, the black press supported black suffrage fervently. The leaders of the black press believed that those who could constitutionally cast a ballot would make a difference, and they argued that failure to utilize the franchise where it was permitted would only fuel the anti-suffrage argument. As *The Colored American* noted on April 29, 1837, "Why extend to these people the right of municipal suffrage, when those who are by law entitled to it, do not use it?"[14]

There was, however, one major roadblock to political involvement for African Americans: free blacks and slaves were almost completely disenfranchised. How effective could the efforts of the black press be to mobilize the African-American electorate with such a limited constituency? One way the press sought to answer this question was to work directly toward an increase in the electorate. In addition to constantly petitioning the government for suffrage rights, *The Colored American* encouraged its patrons to save their money and to purchase the required real estate for the vote.[15] Smith donated a significant portion of his property to try and help some free blacks earn suffrage rights, and letters in the African-American newspapers suggested that others with the means should do likewise.[16] Even with these efforts, the most optimistic estimates of the number of qualified black voters were bleak.

Thus, the pragmatic African-American press leaders searched for new ways to obtain political influence. Importantly, in this regard, African-American newspapers sought and obtained significant numbers of white readers and subscribers.[17] The leaders of the black press understood that their white readers, not subject to the stringent suffrage restrictions of African Americans, could be powerful political allies. Because of this, the black press attempted to mobilize the white reform vote. In an early call to white voters on September 15, 1838, *The Colored American* appealed: "Let all white voters, who would not make their republicanism a mockery, and expose themselves and [their] children to the severest application of our Savior's rule, 'With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again,' let all such immediately adopt the first of the above declarations, and proclaim it in the ears of every politician who may ever ask their vote."[18] *Frederick Douglass' Paper* displayed similar sentiments on December 1, 1854, praising voters after the recent elections for refusing to place pro-slavery politicians in office: "Let the People continue to think, and act for themselves, and not bow with implicit obedience, to the *dicta* of assumed superiority. When the *whites* are emancipated, there will be more hope for the blacks."[19] Thus, acting as advocates of black Americans, the African-American papers supported the use of the white vote and therefore attempted to influence the political decisions of white voters. In essence, this was an attempt to harness the political agency of white Americans on behalf of disenfranchised black Americans.

Because of this, the African-American press' major role in electoral politics was to offer discussions of policies and candidates relating to their political aims. As elections approached, articles, editorials, and letters from patrons advocating one cause or another filled their pages. Although the reformers of the era shared common political aims, opinions differed as to how they could best be reached. Many felt they could not support a candidate who did not fully advocate the cause of black Americans, while others believed it was in their best interest to choose a major party candidate.[20] Through the African-American press, this debate became part of a public dialogue within the northern reform community.[21] Reformers with competing political ideologies battled for the support of the newspapers, which may have been indicative of a large number of voters. The opinion of the African-American press was indeed valued by many voters in their political decisions as was evidenced by a subscriber in 1840 who suggested that it was the duty of *The Colored American* to tell readers, "for whom shall we vote?"[22]

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In addition to carrying on debates on issues important to black Americans, the black press also played a significant organizational role in electoral politics. These papers became a source of information for voters who advocated reform, printing explanations of election laws and reminders of registration deadlines.[23] Before the 1840 elections, the proprietors of *The Colored American* provided voting tickets for all of the candidates whom they felt deserved support and arranged places for them to be received.[24] In this way, African-American newspapers were useful in a practical and material sense, making it as easy as possible to vote on those issues important to African Americans.

Although their numbers were small, evidence suggests that the reform vote championed by the leaders of the black press played a significant role in a number of elections. The Liberty Party, the Free Soil Party, and later the Republican Party succeeded in electing a moderate number of local officials in friendly regions before the Civil War.[25] Probably more influential than a small number of elected officials, the reform vote also successfully prevented the elections of many major party candidates. Proudly reprinted in *The Colored American* in 1838 was a passage from a Whig Party paper attributing the loss of their gubernatorial candidate in Ohio to the abolitionist vote.[26] By 1841, the Liberty Party had grown significantly, leading to several high office upsets in northern states.[27] Though never achieving more than 4.7 percent of the vote in any presidential election, the Liberty Party was given credit by many contemporary citizens for the defeat of Henry Clay by James K. Polk in 1844.[28] Thus, the mobilization of the reform vote had a significant, direct influence on election returns. The identification of the reform-minded community as politically essential to winning elections meant that the issues important to such groups could no longer be ignored by the major parties.

Thus, through the efforts of their relentless leaders, the African-American newspapers developed into powerful political platforms,

fundamentally linked with the reform vote and the party system. Able to position their publications in this way, the black press became an influential force in mobilizing and directing the votes of those friendly to their cause. Unlike the American electoral system, the pages of the African-American newspapers were free and open to all African Americans, and those disenfranchised could make their political pleas in these publications and vie for the advocacy of their readers. In essence, the efforts of the black press succeeded in offering nominal political influence to those otherwise denied any voice in politics.

To both white and black Americans in the mid-nineteenth century, the legacy of the American Revolution sustained an indispensable belief that protest was both the right and duty of citizens in a democratic society.[29] Americans consistently protected this right even when the cause was an unpopular one.[30] Thus, political protest remained one of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of the black press leaders, and this study argues that they consciously used protest tactics to obtain political influence for those denied traditional means of political participation.

"The hardest stone may be worn by a constant dripping on its surface. . . . [M] y opinion is that your motto should be 'agitate, agitate, agitate'!"[31] As suggested by those words from *The Colored American* on March 15, 1838, the concept of "agitation" was one that was familiar to the reformers of the antebellum black press. Again and again in their pleas to their readers, African-American newspapers demanded that it was the duty of free blacks to "agitate" society and government until the rights of all African Americans were guaranteed.[32]

This emphasis on agitation was, in many ways, a direct response to the platform of mainstream society. To an overwhelming majority of Americans, discussions of slavery and the rights of free blacks had no place in politics, and throughout the 1830s and 1840s, abolitionists and reformers were frequently confronted by anti-reform mobs bent on preventing "fanatics" from disturbing the status quo.[33] Reflecting popular opinions, the major political parties adopted a policy of non-agitation on such contentious matters.[34] Additionally, the mainstream press was virtually silent on issues important to black Americans, but to the free black leaders of the African-American press who every day felt the effect of slavery and oppression, silence was not an option. These reformers fought to create a society compatible with the needs of all African Americans.[35] By refusing to remain silent, the black press in effect forced mainstream society to confront issues which otherwise would have been ignored, and the resulting public discussion created a "dialectical relationship between oppression and resistance," according to historian Gayle Tate, which was the groundwork of the entire black resistance movement.[36] Thus, African-American newspapers were, in and of themselves, agitators and a powerful form of protest.

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Beyond this, antebellum African-American newspapers also served an essential role in the creation and direction of the political protest of black communities. The proprietors, journalists, and editors of the black press were the leaders of the northern free black population, and among their ranks were the prominent members of local and national anti-slavery organizations, property owners, ministers, orators, and authors. As Frankie Hutton wrote in 1993, the leaders of the black press were the "agenda setters extraordinaire" for the free black population.[37] Therefore, the political ideals of these community leaders were extremely influential in directing the actions of others. Dedicated to the cause of free blacks and slaves, they attempted to promote political agitation within black communities, and newspapers were their primary vehicle for reaching the public.

One of the instrumental ways that African-American newspapers were able to encourage political agitation was to uphold the necessity of individual action. Importantly, the leaders of the black press understood that there was a need for community-wide, political action, and the African-American papers often printed calls for mass public meetings and conventions. On June 19, 1841, *The Colored American* encouraged its readers to attend a protest against the Maryland Colonization Society, proclaiming, "Brethren! let us gather, and set our brand on this persecution, and send sympathy to the Marylanders!"[38] Similarly, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* testified to the need to attend such gatherings.[39] As the leaders of the black press understood, bringing together African Americans in the public sphere could present them as a unified and powerful public force, which could be an important step towards demonstrating that black society was both active and politically relevant.

In addition to presenting the calls for local meetings and state-wide conventions, the African-American newspapers also reported the resolutions of the meetings to those who could not attend.[40] Because the papers were widely distributed and read, they were in a unique position to deliver the political platform developed by the prominent free black leadership to African-American society as a whole. The promotion of specific issues through the press supported the collective mobilization of black Americans on those things that were seen as the most urgent, which further unified protestors and increased their persuasive power.

Not only was the press able to promote specific issues and inform communities of actions that might be taken, but it played a fundamental role in facilitating the consolidation of individual political voices in order to present a solidified, public front. One way this was done was to print form letters for political petitions, and African-American newspapers contained printed sets of demands to be presented to Congress, encouraging readers to cut them out and copy them.[41] The widespread proliferation of petitions through

the press also offered other significant advantages. For example, *The Colored American* in 1837 printed three petitions to be presented to the New York state legislature, demanding an end to slavery, suffrage for free blacks, and jury trials for suspected fugitive slaves. Throughout the next several months, the circulating agents of the paper delivered the petitions and traveled the state collecting signatures.[42] Their efforts were rewarded with hundreds of signatures on each petition spanning sixty-eight feet of paper.[43] The use of a single petition form allowed the reform community to stand together and to make a consolidated plea for their political aims, and such efforts worked to concentrate the efforts of reformers on a single issue at a single time, strengthening their political stance.

Reformers also developed more coercive means of political agitation. Paramount in this respect was the boycott on slave-produced goods, which was advocated by nearly all American abolitionists throughout the antebellum period.[44] African-American newspapers consistently printed articles advocating it. For example, on September 5, 1850, *The North Star* wrote: "Encourage the free-laboring farmers of the South, and decline the products of sweat and toil, and it may exert a moral influence over the slave-holder, while it will gain the good will of the poor white citizens of the South to the cause of human freedom."[45] In addition to publicly and enthusiastically advocating the boycott, African-American newspapers also were in a unique position to facilitate the efforts of individuals to uphold it as they became a source of information regarding items produced by free labor and places from which they could be obtained.[46] Thus, by informing interested parties of real alternatives to slave-produced products, the press served to ease the difficulty of the boycott. Undoubtedly, this helped gain supporters for the cause, which increased the reform community's power of financial persuasion.

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While African-American newspapers were unquestionably of vital importance to the collective protests of black communities, it is more difficult to determine what effect such widespread protest efforts had on mainstream white society. One of the most important results of the political protest carried out and facilitated by the black press was the creation of a public discourse on the issues important to black Americans. By steadfastly advocating the cause of free blacks and slaves, African-American newspapers ensured these issues would never again be ignored. The decision to carry out protest through political theaters also brought with it additional advantages. Placing their protests in a political context, the leaders of the black press created a situation in which their opponents felt that they, too, must respond in a political fashion. This had ironic results for the defenders of slavery, who, having always portrayed themselves as moderates, now were forced to reveal their truly radical political commitment to slavery.[47] Thus, it was only when threatened by the scrutiny of the northern abolitionist reformers that southern slaveholders began to defend slavery as a positive good.[48] To many northerners this attitude was a rejection of the free labor tenets central to American democracy.[49] Therefore, it can be argued that the agitation of the abolitionists and the reformers of the mid-nineteenth century, which was aided by the black press, essentially revealed profound differences in the values of northern and southern Americans and set the stage for the Civil War.

In the prospectus of *The North Star* on December 3, 1847, Douglass wrote: "While our paper shall be mainly Anti-Slavery, its columns shall be freely opened to the candid and decorous discussion of all measures and topics of a moral and humane character, which may serve to enlighten, improve, and elevate mankind."[50] These words suggest the antebellum African-American press was interested in more than just the political rights of African Americans. Like his predecessors, he positioned his paper as both a political emancipator and a moral elevator of the black population. While in the past many historians have chosen to interpret the papers' moral content as purely assimilationist or derivative of white culture, this study argues that, when viewed in the appropriate cultural and historical context, the creation and extension of such images in the press had a pragmatic political purpose for black Americans.

Many historians have noted the prevalence of messages of elevation, uplift, and morality in antebellum African-American papers.[51] Columns promoting education, temperance, hard work, industry, and moral conviction, alongside pleas for political action, were very much the staple of antebellum black newspapers.[52] To the editors of the black press, it was their duty to instruct African Americans not only in their political actions but in their moral actions as well. Thus, they were highly concerned with how black individuals conducted themselves within the community and at large.

Hoping to influence subscribers, black newspapers promoted an ideal vision of upright living with readers being repeatedly reminded of the benefits of genteel manners and politeness. For example, Douglass wrote in *The North Star* on October 12, 1849: "True politeness is the offspring of good nature and a good heart. It is as far from the studied politeness of a top, as the flower of wax is from nature's own fragrant rose."[53] The papers printed exemplary stories of African Americans who, by hard work and moral conviction, had elevated themselves in society. Encouraging readers to learn from these examples, *The Colored American* wrote on March 11, 1837: "Now go ye, dear people, and do ye likewise with your children; and may the benedictions of heaven rest on you and on them."[54] Similarly, Douglass attested to the possibilities of elevation through industriousness on July 7, 1848, in *The North Star*:

"Their excellencies the Governors of some of our states, honorable Senators, respectable lawyers, ministers and schoolmasters, by regiments, began to hew their way to honorable stations, literally with the axe."[55]

Also of fundamental concern to the black press was the material condition of black Americans. Owing to this, the African-American press often printed articles encouraging frugal spending habits and promoting profitable industries.[56] Thus, the prominent black newspaper leaders used their publications to create and promote a concept of a respectable and elevated person. This concept of elevation gave upwardly mobile African Americans something to aspire to, and the success stories continued to allow free blacks to believe that their individual elevation could be realized.

Historians of the black press have noted that this particular vision of moral and upright living on the pages of African-American newspapers shared many ideological facets with the Victorian values espoused by white middle-class citizens at the time.[57] Owing to these similarities, some modern scholars have ascribed these efforts as attempts to assimilate blacks into white society by adopting acceptable social values and norms.[58] To these authors, the leaders of the black press promoted the common middle class ideologies and values of white society as ideals for blacks to live up to so that a portion of the upwardly mobile blacks might gain the acceptance of white society and pave the way for the rest of black society.

However, when the ideals of uplift, morality, and elevation are closely examined in their specific cultural and historical context, a different picture emerges. First, it should be recognized that the leaders of the black press understood that their efforts towards elevation did not ensure acceptance into white society. Upwardly mobile blacks were often subject to ridicule and even violence at the hands of whites who felt threatened by their independence.[59] In *The Colored American* on September 30, 1837, the editors lamented the fact that all individual efforts by blacks to improve their status were precluded by racial prejudices: "Why should a colored man, who is equal in wealth, in education, in refinement and in taste, be subjected to legal disabilities,—debarred the institutions of the country—crowded into negro pews in the church, and into the dog-cars on the Railroad, or pantries on board the Steam-boats?"[60] If the leaders of the black press understood that elevation did not guarantee acceptance, why did they continue to stress the necessity of such efforts? To answer this question, it is first important to consider what "elevation" meant to Americans at the time.

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville recognized mainstream America's belief in what he called "the perfectibility of man," which essentially was the belief that humans were uniquely able to consciously improve themselves and their society. This philosophical ideal was manifested in all aspects of American life from technological advancement to individual entrepreneurship.[61] As he observed, elevation of the mind, the body, and society were both fundamental and natural. Therefore, when the black press promoted self-improvement and morality, they were speaking of common ideals embedded within the nineteenth-century American ideological framework of which they felt themselves to be a part. Historian Patrick Rael wrote in 2002 that "uplift and elevation were less tropes to be manipulated than they were elements of a conceptual landscape that could not be imagined without them."[62] Indeed, authors could speak simply of "elevation" without any need of explanation. Thus, as he continued, "Black responses to white supremacy relied upon a set of values held deeply and for their own merit, quite apart from any strategic utility they might have possessed".[63]

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The promotion of moral and material elevation was not simply derived from the Victorian ideologies of middle-class white Americans, nor was its purpose to assimilate blacks into white society; rather, this potential for elevation appealed to people across racial and class lines. Importantly to contemporary black Americans, espousing cultural ideologies and norms traditionally seen as "white values" was a form of social protest. As African Americans declared their belief in the fundamental concepts of uplift and elevation, they were stating their adherence to uniquely American values that they considered non-raced. This was not, therefore, simply an attempt to assimilate into white society but instead an attempt to justify their national (rather than racial) status as true Americans.

The promotion of the concept of elevation in the antebellum African-American press, both directly and indirectly, also worked toward the political empowerment of African Americans in two ways. First, by supporting the values of industry, hard work, and frugality, the black press sought to help free African Americans improve their material condition. To contemporary free blacks, political involvement depended to some degree on their financial independence because of poll taxes and property requirements placed on suffrage rights. Thus, working towards the material elevation of black Americans equated directly to working towards an expansion of the black vote. Second, by using the American ideological concept of elevation for their own purposes, the black press was able to call into question many of the principles upon which the nation was founded. For example, on April 15, 1837, *The Colored American* wrote:

> We always, as Christians, have tenderness and pity in our hearts, for the American people, who so cruelly rob us of ourselves, and of our rights. This is the only spirit we desire or mean to cherish, towards our white fellow citizens. We are aware that it is far better to be the oppressed, than to be the oppressors, and that we have far less to envy, than to pity".[64]

Cleverly turning the tables on their oppressors, the editors of *The Colored American* were, in effect, claiming that it was the black population that was truly moral.

Positioning their argument in this way, the leaders of the black press were able to further attack mainstream white society's failure to submit to their own ideals. This was illustrated in *The North Star* on November 2, 1849:

> Yet let us hope that time and events have caused even them to have made some progress in the first rudiments of our country's fundamental principles, viz: That all men are equal—not in stature, intellect, morals or manners, (for we colored Americans know that we have better manners than our white fellow-citizens generally), but equal in rights.[65]

With these comments, *The North Star* was criticizing white society's lack of commitment to the principles of equality and liberty so fundamental to American democracy because it was the black population that was moral and committed to American democratic ideals. This rhetorical strategy allowed African-American newspapers to publicly demonstrate that all of the arguments for human equality and elevation used to support the political empowerment of white males should equally apply to the African-American population.

The concept of elevation was common in the literature and rhetoric of both African Americans and whites in the mid-nineteenth century. Using their publications, the leaders of the black press were able to promote and publicly report the efforts of black Americans towards moral and material improvement, and as a result, the leaders of the black protest movement demonstrated that black society truly encapsulated American democratic ideals. Being black and being American were not mutually exclusive. Thus, as contemporary reformers argued, to exclude African Americans from American democracy was, in essence, a rejection of the principles on which the nation was founded.

"In nineteenth-century America, it was common for whites to cite the historical successes of European civilization to support the subjugation of African Americans. From classical Greek literature to writings such as Thomas Jefferson's* Notes on the State of Virginia, *white authors continually mythologized their own past to depict Europeans as history's chosen people."

In 1829, David Walker, a free black writer and subscription agent for *Freedom's Journal*, wrote in his strong and influential *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America*: "For the information of such, I would only mention that the Egyptians were Africans or coloured people, such as we are—some of them yellow and others dark—a mixture of Ethiopians and the natives of Egypt—about the same as you see the coloured people of the United States at the present day."[66] This pamphlet, distributed throughout the nation, surveyed many of the major issues affecting the lives of both slaves and free blacks because it fervently attacked all aspects of slavery and the anti-black prejudices of the public. Also of note was his use of Egypt as a source of African-American historical identity. Though he was not the first to make this connection, he was the first to fully develop such an argument. As he reasoned, descendants of Africa shared a common history and experienced similar oppression, which necessitated that African Americans must stand together to make a unified response to their oppressors.[67]

By revealing the essential connection between all African-descended people, based on historical identity and achievement rather than degradation and oppression, Walker created a national African-American identity in which blacks throughout the nation could take pride. Such a common identity, he hoped, would be greatly influential in forming ties between African Americans throughout the country, which had the potential to create mass political mobilization based purely on common black identity. Nearly a decade later, the leaders of the new black press, seeking an end to the legal and extra-legal degradation of black Americans, continued to develop Walker's construction of a black national identity. The advocacy of what was essentially an early form of black identity politics played a crucial role in the political empowerment of African Americans.

In nineteenth-century America, it was common for whites to cite the historical successes of European civilization to support the subjugation of African Americans. From classical Greek literature to writings such as Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, white authors continually mythologized their own past to depict Europeans as history's chosen people.[68] Simultaneously, they belittled the achievements and questioned the humanity of African populations, and such historical arguments were extremely influential on social attitudes toward African Americans, both free and enslaved.[69] Meanwhile, the leaders of the African-American press recognized that an autochthonous, unique black history with roots in Africa was essential to their cause. Thus, wishing to prove the innate abilities of African peoples, they turned their attention to the ancient civilizations of Africa. On March 18, 1837, in *The Colored American*, the editors addressed the historical significance of Egyptian civilization:

> Now for a little scrap of history. The negro, you say, is of a degraded race. But who are you? An American. A descendant of the Europeans. And the Europeans who are they? Who? The noble ones of the earth—the men of literature—of civilization—of science—and of true religion. And from whence, pray, did they derive their literature, their civilization, and their religion? Europeans were hordes of naked barbarians, you know, a few centuries since! Yes; but they drew wisdom from the Greeks, the Romans, the Hebrews; and they are drawing fresh lessons still. See those ponderous volumes of classic and sacred literature. But whence, I pray you, did the Greeks, the Romans the Hebrews, derive their civilization and their letters. The Greeks and Romans were once savages. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were plain men, dwelling in tents. No record is made of their literature. When God determined to make of them a great nation, in what school of learning did he train up their appointed legislator, deliverer, and guide? 'Moses was learned in all the wisdom and knowledge of the Egyptians.' To whom did the Greeks and Romans look up, for instruction in letters, in the arts? To the Egyptians![70]

Douglass offered a similar argument in his newspaper on Sep-

tember 23, 1853, attesting to the importance of Africans in the development of science:

> The future may yet reveal to us—and in the feelings of hope, we dare predict, that the future will yet reveal to us the names of colored Americans so gloriously illustrated in the catalogue of literary excellence, as to remind the world of the days when dark-browed Egypt gave letters to Greece, and when the sons of Ethiopia—'black skinned and wooly-haired,' despite the archaeological researchers of Gliddon, and the flippant letters of modern tourists—were at once the originators and conservators of science.[71]

Such historical depictions worked to create a collective history for African Americans, who were widely believed to have no history worth recovering or writing. These powerful images revoked racial stereotypes and created a favorable historical identity, which could be proudly supported by all African-descended people, and by developing these arguments in the press, the proponents of black national identity were able to reach large numbers of blacks throughout the nation as well as beyond.[72] Undoubtedly, this was extremely influential in the ideological and political unification of diverse communities throughout the African Diaspora.

By offering a historical view of Africa and Africans that revealed the existence of powerful civilizations and their achievements, the black press leaders argued that African-descended peoples possessed all of the innate abilities ascribed to white Americans. The degraded status of African Americans was not due to any lack of mental or moral capacity but instead to slavery, and this realization fostered new ways for the black press to attack arguments commonly used to support the oppression of free blacks and slaves. For example, on February 6, 1841, *The Colored American* talked about the history of white slavery:

> It is a curious circumstance, that although white slavery has existed *in Barbary, from time immemorial;* yet no example is on record, of an organized and successful rebellion of these slaves against their masters. Does this fact and the history of slavery in Great Britain and Russia, throw any light on the *fitness* of any race of men for *slavery*?

The author pointed out that if whites wished to argue that inherent inferiority rather than legal condition accounted for the deplorable material and mental circumstances of African Americans, they also must account for their inability to liberate themselves.[73] Such arguments allowed the leaders of the black press to point out flaws in the mythologized histories of European society and negate many of their strongest arguments for the subjugation of free blacks and slaves.

Beyond the realm of rhetorical debates in the mid-nineteenth century, the use of a black national identity based on a common African history also had a great deal of influence on the political empowerment of African Americans. As the leaders of the black press understood, the realization of a common history could be a powerful tool in the mobilization of black communities toward a common cause.[74] Essentially, the belief in a common historical origin led many African Americans to recognize an association with other blacks throughout the country and allowed for connections to be forged despite differences of class, gender, religion, or region based on the common framework of a political and moral struggle.[75]

By obscuring differences and emphasizing their common history and their common struggle, the newspapers in effect created an essentialized notion of race that crossed boundaries of location, status, age and political agenda to appeal to the African-American audience as a whole. Thus, the black press worked to create a national community of concerned blacks who felt they had a fundamental connection to each other and the slave population in the South. The use of historical nationalist images in the press can be seen as an attempt at the unification of widely dispersed black communities as a fundamental part of a mass political mobilization.

"By offering a historical view of Africa and Africans that revealed the existence of powerful civilizations and their achievements, the black press leaders argued that African-descended peoples possessed all of the innate abilities ascribed to white Americans. The degraded status of African Americans was not due to any lack of mental or moral capacity but instead to slavery."

As this study has demonstrated, the publishers, editors, and writers of *The Colored American* and *Frederick Douglass's Paper* were not solely concerned with abolition, nor were they focused only on the problems facing elite blacks. They were, however, by no means objective observers of the severe degradation facing the nation's black communities. These publications were used actively to advance the cause of African Americans, and their content was both subjective and highly politicized. Through their articles and editorial statements, they fought for emancipation of slaves and for the political rights of free blacks throughout the nation and provided a means for members of black communities to do the same. Thus, the African-American press created publications fundamentally in tune with the needs of the black population and defended them with all of the means at their disposal. As this study illustrates, political action was increasingly important in this respect throughout the nineteenth century.

The realization of the significance of political action to African Americans also is important with respect to African-American history. An examination such as this, which reveals many of the subtleties of antebellum political resistance, shows the importance of reform efforts and their place within the lives of African-descended people everywhere. By demonstrating the deep concern that the elite leaders of the black press had for African-Americans, this study precludes arguments that claim the elite status of black community leaders made their actions irrelevant to examinations of African-American society. Through African-American newspapers, elite blacks created and expanded notions of African-American identity and forged powerful arguments that resonated with individuals across differences in age, gender, class, and location.

In addition to this, the actions of non-elite blacks through protest activities formed the popular basis for mass political mobilization. Despite legal and social divisions, African Americans worked towards common goals, though often in different locations, providing what resources they each could contribute to advance their cause. The elite leaders of the black press gave public lectures and they created and ran their newspapers; ex-slaves freed themselves and sought freedom for others, and African Americans of all classes came together and protested locally and nationally. Thus, the rhetoric of the antebellum black press can be seen as the beginnings of a black resistance movement that influenced generations of African-American reformers, rather than a self-interested plea made by black elites for their own benefit. Furthermore, this research reveals that instead of non-elite blacks being simply complacent in their subjugation, they played an essential and active role in their own liberation.

Finally, this study importantly reveals a great deal about the diversity of the antebellum African-American experience, which was not limited to slavery. In the years before the Civil War, African Americans made significant contributions to the scientific, political, and literary history of the nation, and the political ideals of African Americans and the black press were fundamental in the creation of American ideological values. Moreover, the political activities and ideas promoted and carried out by African-American newspapers formed the basis for political protest and resistance before the war. African-American newspapers essentially developed a means for African Americans to both empower themselves politically and mobilize others towards their cause. Indeed the success of the early black press set a precedent for all subsequent African-American political struggles. Ever since the creators of *The Colored American* first revealed the true political potential of African-American newspapers, there has never been a time when an independent bl;ack press has not existed.

NOTES

[1] Carter R. Bryan, "Negro Journalism in America before Emancipation." *Journalism Monographs* 12 (September 1969). For further discussion, see Patrick Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 23-25.

[2] Bernell Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press: New York 1827-1847* (Northport, Ala.: Vision Press, 1992), 9-11.

[3] Widespread changes in the American governmental system, including the use of party nominating conventions, closed ballot voting, and the re-designation of many appointed positions as elective ones subsequently led to an expansion of the electorate. This greatly increased the role of political democracy in government as the public began to see politics as relevant to their lives. See Paul Kleppner, *Who Voted? The Dynamics of Electoral Turnout, 1870-1980* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982), 29; and Laura J. Scalia, "Who Deserves Political Influence? How Liberal Ideals Helped Justify Mid Nineteenth-Century Exclusionary Policies," *American Journal of Political Science* 42 (April 1998): 349-76.

[4] See Frankie Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993); Irving Garland Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (Springfield, Mass.: Willey & Co., 1891); Armistead S. Pride and Clint C. Wilson II, *A History of the Black Press* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1997); Todd Vogel, ed., *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001); and Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*.

[5] Harry Reed, *Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 98.

[6] Accessible Archives is a subscription-based service that provides searchable text files for many prominent African-American newspapers published throughout the nineteenth-century. See "Accessible Archives" at http://www.accessible.com/search/prdcls.asp. Because of the large number of primary resources, it was not feasible to read every extant copy of the two newspapers used in this study. Instead, a representative sample was closely examined. Of the available issues, dates were selected at random, and the issues were read in their entirety. To supplement this, coverage of specific political events, laws, elections, and protests in the black press was located with the aid of the Accessible Archives database.

[7] Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, 32-36.

[8] See Wu Jin-Ping, *Frederick Douglass and the Black Liberation Movement: The North Star of American Blacks* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 43-44; and Pride and Wilson, *A History of the Black Press*, 49.

[9] Pride and Wilson, *A History of the Black Press*, 51.

[10] Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Noon Day Press, 1990).

[11] Kleppner, *Who Voted?* 30.

[12] In Pennsylvania, suffrage was denied to free African Americans in the state constitution of 1838 (Art. 3, Sec. 1). In New York, a property requirement of $250 was added to the suffrage requirements for free blacks in the new state constitution of 1821, basically eliminating the African-American vote (Art. 2, Sec. 3). Leon Litwack noted that "by 1840 some 93 per cent of the Northern free Negro population lived in States which completely or practically excluded them from the right to vote." See Leon F. Litwack, "The Emancipation of the Negro Abolitionist," in Martin Duberman, ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionist* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), 75. Although free African Americans were legally allowed to vote in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts, many did not, fearing ridicule and physical violence. See Charles H. Wesley, "The Negroes of New York in the Emancipation Movement," *Journal of Negro History* 24 (January 1939): 36. Thus, through both legal and social coercion, a majority of free African Americans were effectively removed from their most direct means of political participation. In 1835, only about sixty-eight free blacks in New York City could meet the $250 property qualification for voting, and by 1855 the number had only reached 100. See Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 218; and Gayle T. Tate, "Free Black Resistance in the Antebellum Era, 1830-1860," *Journal of Black Studies* 28 (July 1998): 769.

[13] The 1830s was one of significant change in the anti-slavery movement. From 1835 until about 1839 there was considerable debate within the American Anti-Slavery Society about how abolitionists should and could accomplish their goals. See Tunde Adeleke, "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830s," *Journal of Negro History* 83 (Spring 1998): 130; Carleton Mabee, *Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 through the Civil War* (London: Macmillan Co., 1970), 1-6, 58-59; and Wesley, "The Negroes of New York in the Emancipation Movement." 33-34. Some felt that support for their cause could only be won through moral arguments while others felt that a political response was necessary. Among the prominent leaders of the "moral suasionists" were William Lloyd Garrison and, until the late 1840s, Frederick Douglass. The argument for "moral suasion" stressed the United States Constitution was a pro-slavery document, and therefore political participation in government would be immoral. See Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855; reprint, New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 1994), 391-93. The second faction was dedicated to political participation as the remedy to their problems. This group, while not rejecting moral persuasion, embraced the ballot and felt that legislative change must be sought through government. Its major early proponents included Henry Garnet, Theodore Wright, Charles B. Ray, the general agent of *The Colored American*. See Howard H. Bell, "National Negro Conventions of the Middle 1840s: Moral Suasion vs. Political Action," *Journal of Negro History* 42 (October 1957): 249-50. The debate raged on for years and increasingly caused tension within the abolitionist ranks. At the annual American Anti-Slavery Society convention of 1840, the debate finally divided the organization. Three hundred politically oriented members of the convention broke off and formed a new politically active organization, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The members of this new organization also made up the bulk of the emerging Liberty Party. When things settled down, most African Americans had pledged their allegiance to political abolitionism. See Robert C. Dick, *Black Protest: Issues and Tactics*, *Contributions in American Studies* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), 86, 121; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 108; and Tate, "Free Black Resistance in the Antebellum Era, 1830-1860," 777. The galvanization of the major political parties in the 1830s

and 1840s further strengthened the dedication of the leaders of the black press to political reform. In the new American political environment where formal political organizations controlled so many votes, the idea of reform through apolitical means alone began to seem antiquated, and a larger number of African Americans began to look to politics. See Lori D. Ginzberg, "'Moral Suasion Is Moral Balderdash': Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850s," *Journal of American History* 73 (December 1986): 604; and Tate, "Free Black Resistance in the Antebellum Era, 1830-1860," 777. The tide turned even more strongly toward politics when Douglass, in the culmination of a gradual reconsideration of his views on reform, joined the ranks of the burgeoning Liberty Party in 1851. The transformation was complete when he merged his publication with *The Liberty Party Paper* later in the same year. See Jin-Ping, *Frederick Douglass and the Black Liberation Movement*, 49-50; and Tyrone Tillery, "The Inevitability of the Douglas-Garrison Conflict," *Phylon* 37 (Spring 1976): 144. This move solidified the platform of the most prominent African-American newspaper as one that was fundamentally linked with suffrage and the party system.

[14] "Right of Suffrage," *The Colored American*, April 29, 1837.

[15] "Right of Suffrage," *The Colored American*, Dec. 15, 1838.

[16] See James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243; "Philanthropy," *The North Star*, May 18, 1849; and "Gerrit Smith's Lands," *The North Star*, April 26, 1850.

[17] At the end of 1837, *The Colored American* had 1,650 subscribers, 75 percent of whom they estimated were African Americans. See Charles B. Ray, "To the Agents and Friends of this Paper," *The Colored American*, Dec. 30, 1837. Nearly twenty years later, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* had an average of about 3,000 subscribers with whites outnumbering black subscribers five to one. See Pride and Wilson, *A History of the Black Press*, 51. The rise in the number of white subscribers, however, should not be equated to the dismissal of ideas important to black Americans; African-American newspapers were always interested in obtaining a white readership. The editors of *The Colored American*, in one of their many calls for subscription, requested 1,000 new subscribers, "two thirds of this number to be colored persons, the remaining one-third to be white persons." See "Wanted: One Thousand Subscribers," *The Colored American*, March 20, 1841. In the first issue of *The North Star*, Douglass had one editorial dedicated to his efforts towards the advancement of African Americans, and a second, "Our Paper and Its Prospects," recognized and thanked his white supporters. See Frederick Douglass, "To Our Oppressed Countrymen," *The North Star*, Dec. 3, 1857; and Frederick Douglass, "Our Paper and Its Prospects," *The North Star*, Dec. 3, 1847. Although Douglass bemoaned his inability to garner significant numbers of African-American subscribers, he understood that a white subscription base would still benefit black communities. He linked his publication unequivocally to black society, and therefore its success was vital. He accepted white patronage and a significant white readership for the greater good of being able to deliver his message to the public. See Robert Fanuzzi, "Frederick Douglass' 'Colored Newspaper': Identity Politics in Black and White," in Vogel, *The Black Press*, 61.

[18] "Ballot Box Against Slavery," *The Colored American*, Sept. 15, 1838.

[19] *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Dec. 1, 1854. The italics were in the original.

[20] Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982), 46.

[21] For good examples, see *The Colored American*, Oct. 3 and Oct. 10, 1840; and *The North Star*, July 21, 1848.

[22] J.W. Duffin, "For Whom Shall We Vote?" *The Colored American*, Oct. 3, 1840.

[23] "Colored Voters in This City," *The Colored American*, Sept. 19, 1840.

[24] "Anti Slavery Ticket," *The Colored American*, Oct. 24, 1840.

[25] To the great surprise of many reformers, Gerrit Smith was successfully elected as a congressman from New York on the Liberty Party ticket in 1852. See "Election of Gerrit Smith," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Nov. 19, 1852.

[26] "Abolition Influence," *The Colored American*, Nov. 10, 1838.

[27] "Liberty Party Movements," *The Colored American*, Oct. 2, 1841.

[28] Field, *The Politics of Race in New York*, 46.

[29] See Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*, 26-27; and Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 279-80.

[30] Ironically, the "gag-rule," which was created to silence anti-slavery protest, had a profound effect on the creation of an African-American political presence. The Southern pro-slavery congressmen, in their efforts to remove all discussion of slavery from the House, had made a fundamental error. The tabling of all slavery petitions without consideration was, as many Americans including former president John Quincy Adams argued, both unconstitutional and undemocratic. See Jin-Ping, *Douglass and the Black Liberation Movement*, 24; and Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 29. Denial of the right to petition did not bode well, even among many pro-slavery whites. Robert Ludlum wrote that the chief importance of the "gag-rule" in the abolitionist movement was that it "linked this popular issue, the right to petition, with the unpopular one of naked abolitionism." See Robert P. Ludlum, "The Antislavery 'Gag Rule': History and Argument," *Journal of Negro History* 26 (April 1941): 227-29. It can be argued that the increasing frequency of political confrontation, which developed surrounding Pinckney's resolution, was significant because it strengthened the idea that political action was relevant to the fight against slavery and for the rights of free blacks. This, in turn, set the stage for the formation of the politically oriented anti-slavery conventions of the 1840s, which were strongly advocated by many free African Americans.

[31] *The Colored American*, March 15, 1838.

[32] See "Political Organization," *The Colored American*, Nov. 17, 1838; *The North Star*, March 9, 1849; and "The Property Qualification," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 20, 1855.

[33] Mabee, *Black Freedom*, 27-28.

[34] See Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 202; and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Aug. 27, 1852.

[35] See Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press*; Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*; and Pride and Wilson, *A History of the Black Press*.

[36] Tate, "Free Black Resistance in the Antebellum Era, 1830-1860," 766.

[37] Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*, xi.

[38] *The Colored American*, June 19, 1841.

[39] *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 29, 1852.

[40] See *The Colored American*, Aug. 22, 1840; *The North Star*, April 3, 1851; and "Abolition Uproar in Syracuse," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Oct. 15, 1852.

[41] *The Colored American*, Oct. 16, 1841.

[42] Wesley, "The Negroes of New York in the Emancipation Movement," 92.

[43] "New York Petitions to the Legislature," *The Colored American*, March 11, 1837.

[44] Mabee, *Black Freedom*, 185.

[45] Frederick Douglass, "Duty of Avoiding Slave Produce," *The North Star*, Sept. 5, 1850. This method of anti-slavery agitation was not without precedence. The British boycott of slave-harvested sugar in the early part of the nineteenth century had proved to be a most effective means of getting the attention of the slaveholding population. See L. Clough, "Free Produce," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 20, 1855. There was even some hope, contemporary reformers believed, that Britain would participate in the American boycott. See "England Ever Against Slavery," *The Colored American*, Sept. 15, 1838.

[46] See "Free Produce Store," *The North Star*, June 30, 1848; "Free Labor Goods," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 26, 1851; and "Free Labor Goods," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Aug. 20, 1852.

[47] Stephen John Hartnett, *Democratic Dissent and the Cultural Fictions of Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 16.

[48] Richard Ellis and Aaron Wildavsky, "A Cultural Analysis of the Role of Abolitionists in the Coming of the Civil War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (January 1990): 103-04.

[49] Ibid., 111.

[50] *The North Star*, Dec. 3, 1847.

[51] See Penn, *The Afro-American Press and Its Editors*; Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press*; Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*; and Pride and Wilson, *A History of the Black Press*.

[52] See Tripp, *Origins of the Black Press*, 77-79; and Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*, 103-25.

[53] "Politeness," *The North Star*, Oct. 12, 1849. While the word "top" in the quotation is correct, it is unknown if this was a misspelling or if something was omitted.

[54] Lowland Greene, "Benefits of a Good Trade and Good Habits," *The Colored American*, March 11, 1837.

[55] "Self Made Men," *The North Star*, July 7, 1848.

[56] "A Means of Elevation," *The North Star*, April 27, 1849.

[57] Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*, 103.

[58] See Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II* (London: Associated University Presses, 1975), 20; and Hutton, *The Early Black Press in America, 1827-1860*, 33.

[59] Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 204.

[60] "Disabilities of Colored People," *The Colored American*, Sept. 30, 1837.

[61] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Richard D. Heffner. (1835; reprint, New York: New American Library, 1956), 187-88.

[62] Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, 125.

[63] Ibid., 125.

[64] *The Colored American*, April 15, 1837.

[65] L.I. Brooklyn, "Away with the $250 Suffrage!—Equal Rights, and Nothing Less!," *The North Star*, Nov. 2, 1849.

[66] David Walker in 1829 as reprinted in Herbert Aptheker, *"One Continual Cry": David Walker's Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World (1829-1830)* (New York: Humanities Press, 1965), 70.

[67] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 120.

[68] Jefferson's famous *Notes on the State of Virginia* was originally written as a private response to the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon's assertions of the inferiority of the American continents in terms of natural resources and cultures. Several editions of these notes were later published, starting in 1787. In these writings, Jefferson attempted to counter the view of the inferiority of the Americas by describing the natural wonders of Virginia as well as arguing for the noble, while degraded, character of the Native American inhabitants of the region. The notes were filled with classical references to Greece and Rome, which allude to the connections between white Americans and the ancient cultures of western Europe. At the same time, however, he argued for the inherent inferiority of African-descended people and defended the institution of slavery because of assumed white superiority. See Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Boston: Lilly and Wait, 1832), 150.

[69] Reed, *Platform for Change*, 107.

[70] *The Colored American*, March 18, 1837.

[71] "Glances at Our Condition No. 1: Our Literature," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Sept. 23, 1853.

[72] Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, 214.

[73] "De Toqueville's *Democracy in America*: A Review of Those Sections of Chapter XVII which Relate to the Colored People of the United States," *The Colored American*, Feb. 6, 1841. The italics were in the original.

[74] Kenneth D. Nordin, "In Search of Black Unity: An Interpretation of the Content and Function of *Freedom's Journal*," *Journalism History* 4 (Winter 1977-78): 123.

[75] Tate, "Free Black Resistance in the Antebellum Era, 1830-1860," 765.

AMERICAN JOURNALISM HISTORIANS ASSOCIATION 2009 MARGARET A. BLANCHARD DOCTORAL DISSERTATION PRIZE

The AJHA Margaret A. Blanchard Doctoral Dissertation Prize, given for the first time in 1997, is awarded annually for the best doctoral dissertation dealing with mass communication history. An honorarium of $500 accompanies the prize, and a $200 honorarium is awarded to each honorable mention.

Eligible works shall include both quantitative and qualitative historical dissertations, written in English, which have been completed between January 1, 2008, and December 31, 2008. For the purposes of this award, a "completed" work is defined as one which has not only been submitted and defended but also revised and filed in final form at the applicable doctoral-degree-granting university by December 31, 2008.

To be considered, nomination packets must include:

(a) One copy of the complete dissertation;
(b) Four copies each of the following items, with all author, school, and dissertation committee identification of any kind whited-out:
    (i.) a single chapter from the dissertation [preferably not to exceed 50 manuscript pages, not including notes, charts or photographs],
    (ii.) a 200-word dissertation abstract,
    (iii.) the dissertation table of contents;
(c) a letter of nomination from the dissertation chair/director or the chair of the university department in which the dissertation was written;
(d) a cover letter from the nominee indicating a willingness, should the dissertation be selected for a prize, both to attend the awarding ceremony and to deliver a public presentation based on the dissertation at the 2009 American Journalism Historians Association Annual Convention, October 6-8, 2009 in Birmingham, AL.

Note: Regarding Paragraph (b.)(i.) above, as a guide to selecting a chapter for submission, the Award Committee has in the past expressed a preference for a chapter which, if possible, highlights the work's strengths as a piece of primary-sourced original research.

Nominations, along with all the supporting materials, should be sent to: Prof. David Abrahamson, Chair, AJHA Margaret A. Blanchard Doctoral Dissertation Prize Committee, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, 1845 Sheridan Road, Evanston, IL 60208.

The deadline for entries is a postmark date of February 1, 2009.