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The Role of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 in Black Intellectual History

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ABSTRACT

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 marked a turning point in the debate over the expansion of slavery in the United States. The legislation became law on May 30th, 1854, and repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and allowed the possibility for slavery to expand to places where federal law had prohibited it for more than thirty years. Historians have long understood the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in popularizing antislavery sentiments among white Northerners, but few scholars have studied the ways African Americans respond to the law. Before, during, and after the law's passage, Black Northerners debated the consequences of the Act and what it meant for the future of people of color in the United States. Black abolitionists were extremely concerned by the passage of the Act and interpreted it as a call to action. Frederick Douglass, a famous freedman and abolitionist, encouraged Black emigration to the Kansas territory to ensure votes to make the territory free. On the other hand, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a notable abolitionist, called for Black emigration out of the United States, specifically to Canada, and argued that the Kansas-Nebraska Act showed the growing strength of the Slave Power in the United States. Douglass and Shadd Cary believed that direct action would enable abolitionists to defeat the Slave Power but Shadd Cary doubted that it would ever be possible to overcome slavery and racism in the U.S. My research demonstrated the importance Black abolitionists placed on the impact of the expansion of slavery and how this informed the future of abolitionist organizing, conversations, and debates surrounding the future of African Americans in the United States.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Most scholars of the abolition movement describe the Compromise of 1850 as a central turning point, but the years that followed marked a new era in abolition action and conversation. Black abolitionists, like Frederick Douglass and Mary Ann Shadd Cary, used their platforms to consider the future for Black Americans and the politics of engagement in an era in which the Northern antislavery movement was deeply divided over Black rights, emancipation, emigration, and the future. Abolitionists understood the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act as a major turning point in American history but differed in their plans of action against the Act. Within that movement, some abolitionists used the Kansas-Nebraska Act to persuade wider audiences of the power and danger slavery posed to all people, not just African Americans. Looking to the future of America, activists like Mary Ann Shadd Cary, used the Act to persuade their readers to emigrate out of the United States to create new lives and gain rights limited to the white population of the United States. Meanwhile, others such as Frederick Douglass and others argued for African Americans to emigrate to the West, specifically the Kansas territory to join the inevitable clash between slavery and freedom. This thesis argues that previous scholarship has not fully explored Black reactions to this Act, which features significant intellectual mobilization around the future of America.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 was a major turning point in the 1850s United States *and* in the abolition and anti-slavery movements' conversations surrounding the expansion of slavery. The abolition movement was a "radical, interracial movement, one which addressed the entrenched problems of exploitation and disfranchisement in a liberal democracy and anticipated

debates over race, labor, and empire.”¹ On the other hand, the antislavery movement was a biracial moderate movement that called for the end of slavery but did not push for immediate abolition or equal rights among Black and white Americans. After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the territory of Missouri applied for statehood in 1818, setting off tensions over the expansion of slavery west of the Mississippi River. After a stalemate in Congress, representatives agreed to the Missouri Compromise of 1820, granting Missouri’s entrance into the union as a slave state but admitting Maine as a free state. The Compromise declared that slavery would be banned in the former Louisiana Purchase lands north of the 36° 30’ latitude line apart from Missouri which was above this line. As Manisha Sinha argued, “the Missouri Crisis, revealed that free soilism, or efforts to restrict the expansion of slavery, was far more popular in the North than abolition” and simultaneously gave the federal government the ability to legislate on slavery, angering Southerners.² The Compromise aggravated many Northerners and boosted the antislavery movement in the North.

The topic of the expansion of slavery tends to center the political conversations between white politicians but failed to fully incorporate Black thought in the expansion debate. The political policy-making behind the expansion of slavery debate in the United States was a fragile and looming topic of conversation of the era among politicians, but Black abolitionists were concerned about the future of African Americans in the United States. The Kansas-Nebraska Act lent itself to a heated debate between Black abolitionists who supported emigration out of the United States and those who supported Black emigration to Kansas to help prevent Kansas from becoming a slave state.

¹ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 1.

² Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 278.

In the 1840s the United States began a path of territorial expansion beginning with the annexation of Texas in 1845 under President James K. Polk. The annexation of Texas and the U.S. Mexican War increased discussion among Black Americans about the expansion of slavery in new territories. In 1848, Douglass printed an article detailing the U.S. and Mexico War. The article mentioned the oppressive force of slavery spreading throughout the country. They described Texas as a ‘new-slave market’ that had opened and expressed concern that Texas would become a slave state. They followed this by adding that in the 1839 Virginia Convention, Mr. Upshur, or Abel Upshur the Secretary of State claimed that if the U.S. acquired Texas then said “the price of slaves will rise.”³ Black Americans were concerned and discussed the future of slavery and America during and after the U.S.-Mexican War.

In February 1848, Douglass printed *Texas a Free State* discussing news from a correspondent sharing the prospect of Texas becoming a free state in the future. The correspondent explained that “We the North are divided upon the means and measures best calculated to produce the downfall of slavery” but claimed that the strong efforts to make Texas a free state helped make their goal successful.⁴ African Americans were having conversations about the potential expansion of slavery in Texas that mirrored the upcoming debate and discussion around the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Abolitionists in the 1840s and 50s did not have a singular idea about ending slavery, still, in the cases of Texas and Kansas, they called for fierce intervention in the contested territory to prevent it from emboldening slavery. This could explain why Frederick Douglass was so eager to call for direct intervention in Kansas, but the repeated attempts to preserve slavery laid the tracks for Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s favor of Black emigration out of the United States.

³ "Selections Shackford's Lecture on the War with Mexico," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, February 25, 1848, no. IX.

⁴ "Selections Texas a Free State," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, February 4, 1848, no. VI.

While concern over the expansion of slavery was on the rise, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 disrupted the everyday lives of Black and white Northerners and became a focal point in the abolition and anti-slavery movements. Tensions between anti-slavery and pro-slavery advocates heightened in the 1850s with the passage of the Act. The Fugitive Slave Act forced Northerners to take part in the kidnapping of people fleeing enslavement thus forcing their involvement in slavery.⁵ It removed the right to a jury trial for enslaved people and enforced the law through federal commissioners. Still, abolitionists defied the Act and the Underground Railroad peaked in the following years.⁶ Although Black abolitionists concentrated on helping other African Americans in the face of the Fugitive Slave Act, it was not the central legislation in Black intellectual spaces.

The debate over the expansion of slavery and the future of the United States was painted as a white issue despite the widespread concern and interest by African Americans. After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, tensions intensified when Stephen A. Douglas, an Illinois Democrat and one of the most prominent politicians of the era, introduced his Nebraska Bill, later known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. Douglas backed the creation of a transcontinental railroad passing through the Nebraska Territory that was acquired in the Louisiana Purchase. Many southern politicians opposed Douglas' plan to organize the territory because the newly organized land would have to enter the union as free states based on the Missouri Compromise. Douglas needed votes to pass his bill and subsequently added a section to his bill that repealed the Missouri Compromise. This section of the bill created the territories, Kansas and Nebraska and allowed settlers to vote on permitting slavery in the territories. Congress signed the bill into law

⁵ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought : The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Cary: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2007), 654.

⁶ Ibid.

on May 30th, 1854, forcing Northerners to come to terms with slavery's expansion. Abolitionists felt confident that Nebraska would become a free state because it had a smaller population and bordered other free states. Kansas on the other hand was contentious because the population was larger, it bordered slave states, and it was closer to entering the Union as a state compared to Nebraska. While a fervor of pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers and activists made their way to Kansas in an attempt to ensure the territory entered the Union on their respective sides others emigrated out of the United States with the hopes of better lives and new rights. Abolitionists' conversations after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act initiated a surge in debates over Black emigration to Kansas or out of the United States entirely.

Historians have primarily considered the Kansas-Nebraska Act through the perspective of white politicians and its effect on the apathetic white Northern population. Yet, Black abolitionists were deeply engaged with that Act and its meaning for the future of the United States. Frederick Douglass and Mary Ann Shadd Cary, two prominent Black abolitionists, reported in their respective newspapers about the Act and Black organizing around the Act. Although Douglass and Cary were not the only Black leaders concerned with the Act or engaged in the emigration debate, their vast audiences gave them both great influence to spread messages to the general public. They offered two different perspectives on how the Kansas-Nebraska Act might influence Black Americans through the lens of emigration.

Before becoming arguably the most well-known abolitionist, Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in Maryland in 1818 and was enslaved for twenty years. Douglass escaped enslavement and arrived in New York in 1838 later marrying Anna Murray, a freewoman from Baltimore, Maryland.⁷ The couple moved from New York to Massachusetts where Douglass

⁷ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, ed. David W. Blight. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, Mcmillan Learning, 2017), 87.

became acquainted with the abolition movement and the work of William Lloyd Garrison, a prominent Massachusetts abolitionist. Garrison hired Douglass as a lecturer where he toured sharing his ideas and thoughts on slavery and the abolition movement. Douglass later moved to Rochester, New York, and founded his newspaper *The North Star*. He wrote his own pieces and selected articles from other publications to reprint for his audience as editor of the newspaper. This was a common practice at the time due to the lack of modern copyright laws. Though Frederick Douglass did not write every article in his newspaper, he held editorial control over the content and was seen as a political commentator.⁸ Douglass and his staff sought to inform the literate Black population of the North about the abolitionist cause, domestic and foreign politics, and employment opportunities amongst other things in the newspaper. Although Douglass opposed Black emigration out of the United States he was a strong supporter of Black emigration to the West, but more specifically to the Kansas territory.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a prominent Black abolitionist, was exposed to the abolition movement at a young age and was motivated to create change for African Americans. Shadd Cary's efforts in the abolition and anti-slavery movements reflect the work of generations of activists before her including her own parents.⁹ Born free in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1823 Shadd Cary was the eldest of thirteen children in a well-known abolitionist family. Her parents Abraham Shadd and Harriet Burton Parnell were widely involved in the Underground Railroad, the American Anti-Slavery Society, and the Colored Conventions Movement.¹⁰ As Mary Ann Shadd Cary got older, she began to develop her own ideas about the future of African Americans in the United States. She worked as an educator in Delaware, New York City, and Pennsylvania

⁸ Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass*, ed. David W. Blight, 241.

⁹ Jane Rhodes. *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: the Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 1.

¹⁰ "Mary Ann Shadd Cary," Black Womens Organizing Archive, accessed March 21, 2024, <https://bwoaproject.org/shadd-cary/>.

and after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Mary Ann Shadd Cary and her brother Issac Shadd emigrated to Canada. Shadd Cary believed that the issue of racism and discrimination in the United States was widespread and dangerous and feared the re-enslavement of free African Americans, especially after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act thus sparking her favor for Black emigration out of the United States.¹¹

In the 19th century, African Americans regularly gathered and read newspapers aloud as a means to spread information to those who could not obtain newspapers or read. Reading a newspaper was seen as a way of socializing with others and building a community. In an era before professionalization, newspapers were highly politicized and often took staunch stances on political topics.¹² Newspapers were often well-known as pro-slavery or anti-slavery publications that advocated for specific parties, politicians, and policies. For example, *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper* was banned in the Southern United States — although this does not mean that the newspaper did not reach people in the South — because of its abolitionist messaging and Frederick Douglass' popularity as a Black freeman. Thus newspapers are a powerful source to gain insight into political, intellectual, and social conversations taking place in the 19th century.

Rooted in this emerging historiography, this thesis highlights an understudied aspect of Black intellectual and political tradition and one that altered abolitionist strategies in the 1850s. This omission is somewhat surprising because the last three decades of historical scholarship on abolition have transformed the Civil War era away from the perspective of white Evangelicals to center Black voices and experiences. Walter C. Rucker has acknowledged the relationship between Black abolitionists and the Kansas-Nebraska Act in a chapter in *The Nebraska-Kansas Act of 1854* where he argues that “support for emigration and black nationalism increased almost

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass*, ed. David W. Blight, 241.

exponentially among free blacks by the mid-to-late 1850s.”¹³ While displaying the relationship between the emigration debate and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, this work has not been translated into the Civil War Era literature. Despite the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, historical research up to this point has failed to understand and explore the connection between the Act and the work and messaging of Black abolitionists in the Northeastern United States. Using primary and secondary sources I build on the growing historiography of Black abolition and intellectual history.

I heavily rely on the research of scholars like Manisha Sinha in forefronting Black Americans in the abolition movement and framing the movement as a radical and interracial one that confronted disfranchisement and oppression. As Sinha explains, many historians have overlooked Black roots in the conversation regarding the origins of immediate abolition and have even argued that Black abolitionists’ efforts lay outside of the abolition movement.¹⁴ Manisha Sinha wrote the historiography section of Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer’s *Prophets of Protest* and asserted that the dominant image of an abolitionist in American history is a “bourgeois reformer burdened by racial paternalism and economic conservatism” thus overshadowing the impact of African American and women abolitionists.¹⁵

Among scholars of the Republican Party, the Kansas-Nebraska Act is known for having played an important role but doesn’t include Black voices. Eric Foner in *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* emphasized the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act demonstrating how the Act led to “a full political reorganization” and allowed “mass anti-slavery politics to emerge.”¹⁶

¹³ John R. Wunder and Joann M. Ross, ed., *Nebraska-Kansas Act of 1854*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 131.

¹⁴ Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause*, 358.

¹⁵ Manisha Sinha, “Coming of Age: The Historiography of Black Abolitionism,” in *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, ed. Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer (New York, NY: New Press, 2006), 23.

¹⁶ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 125-126.

According to William Gienapp in *The Origins of the Republican Party*, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 “rekindled antislavery men’s dreams of forming a new party.”¹⁷ Despite historians’ understanding of the importance of the Act among white politicians, particularly white antislavery politicians, there is more to uncover about how Black Americans were reacting to its passage. Through my exploration of Black media, specifically newspapers I aim to understand how Black abolitionists understood the impact of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

Recent scholarship on the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 also informs my argument. In the *Journal of American History*, Cooper Wingert argued that while the Act aimed to “appease white Southerners and preserve the Union,” it did the opposite and showed that the Act did not have the power it was thought to have had.¹⁸ This growing historical research provides even more insight into reinvestigating relationships between laws and how people interacted with and understood them. While I agree that the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was a crucial policy even if it was ineffective in appeasing white Southerners, I argue it was not the most dominant policy in Black intellectual thought and historians have not fully appreciated the Kansas-Nebraska Act in Black abolition.

As this thesis argues, Douglass and Shadd Cary were centrally concerned with the future of Black Americans and the Kansas-Nebraska Act was important to that future. Scholars of the Civil War Era have missed this concern by focusing on white Republicans. In the first chapter, I will explore how the various corners of the Black abolitionist movement were engaging with the Kansas-Nebraska Act through shared identity with enslaved people, the morality of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and religious opposition to the Act. I will use my two last chapters to

¹⁷ William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party: 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford Univ. Pr., 1987), 134.

¹⁸ Cooper Wingert, “Fugitive Slave Renditions and the Proslavery Crisis of Confidence in Federalism, 1850–1860,” *Journal of American History*, Volume 110, Issue 1 (June 2023): 40–57, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jaad170>

address the differing arguments of emigration to Kansas or out of the United States through Frederick Douglass and Mary Ann Shadd Cary respectively.

Chapter 2

Significance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

Black abolitionists felt a deep connection to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, whether they were directly impacted by the bill or not. Their interest in the Nebraska Bill and the expansion of slavery showed both the importance of the Act and the intellectual approach of Black Americans to the future of the country. Northern African Americans and abolitionists tracked the journey of the Kansas-Nebraska Act through the House of Representatives, Senate, and after. African American abolitionists cared about the Nebraska Bill as much as they did about the Fugitive Slave Act. They showed the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act through shared identity amongst African Americans, connection to the Fugitive Slave Act, using the Act to appeal to white Northerners, and used the Kansas-Nebraska Act to discuss the future of the United States and surrounding countries in the face of the expansion of slavery.

Shared Identity

Black Americans whether they were previously enslaved or born free felt a strong connection to the enslaved people in the South. On April 7th, 1854, the month before the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* printed an article titled *Anti-Colonization and Anti-Nebraska Meeting*. This meeting was held in March 1854 in Philadelphia. James McCrummel, an African American minister, dentist, and the chairman and co-founder of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society was present along with Jacob W. Glasgow, the secretary, and others.¹⁹ The members of the meeting stated that they were opposed to

¹⁹ Samantha de Vera, "Stephen Smith," *The Fight for Black Mobility: Traveling to Mid-Century Conventions*, February 25, 2021, <https://coloredconventions.org/black-mobility/delegates/stephen-smith/>.

colonization and the Nebraska Bill. They argued that they opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act not just because it overrode the Missouri Compromise but because “slavery cannot be legalized” and thus the people cannot decide to enslave people in any new territory.²⁰ The members claimed to understand the nature of the South and believed the Nebraska Bill was a tool to expand slavery. Notably, they stated that the expansion of slavery affected them because of their “identification with the slaves of the South.”²¹ Black Northerners felt a strong connection to the enslaved people in the South regardless if they were previously enslaved or not. As a result, African Americans looked to the future of slavery in the United States and were interested in the future expansion of slavery could pose to the United States and Black Americans. From this, African Americans aimed to increase their rights and bring out immediate abolition and emancipation. Northern African Americans understood the danger posed by the Kansas-Nebraska Act to the future of slavery and the future of Black Americans in the United States.

Acts of Equal Importance

On countless occasions, African Americans discussed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in tandem illustrating the joint importance both Acts shared in abolitionist conversations. On August 4, 1854, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society celebrated the Twentieth Anniversary of the Emancipation of eight hundred thousand enslaved people in the British West Indies. An article detailing the speakers and happenings of the meeting was published to the *Liberator* and was signed off by Francis Jackson and the secretaries, James Manning Winchell Yerrinton and Samuel May Jr. three white anti-slavery supporters in the Boston area. People of color did hold leadership roles in the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society including Charles Lenox Remond,

²⁰ James C. McCrummell and Jacob W. Glasgow, "Anti-Colonization and Anti-Nebraska Meeting." *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Apr 07, 1854.

²¹ Ibid.

one of the Vice Presidents. Remond was a prominent speaker on abolition and grew in popularity while holding speeches before there were many African American lecturers.²² It is probable that African Americans attended these meetings and had an interest in or shared some of the ideas of the speakers including William Lloyd Garrison. Reverend Caleb Stetson spoke at the meeting and called for a party in the North that was fully opposed to any “compromise to the giant sin of slavery.”²³ Stetson was a minister and white Transcendentalist, who followed the “literary, philosophical, religious, and political movement” that called for people to find “an original relation to the universe” through connection with nature and writing. Many Transcendentalists opposed slavery in the 1850s.²⁴ He then called for a repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, emphasizing the importance of repealing these pieces of legislation based on their sanctioning of the “infernal system.”²⁶ By discussing the Kansas-Nebraska Act with the Fugitive Slave Act, abolitionists positioned the Acts as two of the major problems for the anti-slavery movement.

International Importance

Black abolitionists who left the United States were impacted and angered by the Kansas-Nebraska Act illustrating its gravity amongst American Americans in the U.S. and internationally. On October 20th, 1854, Cooper Nell wrote *The Reception at the Meionaon to The Liberator*. William Cooper Nell was a prominent Boston abolitionist and community leader

²² Amelia Chaney, “Charles Lenox Remond,” ed. Jake Alspaugh and Samantha de Vera, *The Fight for Black Mobility: Traveling to Mid-Century Conventions*, February 25, 2021, <https://coloredconventions.org/black-mobility/delegates/charles-lenox-remond/>.

²³ Francis Jackson, James M. Winchell Yerrinton, and Samuel May Jr., “First of August at Abington.” *Liberator*, Aug 04, 1854.

²⁴ Russell Goodman, “Transcendentalism,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, September 12, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/transcendentalism/>.

²⁵ Peter Wirzbicki, “Black Transcendentalism: William Cooper Nell, the Adelpic Union, and the Black Abolitionist Intellectual Tradition.” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 2 (2018): 269–90. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26478059>.

²⁶ Jackson, Winchell Yerrinton, and May Jr., “First of August at Abington.”

who worked in the Boston Underground Railroad. He was an apprentice to William Lloyd Garrison and later worked with Frederick Douglass when he moved to Rochester, New York.²⁷ Both African Americans and white Americans came together at this meeting for William Wells Brown, a freeman, abolitionist, playwright, and author. Wells Brown traveled to Europe in 1849 to lecture against slavery but chose to stay in Europe after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. In 1854, his freedom was purchased and he returned to Boston.²⁸ In Brown's first speech back in Boston after being abroad for years, he focused a portion of his time discussing two pieces of legislation that emerged during his absence, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. He particularly mentioned that "slavery has received a license to run wild on the virgin soil of Nebraska and Kansas."²⁹ His choice in selecting these two Acts during his speech illustrates the importance these Acts had not merely on American politics broadly but also specifically on Black people internationally. He depicted the importance the two held in the abolition movement and the minds of African Americans.

Anger about the Kansas-Nebraska Act was shared not only through speakers who were abroad but through international newspapers as well. An article titled *American Slavery* from the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, an anti-slavery newspaper from London, printed a speech by Rev. S. R. Ward. This was probably Samuel Ringgold Ward, a freedman and minister who helped with Mary Ann Shadd Cary's newspaper *The Provincial Freeman*. After growing in popularity as an orator and abolitionist, Ward moved to Canada in 1851 after helping in the "Jerry Rescue" or the rescue of William Henry, a fugitive slave who was arrested in Syracuse, New York. Ward moved a resolution which was seconded by Joseph Clark which acknowledged that the United States

²⁷ William Wells Brown, *The Works of William Wells Brown: Using His 'Strong, Manly Voice'*, eds. Paula Garrett and Hollis Robbins, (Oxford University Press, 2006), xvii-xxxvi.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ William Cooper Nell, "The Reception at the Meionaon." *Liberator*; Oct 20, 1854.

was growing and becoming more prosperous but that should not discount the protest against slavery and the “deep grief” felt by the Fugitive Slave Act and the Nebraska Bill. He then argued that “slavery, as a legal institution, should have been so fatally ratified and so grievously aggravated.”³⁰ Even on an international level, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was highlighted in Black intellectual spaces and was a frequent subject of conversation in anti-slavery spaces.

Garnering Anti-Slavery Support

Black abolitionists used rhetoric and messaging to introduce the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a major strike by pro-slavery supporters to evoke anti-slavery reactions. In particular, they joined Northern warnings of a “Slave Power,” or the notion that enslavers held disproportionate and corrupt political influence in the federal government. Abolitionists in the North argued that these enslavers gained political power in their states to control the decisions of politicians and lawmakers to gain federal influence to expand slavery in states where it did not exist.³¹ These activists argued that the fight against slavery was not restricted to emancipation but to fight against enslavers who were trying to maintain and spread slavery, destroy civil liberties, control the federal government, and create an economy dependent on slavery. The Slave Power was a useful tool in appealing to white Northerners who were apathetic about Black rights but believed that southern political power endangered their rights and privileges.

In his orations and writing, Frederick Douglass portrayed the Kansas-Nebraska Act as an extension of the Slave Power creating a real danger for anyone in the North or African Americans who would be enslaved due to the extension of slavery. Frederick Douglass delivered a speech in the Metropolitan Hall, and described the Slave Power’s goals as trying to suppress

³⁰ "American Slavery." *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (London), Mar 01, 1855.

³¹ Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 5.

anti-slavery dialogue, extend slavery throughout the territories, nationalize slavery, and make “slavery respected in every State in the Union.”³² Douglass emphasized that the Act’s removal of the Missouri Compromise line endangered people in the North, including white Northerners, but also greatly affected African Americans who were already free.

A week before the Act passed through Congress, William T. Catto—a freedman, and prominent pastor at the oldest African American Presbyterian Church—and James Joshua Gould Bias—a freedman, preacher, and active in the Underground Railroad and Colored Conventions—signed off on the *Report of the Committee on the Nebraska and Kansas Bill*.³³ They stated that although the United States denied Black political rights it “does not by any means depr-[ieve] us, as freemen, of feeling, and the power of thought.”³⁵ The resolution declared that the Philadelphia District Annual Conference viewed the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in the House of Representatives as a “stretch [of] that power, which, like the horse-leech, still cries ‘Give, give!’ or, like the grave, ‘is never satisfied.”³⁶ The authors allude to the Slave Power through the imagery of pro-slavery supporters who expand slavery and gain more power. It becomes evident that many Black Americans viewed the Kansas-Nebraska Act as proof that the danger of enslavement and the growth of slavery was imaginable and real.

Frederick Douglass emphasized the undemocratic nature of the Slave Power to challenge supporters of the Nebraska Bill who argued that the bill promoted popular sovereignty and was more democratic than leaving the slavery question in the hands of Congress. Popular sovereignty

³² "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 10, 1854, no. 47.

³³ “First African Presbyterian Church,” [ushistory.org](https://catto.ushistory.org/catto_maps/first-african-presbyterian-church/), accessed March 22, 2024, https://catto.ushistory.org/catto_maps/first-african-presbyterian-church/.

³⁴ Michael Dickinson, “Dr. J. J. Gould Bias,” ed. Carolyn King and Samantha de Vera, *The Fight for Black Mobility: Traveling to Mid-Century Conventions*, February 25, 2021, <https://coloredconventions.org/black-mobility/delegates/dr-j-j-gould-bias/>.

³⁵ Michael Johnson and Richard Berry, "Letter from Michael Johnson and Richard Berry to Jabez P. Campbell Enclosures from J[Ames] J[Oshua] G[Ould] Bias; Et. Al." *Christian Recorder*, Jul 13, 1854.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

was the idea that the government only operated based on the consent of the people referring to settlers' ability to vote on slavery in their respective territories. Douglass and his staff printed articles that denied the inclusion of popular sovereignty in the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In Frederick Douglass' speech in the Metropolitan Hall, he argued that the Nebraska Bill did not give the people of the territories the right to govern for themselves and only gave the people a shadow of governing power.³⁷ The article "New Nebraska Bill" printed before the bill was signed into law, declared that the bill disregarded the voice of the people. The author claimed that popular sovereignty was "with the Slave Power" and only acknowledged the right of enslavers to "buy and sell men and women."³⁸ Another article "The New Stride" reprinted from the N.Y. Tribune claimed that one enslaver could overrule a thousand freemen.³⁹ Douglass emphasized the immense strength of the Slave Power in empowering the Nebraska Bill to create more and show the danger to African Americans and the North more broadly.

Frederick Douglass and his staff continued their attacks on the Slave Power and the content of the Kansas-Nebraska Act by elaborating on the falsehoods lodged in the bill and the lie of non-intervention. Non-intervention meant that the government did not involve itself in certain affairs, for example, in American foreign policy the Monroe Doctrine, under President James Monroe in 1823, warned European nations not to interfere with the affairs of the Western Hemisphere and the U.S. would not interfere with the affairs of Europe.⁴⁰ Gerrit Smith, a representative in the House from 1853 to 1854, spoke to the House of Representatives with the hopes of preventing the passage of the Nebraska Bill. He claimed that the bill did not recognize non-intervention because "it dictates to the territories the form of their government, and denies

³⁷ "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," no. 47.

³⁸ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 28, 1854, no. 19.

³⁹ "The New Stride," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 31, 1855, no. 37.

⁴⁰ Message of President James Monroe at the commencement of the first session of the 18th Congress (The Monroe Doctrine), 12/02/1823; Presidential Messages of the 18th Congress, ca. 12/02/1823-ca. 03/03/1825; Record Group 46; Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990; National Archives.

them the appointing of their principal officers.”⁴¹ By printing Smith’s speech, Frederick Douglass and his staff demonstrated the falsehoods of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, framing the Act as an urgent issue. Douglass printed an article from the Washington correspondent of the *Philadelphia North American* which claimed that the current administration under President Franklin Pierce, a Democrat who believed that the abolition movement was a threat to the unity of the nation, was preventing emigrants from the North from entering the Kansas territory.⁴² This claim by the Washington correspondent of the *Philadelphia North American* dismantled the lie of non-intervention and portrayed a direct act of intervention by the federal government in the affairs of Kansas. Douglass strategically used these different articles to reinforce the importance of the Act to white Americans.

Abolitionists described the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a pro-slavery legislation that was morally wrong and against freedom. By presenting the Act as an opposition to slavery, African Americans posed the Act as un-American, un-democratic, and against the writing of the Declaration of Independence. On August 4, 1854, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society members emphasized that they did not see the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a compromise between slavery and freedom and didn’t believe that there should be any compromise between slavery and freedom because “slavery has no rights” and is wrong as a whole. They describe the bill as a “foe to freedom, we stamp it as a document meriting the execration of every friend of man.”⁴³ The attempt to pose the institution of slavery and American ideals against each other was an effective way for African Americans to use the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act to garner anti-slavery support in the North.

⁴¹ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 12, 1842, no. 21.

⁴² *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 6, 1854, no. 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

At times, Frederick Douglass took a different approach and argued that slavery and freedom were contradictory and thus could not coexist forever. This argument often corresponded with conversations over the constitutionality of slavery and American ideals. Frederick Douglass, in his speech in the Metropolitan Hall, referenced the Declaration of Independence, specifically the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to contrast these ideals with the actions and violations of Congress through the Nebraska Bill. He questioned where Stephen A. Douglas procured the right to enslave men and argued that no man, not even the men in Congress possessed rights above the rights of men and thus could not enslave other men.⁴⁴ In the same 1854 speech by Gerrit Smith against the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act to Congress, he argued that there were no laws in support of American slavery after the Declaration of Independence, and if there were laws for slavery before the Declaration they were “swept away” after it was adopted. Smith also claimed that as slavery’s influence increased, the Declaration of Independence was ridiculed but as slavery decreased, the Declaration was respected.⁴⁵ Douglass and Smith use language that forefronts the moral dilemmas of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and being an American supporting slavery more broadly.

Frederick Douglass and his staff printed articles centering the immoral practices in the House and the Senate to delegitimize and try to give the impression of opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The varying authors of these articles described the passage of the Act as unfair. Douglass and his staff printed a series of articles surrounding the passage of the Nebraska Bill. One article titled “The Deed Done—How it was Done—A Recapitulation” from the *National Era* Newspaper in Washington D.C. discussed the unfair procedures in the House specifically detailing the lawlessness of the supporters of the Kansas-Nebraska Act through “flagrant

⁴⁴ "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," no. 47.

⁴⁵ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 21.

violations of the rules,” and by dismissing anti-slavery representatives’ suggestions or changes to the bill.⁴⁶ Another article in the same newspaper printing echoed similar sentiments and argued that the “minority [anti-slavery representatives] were shut out of making any amendments to the bill.”⁴⁷ The committee from the “Free Democratic Address to the People of the State of New York” described the bill as having been made in bad faith, full of falsehoods, and saturated in fraud. The same article claimed that the Nebraska Bill passed in the Senate “amid drunken insolence” and violated the rules of the House of Representatives.⁴⁸ Frederick Douglass’ choice of articles to reprint attempted to invalidate the Nebraska Bill and its supporters by emphasizing its fraudulence and immorality to create a sense of distrust in the bill and the pro-slavery supporters in government.

In the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Northern abolitionists criticized members of the House of Representatives from the North who voted to pass the bill. Even before the Nebraska Bill was passed in the House, Douglass printed articles that argued the bill could only pass through the “treachery of the Northern Representatives” who would vote to pass the bill to prove their loyalty to President James Buchanan’s administration and reap the political rewards of doing so.⁴⁹ Those who voted in support of the Kansas-Nebraska Act from the North were pummeled by Douglass’ newspaper. Another article, “The Nebraska Bill Passed” *from The Evening Post* claimed that President James Buchanan took part in bribing Northern representatives to pass the bill.⁵⁰ Northern anger reached new levels eliciting violent and threatening language toward these Northern traitors. The article “Senator Douglas and his Bantling,” referring to Stephen A. Douglas, declared that “Northern men hate treachery, and

⁴⁶ *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, June 2, 1854, no. 24.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ “Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings,” no. 47.

⁴⁹ *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, no. 19.

⁵⁰ *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, no. 24.

understand the most argumentative way of evincing their contempt for the traitor.”⁵¹ Northern traitors and the Slave Power raised the growing fear in the North over the danger of slavery not only to African Americans, but all Northerners.

Douglass also printed articles that encouraged civic engagement and voting to force the hand of congressmen, specifically the Northern traitors who helped pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act through the House. He specifically asked his readers to vote for people who were against the Nebraska Bill to remove supporters of the Bill from office. Douglass chose articles that tried to energize people who were against the Nebraska Bill or felt wronged by the bill. An author asked this group to use their outrage to vote and “fill Congress with honest representatives who will convince the slave power that ‘there is a North.’”⁵² Another article insisted that “the people ought to be aroused, and their voices should be made to be heard at Washington.”⁵³ Civic engagement and voter turnout were exceptionally higher in the antebellum period compared to the twenty-first century and voting was seen as a responsibility. This call to vote and engage with the government was also a call to complete their duties as citizens to protect the Union.

Frederick Douglass used his platform and newspaper to appeal to Northerners’ emotions and make the abolition movement and anti-slavery sentiment more appealing. Douglass and his staff reported on the betrayal and humiliation bestowed upon the North by its complicity to the Slave Power and leniency to pro-slavery supporters. Frederick Douglass claimed that pro-slavery supporters overturning the Missouri Compromise was a breach of honor.⁵⁴ Other articles printed by Douglass emphasized the feeling that the passage of the Nebraska Bill had wronged the North. The “Free Democratic Address to the People of the State of New York” claimed that the

⁵¹ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 19.

⁵² "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," no. 47.

⁵³ "The Nebraska Iniquity from the N. Y. Tribune the Voice of New City Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park," no. 23.

⁵⁴ "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," no. 47.

Southern Whigs who sided with the Nebraska bill swindled “the free laborers of the North, East, and West.”⁵⁵ Others focused on the bill as a humiliation to Northerners. The article “The ‘Soft’ Suicide” from the N.Y. Tribune, described the Nebraska issue as “a new insult and deeper humiliation for the North.”⁵⁶ This notion of growing Northern embarrassment continued. The article, “The Voice of New York City. Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park” from the N.Y. Tribune described the North as having “bent the knee to the Slave Oligarchy of the South” before and leading up to the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.⁵⁷ The idea of “bending the knee” ties to the Slave Power emasculating Northern men disregarding the effect of slavery and the Slave Power on Northern women who did not share the same rights and privileges as men.

Throughout his newspaper, Douglass stressed the threat the Slave Power and slavery posed to the way of life in the United States, specifically the North. In the June 29, 1855 edition of his newspaper, Douglass included an article titled “The Issue at Hand” which wrote “Liberty and slavery are potent antagonisms. They cannot dwell together in harmony. They hate each other with a deadly hatred.”⁵⁸ Frederick Douglass expanded on this idea of either slavery or liberty surviving in the future by declaring that “the South must either give up slavery, or the North must give up liberty.”⁵⁹ Frederick Douglass aimed to show the intensity of the slavery question, the Slave Power, and the strides of pro-slavery supporters to pressure Northerners to understand and come to terms with the stake in the battle between those who were pro-Nebraska and anti-Nebraska Bill.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 15, 1854, no. 39.

⁵⁷ “The Nebraska Iniquity from the N. Y. Tribune the Voice of New City Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park,” no. 23.

⁵⁸ “Minority Know Nothing Report,” *North Star*, June 29, 1855.

⁵⁹ “Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings,” no. 47.

Black abolitionists used the fear surrounding the Nebraska Bill and evoked violent language to illicit action. William James Watkins, one of the first African American lawyers who worked with William Lloyd Garrison before working with Frederick Douglass as an associate editor of *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper*.⁶⁰ He wrote an article for the paper titled *Effect of the Nebraska Bill* on March 3rd, 1854, a few months before the bill passed. Watkins claimed that through the Nebraska Bill, whether it would pass or not, anti-slavery supporters and abolitionists had learned how to end slavery and claimed that “Slaveholders and their apologists are unconsciously erecting a gallows upon which to hang themselves.”⁶¹ According to Watkins, Stephen A. Douglas woke up the North and the “Nebraska swindle has set the mind of the North at work.”⁶² Watkins believed that the Kansas-Nebraska Act would bring about the end of slavery and emancipation because of the widespread anger caused throughout the North.

In the wake of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Douglass faced a change in his thoughts about using violence to resist and combat slavery and the Slave Power. On November 3rd, 1854, a few months after the passage of the Nebraska Bill an article titled “General Cass Speech” from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* centered General Lewis Cass, a senator, military officer, and the Secretary of State from 1857-1860. He was an enslaver and a prominent leader of the Indian removal policy. After his speech, anti-slavery supporters called for Frederick Douglass to make a speech resulting in an altercation between pro-slavery and anti-slavery supporters at the North Market Hall in Chicago after a threat was made to Douglass if he were to give a speech. The result was described as “pandemonium” and threats by those who supported the bill. After the altercation, Douglass called for “decency displayed by his abolition brethren” and hoped that

⁶⁰ William James Watkins, “William James Watkins to Frederick Douglass, May 18, 1852,” William James Watkins to Frederick Douglass, May 18, 1852.

⁶¹ William James Watkins, "Effect of the Nebraska Bill," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Mar 03, 1854.

⁶² Ibid.

white anti-slavery supporters would not “disgrace him.”⁶³ In this instance, Douglass was still apprehensive about using violence to combat supporters of slavery.

In the years following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the anti-slavery and abolition movements became increasingly intensified based on the anger many Northerners felt in response to these Acts that they believed denied their rights or showed the strength of the Slave Power and the institution of slavery itself. Although Douglass tried to promote peaceful resistance for as long as possible, he began to utilize apocalyptic language and make use of the growing militant attitude in the abolition movement to promote stark change in the fight against slavery. The article, “Oberlin Anti-Slavery Platform,” argued that the recent developments in Congress, alluding to the passage of the Nebraska Bill, proved that “the contest between Slavery and Freedom, in the United States, is a war of extermination.”⁶⁴ Another article, “Free Kansas Convention at Cleveland” claimed that the “day for compromise has certainly passed.”⁶⁵ These articles printed by Douglass used language that emphasized the dire nature of the slavery problem in the United States and alluded to violence and moving past conversation and compromise to ensure the end of slavery.

Frederick Douglass and his newspaper staff used the feeling of fear to promote action from a new North that would resist the Slave Power through growing resistance. Throughout different articles, there is a theme of ending Northern complicity to the South and the Slave Power. An article titled “Senator Douglas and his Bantling” argued that the North had a “phlegmatic constitution” meaning the North had an unemotional or apathetic temperament, but Senator Douglas and the Nebraska Bill had woken the North “from her delusive dreams.” The same article stated that the North was gaining momentum and should, “let the North, now that

⁶³ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 3, 1854, no. 46.

⁶⁴ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 25, 1854, no. 36.

⁶⁵ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, December 4, 1857, no. 51.

she is seen, be felt also.”⁶⁶ This revolutionary language was spread throughout countless articles and encouraged readers to take action beyond sitting idly by as the Slave Power expanded. The “Free Democratic Address to the People of the State of New York” maintained that Northern weakness had come to an end.⁶⁷ Another article, “Resolutions Adopted at the Meeting of the Western Anti-Slavery Society, held at Salem, Ohio” held that there was growing resistance to the Slave Power stemming from the Anti-Nebraska movement.⁶⁸ This call for Northern action went as far as comparing Northerners’ experience with the Slave Power to that of enslaved people. The article, “Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park,” contended that the South and slavery had mistaken Northern patience, but proclaimed that “the North will teach these traitors that they are not the supple negroes whom their whips and manacles can co-erce.”⁶⁹ The comparison to enslaved people shows the fear the abolition movement and Frederick Douglass were trying to instill in white Northerners to push them to act against slavery and the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Douglass indicated how the Kansas-Nebraska Act and pro-slavery supporters had finally agitated Northerners enough to bring about the downfall of slavery. One article titled, “The Nebraska Bill Passed” from *The Evening Post*, claimed that the Democratic party had “lost its moral strength in the free states” and the article “The Compact Violated” from the same printing argued that the Nebraska Bill would injure the South and was the most unwise thing it could have done.⁷⁰ Frederick Douglass and his staff continued to allude to the end of slavery and the Democratic Party. An article titled, “The National Gladiators! War on the Hilt!! ‘On, Stanley, on’!!!” claimed that the Democratic Party would “die by its own hand” or “by the hand of its

⁶⁶ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 19.

⁶⁷ "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," no. 47.

⁶⁸ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 39.

⁶⁹ "The Nebraska Iniquity from the N. Y. Tribune the Voice of New City Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park," no. 23.

⁷⁰ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 24.

reckless protégé, slavery.”⁷¹ Douglass reiterated the end of slavery and even pushed blame on the author of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Stephen A. Douglas. An article titled, “Senator Douglas and his Bantling” began with the statement that Stephen A. Douglas was inadvertently moving toward the overthrow of slavery.⁷² Douglass and his staff conveyed that the actions of the Democratic party and the South were so dangerous to the North that it created a reaction from the North that would lead to the demise of slavery.

A Lack of Direct Action

Abolitionists addressed their thoughts about the action and inaction of the abolition movement, specifically in connection to combating legislation and the growing Slave Power. They often made these comments with hopes that it would spur future abolition action in the future. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, for example, wrote a letter to Frederick Douglass in 1849 that would be published in *The North Star*, the name of Douglass’ paper before it was renamed *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. She argued that despite abolitionist and anti-slavery supporters hosting conventions for years, making speeches, and discussing different problems there was little progress truly made to end slavery. Shadd Cary wrote that “we have put forth few practical efforts to an end” and “we should do more, and talk less.”⁷³ Although this letter was written and published before the passage or introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, these feelings of inaction in the abolition movement were not limited to Shadd Cary and continued to be discussed in the years to come.

On September 16th, 1854, Samuel Golden, wrote to the *Christian Recorder* in an article titled *Our Political Rights*. Golden claims that the best way to make strides in the abolition

⁷¹ *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, no. 51.

⁷² *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, no. 19.

⁷³ “Wilmington, Jan. 25, 1849,” *The North Star*. March 23, 1849.

movement is to “petition the powers that be” and argues that he has never seen “so much as the form of a petition to the Legislature of this State, asking them to grant anything we need.”⁷⁴ He connects this argument with the “Christian motto” to “Knock, and it shall be opened; ask, and it shall be given” appealing to Christians to call for the end of slavery.⁷⁵ Similarly to Shadd Cary’s letter to Douglass, Samuel Golden added that there were calls for meetings and making the best speeches when the government made pro-slavery actions such as passing the Fugitive Slave Act or the Kansas-Nebraska Act, but this action ultimately came to an end until another dire pro-slavery action came along.⁷⁶ Golden’s criticism of the abolition and anti-slavery movements mirrored Shadd Cary’s thoughts six years earlier emphasizing that direct action was still lacking in response to the Slave Power and pro-slavery legislation. Although Golden seemed hesitant about lasting anti-slavery results from responses to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, his use of the Fugitive Slave Act and the Kansas-Nebraska Act as two examples of the issues creating the most response by abolitionists in 1854 showed the great influence both pieces of legislation had to grab the attention of African Americans, abolitionists, and anti-slavery supporters.

Religious Opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act

Opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act spread across religious boundaries emphasizing religious imagery to oppose slavery and the Nebraska Bill. Many religious organizations, groups, and individuals were angered by the Kansas-Nebraska Act. When discussing their opposition to the legislation they regularly connected their arguments to religious iconography and motifs. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Fugitive Slave Act, Black churches

⁷⁴ Samuel Golden, "Our Political Rights," *Christian Recorder*, Sep 16, 1854.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

became more radical and in favor of direct action. Churches began to denounce slavery following after one another and began to approve anti-slavery resolutions.

On January 26th, 1854 there was the Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church in Providence, Rhode Island. One of their resolutions centers on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and claims that the Fugitive Slave Act and the Nebraska Bill “are burning coals of fire, which will burn to the lowest hell. Over them all hovers the dark angel of the night, covering them with the dark mantle of wickedness.”⁷⁷ This description of the two Acts burning in hell being covered by wickedness depicts the violence growing in the Black abolition movement but also illustrates how negatively the Acts were viewed and the emotional charge that accompanied the dislike for the Act. The members of the conference also gave the new governor William W. Hoppin a copy of their resolutions and called for “his influence in behalf” of the African Americans in the state.⁷⁸ Hoppin opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act and two years later in 1856 called for Kansas’ admission into the union as a free state.⁷⁹ Religious leaders were trying to use their religious beliefs to connect with other Northerners, anti-slavery supporters, and politicians to evoke strong action.

On August 4th, 1854 the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society celebrated the Twentieth Anniversary of the Emancipation of eight hundred thousand enslaved people in the British West India Islands. Reverend Caleb Stetson elaborated on a clerical petition. According to the author, Stetson “proceeded, at some length,” about “the position of that portion of the signers of the clerical petition against the Nebraska Bill, who had heretofore defended or apologized for slavery.” He criticized their inconsistency on the issue of slavery and compared it to supporting

⁷⁷ Daniel A. Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville, Tenn, 1891; reprint, New York, N.Y., 1968), 307-8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Dictionary of American Biography*, 20 vols, eds. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, (New York, New York, 1928-36) (DAB), 5:227-28;; Arline Ruth Kiven, *Then Why the Negroes: The Nature and Course of the Anti-Slavery Movement in Rhode Island, 1637-1861* (n.p., 1973), 72-73.

slavery and pushing forward the Kansas-Nebraska Act because it would have been doing the good work of expanding slavery.⁸⁰ Religious figures used the immorality of the Kansas-Nebraska Act to help gain anti-slavery support from the religious community.

The Expansion of Slavery

In the face of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, abolitionists emphasized the danger of the expansion of slavery in the West. The State Convention of the Free Democracy addressed the people of New York in an article titled “Free Democratic Address to the People of the State of New York” about the violations and dangers of the Nebraska Bill. The convention appointed John P. Hale, Hiram Barney, and John Jay, three white politicians, to act as a committee and sign the address. Douglass printed the address in his newspaper and described the bill as deceitful and aligning with the goals of the Slave Power. The members of the convention described the goals as economically aiming to depreciate the value of labor, politically attempting to “rule the country by a slaveholding oligarchy” while extending slavery westward, and morally aiming to destroy liberty.⁸¹ Throughout these various articles, Douglass and his staff made it clear that Slave Power was an impending danger to life and all people in the North.

Frederick Douglass used the Kansas-Nebraska Bill to demonstrate the danger of slavery’s expansion in the North. Stephan A. Douglas proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act to open up the North to the expansion of slavery into the territory it had been legally excluded from under the Missouri Compromise. Frederick Douglass and his staff frequently referenced the aggressive expansionist goals of the Slave Power and the role of the Nebraska Bill in introducing “slavery to

⁸⁰ Francis Jackson, James M. Winchell Yerrinton, and Samuel May Jr. "First of August at Abington." *Liberator*, Aug 04, 1854.

⁸¹ "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," no. 47.

all the territories of the Republic.”⁸² Various articles illustrate the possible result of the expansion of slavery. *Frederick Douglass' Paper* printed the “Oberlin Anti-Slavery Platform” from the Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society in Oberlin, Ohio. The anti-slavery society and the city of Oberlin became prominent in the abolition movement in the mid-nineteenth century. The Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society claimed that slavery wished to destroy liberty and take over Western America alluding to the attempts to expand slavery under the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

In the same newspaper printing the article, “Resolutions Adopted at the Saratoga Convention” described the incompatibility of free labor and slave labor and predicted the defeat of free labor and industrial progress if slavery and the plantation system spread showing apathetic Northerners the economic reasons to oppose the expansion of slavery.⁸³ Gerrit Smith argued in a speech to Congress on April 6th, 1854 before the bill was signed into law with the hopes of preventing the passage of the Nebraska Bill into law. He claimed that slavery’s aggression attacked liberty, law, and both human and divine rights.⁸⁴ Douglass’ choice of articles for his newspaper emphasized the danger of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in opening previously prohibited lands to slavery and expanding the influence of the Slave Power.

Frederick Douglass used the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 to explain how slavery’s expansion was a danger to the Northern population. He reprinted articles illuminating how the Kansas-Nebraska Act created a new threat to the North and the United States more generally. An article titled, “Kansas and Slavery”, argued that slavery had no regard for climate, soil, or geographical position.⁸⁵ By describing slavery as a force that cannot be contained, the author portrayed how the destruction of the Missouri Compromise line opened the North to slavery.

⁸² *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 15, 1854, no. 39.

⁸³ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 25, 1854, no. 36.

⁸⁴ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 12, 1854, no. 21.

⁸⁵ “Kansas and Slavery.” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. (Rochester, New York) VII, December 15, 1854, no. 52.

Frederick Douglass reiterated this by claiming that the Nebraska Bill could give all of the free North to slavery.⁸⁶ The article from the *N.Y. Tribune* titled “Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park” declared that “the rights of the free states are in jeopardy from southern aggression and northern treachery” and insisted that the people of the free states will be forced to confront the aftermath of the Nebraska Bill.⁸⁷ Douglass wanted Northerners to grasp the reality of their danger to promote action against pro-slavery supporters and the Slave Power. An article titled “The Absorbing Question” from the *N.Y. Tribune* stressed the impending danger to assert that the country had reached the “last struggle between the Oligarchy and the free spirit of the North.”⁸⁸ Douglass and abolitionists harnessed the fear of slavery’s expansion and a potential convergence between the opposing ideals of slavery and freedom to force white Northerners to take a stake in the issue of slavery.

After being introduced by William Cooper Nell after his return to Boston, William Wells Brown gave a speech on the changes that had taken place in Boston since he left. He discussed the Fugitive Slave Act and the lack of freedom in the North. He then moved to turn to the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He claimed that “new territory has been thrown open to slavery, that it may spread and gain influence.”⁸⁹ While emphasizing the danger of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in opening the country for the expansion of slavery, Brown notes that southern enslavers were trying to acquire islands in the Caribbean to spread slavery, particularly in Cuba and Haiti. William Wells Brown argued that he believed these enslavers would gain Cuba but hoped that Haiti would channel the “head and heart of Toussaint L’Ouverture” and resist American

⁸⁶ "Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings," no. 47.

⁸⁷ "The Nebraska Iniquity from the N. Y. Tribune the Voice of New City Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park," no. 23.

⁸⁸ "Minority Know Nothing Report," June 29, 1855.

⁸⁹ Nell, "The Reception at the Meionaon," Oct 20, 1854.

slavery.⁹⁰ He then spent the rest of his speech discussing British abolishment of the slave trade and slavery.

Conclusion

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was a large part of abolitionist conversations in the 1850s alongside the Fugitive Slave Act. Abolitionists talked about the bill from its introduction through its ultimate passing and used various methods to try to persuade the wider public to oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act and rile up anti-slavery action from the North. The discussion about the Kansas-Nebraska led itself into the emigration debate positioning abolitionists against each other in conversations about how to call forth the end of slavery. A few years later the abolitionist movement faced a similar instance with the Nebraska Bill and the following debate over the expansion of slavery and Black emigration.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 3

Black Emigration to Kansas

Frederick Douglass on Emigration Before the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

Frederick Douglass had instances of supporting the use of violence as a means to fight slavery before the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 but throughout the 1850s Douglass became progressively more and more upset with the inaction against the Slave Power. Before the Nebraska Bill, Douglass's language usually aligned with the ideas of civil disobedience but became more violent after the Kansas-Nebraska Act. According to John R. Wunder and Joann M. Ross, Douglass was a “nonresistant Garrisonian” and publicly preferred agitation to force in the 1840s, but began to allude to the need for armed resistance, particularly in Kansas after the Nebraska Bill passed.⁹¹ In the 1850s Douglass publicly split with William Lloyd Garrison’s ideals. Garrisonians “attacked Douglass’s violent language as the ‘blood and murder’ approach.”⁹² Still, Frederick Douglass was known for his shifting political views and this rise in support for violent means was not the end of his evolution. Douglass would later shift his support from violence, but this change in rhetoric in the 1850s illustrates the way the Kansas-Nebraska Act affected his political ideology. After the passage, Douglass and many African Americans began to feel a sense of hopelessness in the fight against slavery and the Slave Power and were more willing to accept violent and radical action from abolitionists.

⁹¹ John R. Wunder and Joann M. Ross, *The Nebraska-Kansas Act of 1854* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 114.

⁹² Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, ed. David W. Blight. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, Mcmillan Learning, 2017), 87.

The Texas Legacy

Abolitionists encouraged strong efforts to prevent Texas from becoming a slave state and mirrored some of their messaging in the context of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. On March 10, 1854, Douglass printed a speech by William H. Seward on the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the undermining of the Missouri Compromise and its impact on the American West. William Henry Seward was a prominent politician from New York, who served as governor, in the Senate, and became the Secretary of State under Abraham Lincoln.⁹³ Seward read a part of a report from an unspecified committee he respected but did not necessarily agree with all of their ideas. Still, this report claimed that the question about enslaved people in new territories has grown from the controversy over the territory acquired from Mexico including Texas. The committee argued that once “Indian laws shall be withdrawn, and the country was thrown open to emigration and settlement.”⁹⁴ As mentioned, they claim that the free versus slave state debate had been looming from the contentiousness over Texas and the question over emigration was not new. In the cases of both Texas and Kansas, abolitionists were planning and discussing mass emigration and settlement from both pro-slavery and anti-slavery people and the effects it could have in the United States. The lasting effects of abolitionist action in Texas informed the support for emigration and direct action in Kansas.

Movement to Kansas

Emigration Societies formed across the Northeast to move people to Kansas to help them get settled and eventually help Kansas become a free state. In Monroe County, New York the Kansas Emigration Society formed around August of 1854. The society formed to aid “in the

⁹³ “Biographies of the Secretaries of State: William Henry Seward (1801–1872),” U.S. Department of State, accessed March 23, 2024, <https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/people/seward-william-henry>.

⁹⁴ “Legislative Acts/Legal Proceedings,” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, March 10, 1854, no. 12.

settlement of the newly organized Territory of Kansas, by industrious, intelligent, and liberty-loving inhabitants.”⁹⁵ This society was formed to act as the auxiliary to the Emigrant Aid Company which was organized around the same time. The Emigrant Aid Company claimed that based on the applications they had received, they would transport as many as twenty thousand emigrants to Kansas.⁹⁶ Emigration efforts to Kansas began soon after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the details and planning were printed in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* to inform the public on the process and encourage more emigration. In an extended copy of the same article, the emigration society members wrote that the urgent importance of emigration was Kansas is to quickly act with anti-slavery supporters. In their constitution, they also claimed that all money of the society will be used to promote the emigration of people who are anti-slavery and will prevent the introduction of slavery or support laws to repeal slavery if it were to be introduced.⁹⁷ In a different article titled “Kansas” in July 1854, the author from the N.Y. Tribune claimed that there was a lot of emigration in all parts of Kansas but meetings and resolutions had been made to prevent Northern abolition emigration.⁹⁸ Emigration societies began to form throughout the North after the Kansas-Nebraska Act with the hope of sending as many anti-slavery people to the territory to prevent slavery from taking hold.

Other articles acted as more of an advertisement or campaign for emigration groups sharing the process of emigration and the morality and goals of the various organizations to incentivize more emigration. While this article was unsigned, good evidence points to Douglass as its author as he often used the phrase “Friends of Freedom” in his articles. In this March 1855 article, Douglass alluded to the idea of popular sovereignty and claimed that it was up to

⁹⁵ "Monroe County Kansas Emigration Society Rochester, N. Y., July, 1854," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 18, 1854, no. 35.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ "Monroe County Kansas Emigration Society Rochester, N. Y., July, 1854," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 4, 1854, no. 33.

⁹⁸ "Selections Kansas," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 21, 1854, no. 31.

the friends of freedom to secure Kansas “from the grasp of the spoiler by settling it with such emigrants as are alive to the evils of slave labor, and to the advantage of free labor—not with emigrants from the free states merely, but from the slave states as well.”⁹⁹ Douglass wanted to expand emigration efforts from focusing on the North to helping anti-slavery people in the South emigrate to Kansas. The article continued with details about the American Settlement Company and The New York Kansas League. The League worked to find the best route to Kansas to “arrange with transportation companies for reduced fares.” The American Settlement Company provided paid membership that would include benefits for a person arriving in Kansas.¹⁰⁰ The author advertised the options available for those who wanted to emigrate but also illustrated the battle of getting people to spend their money to support anti-slavery causes and move across the country to Kansas.

Motivation for emigration

Various articles that Frederick Douglas printed used the threat of Kansas becoming a slave state to motivate emigration to the territory. An article titled “Africanization of Kansas” claimed that they believed that the administration was trying to prevent emigration from the free states because the Commissioner of Indian Affairs postponed the opening of the territory for six months. They argue that this meant that settlers could easily enter before this date through Missouri but groups of emigrants from the North would not be allowed to enter. The correspondent closed the article by writing that they believed Kansas would become a slave state based on these restrictions.¹⁰¹ The “Douglas vs. Douglass Settlement of Nebraska” was printed in October 1854 detailing a debate between Frederick Douglass and Arnold Douglas, who I

⁹⁹ "Selections Freedom's Struggle in Kansas to the Friends of Freedom," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, March 16, 1855, no. 13.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ "Africanization of Kansas," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 6, 1854, no. 29.

presume is Stephen Arnold Douglas (Stephan A. Douglas), the author of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Frederick Douglass was against emigration to Liberia and argued that it was better for Black people to emigrate to Kansas than the West Indies or Central America. He also claimed that if the proper resources are in place then there are three hundred families of African descent who would emigrate to Kansas.¹⁰² He discussed how emigration could lead to Kansas becoming free without violence but explained that the pro-slavery people have threatened violence still Douglass believes these threats have only increased the amount of anti-slavery people who want to emigrate to Kansas. Douglass tried to use the threat and fear of Kansas becoming a slave state and the Slave Power growing to encourage African Americans in the North to emigrate and create more aid to make emigration more obtainable.

Frederick Douglass' newspaper influenced abolitionists in the North and acted as a method to plan and organize abolitionists in future action against slavery. After the Missouri Compromise was overturned and the Nebraska Bill was signed into law, Douglass used his platform to urge emigration to the Kansas territory. The article, "The Nebraska Bill Passed," printed on June 2nd, 1854, soon after the signing of the Nebraska Bill, expressed hope that emigrants from the "older States and Europe" would move to settle in Kansas and vote on behalf of liberty.¹⁰³ Douglass also printed articles specifically reaching out to free African Americans and called for their settlement in Kansas. An article titled, "Settlement of Kansas" from *The American* newspaper, planned to send "intelligent, active, and industrious" African American men to Kansas to civilize and colonize the territory as they had once done with Africa, alluding to the established systems and governance in Africa prior to European arrival.¹⁰⁴ Frederick Douglass shared his own plan in an article titled, "Our Plan for Making Kansas a Free State." He

¹⁰² "Douglas Vs. Douglas Settlement of Nebraska," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 27, 1854, no. 45.

¹⁰³ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*; no. 24.

¹⁰⁴ "Settlement of Kansas," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 29, 1854, no. 41.

urged the quick settlement of a large group of free African Americans from the North. Douglass argued that “There is nothing, confessedly, which slaveholders dread more than the presence of a numerous population of industrious, enlightened, and orderly Colored men.”¹⁰⁵ Douglass and his staff urged Northerners to move to Kansas as quickly as possible but specifically advocated for Black migration from the North to the West to combat the influence of enslavers in the new territories.

Moving to more radical language, Frederick Douglass shared his plan for Black emigration to Kansas and exclaimed, “Friends of Freedom! What say you to meeting the enemy on this vantage ground?”¹⁰⁶ Douglass implied that abolitionists and those against the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Slave Power should emigrate to Kansas to fight for freedom and liberty against pro-slavery supporters. Douglass understood the opportunity for violence to break out but still believed that African American emigration to Kansas would open new opportunities to people of color while working against the Slave Power and the pro-slavery faction. Frederick Douglass and the abolition movement in the mid to late 1850s were influenced to radicalize and take more violent action by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.

Other instances show that there was emigration to other places throughout the United States besides Kansas. The April 28th, 1854 edition of the “Cleanings of News” shared news reports on various topics. In this collection of news, the *Cincinnati Gazette* reported that there was emigration to Nebraska “already pushing up the Missouri River.”¹⁰⁷ Even though Kansas was more fiercely contented, emigration was still taking place to other territories in the West. The article “Resolutions Adopted at the Saratoga Convention,” mentioned the work going into organizing a system of colonization to Kansas and eventually the “Territories and unpeopled

¹⁰⁵ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 39.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ “Cleanings of News,” *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 28, 1854, no. 19.

regions exposed to the blight and scourge of Slavery.” alluding to the further spreading of anti-slavery people in new territories to prevent the spread of slavery.¹⁰⁸ Frederick Douglass and other abolitionists were hopeful that emigration would help prevent slavery in Kansas but also imagined that it could mean the same in other territories and parts of the country.

Encouraging other Action

Frederick Douglass utilized the press to spread abolitionist planning to combat the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 by calling for the growth of conventions and spreading the abolitionists' ideas. Conventions were a powerful means to share information with a large group and were employed by the abolition movement. The article, “To the Friends of Free Kansas in the United States,” printed on December 4th, 1857, called for a general convention in Cleveland, Ohio for those who supported Kansas becoming a free state regardless of political affiliation.¹⁰⁹ The “Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park” also asked that people from the free states and “Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Missouri who sympathize with these views” hold conventions in their respective states.¹¹⁰ Frederick Douglass encouraged the press to spread abolition planning and combat the Kansas-Nebraska Act. He wrote, “Let the press of the North take hold of this idea and press it upon the public mind, and Kansas need not be a slave State.”¹¹¹ Douglass and his staff wanted to promote different ways the North could contend with the Nebraska Bill and the Slave Power by ensuring Kansas became a free state.

Among these calls for action and new organizing for the abolition movement, Douglass and his staff used his newspaper and the Kansas-Nebraska Act to plan the radical future of

¹⁰⁸ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 36.

¹⁰⁹ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 51.

¹¹⁰ “The Nebraska Iniquity from the N. Y. Tribune the Voice of New City Great Anti-Nebraska Mass Meeting in the Park,” no. 23.

¹¹¹ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 39.

abolition that would become violent leading up to the Civil War. The article “Resolutions Adopted at the Saratoga Convention” argued that those who supported emigration to Kansas should “challenge those who say they are as much opposed to Slavery as we are but have never found yet a satisfactory opportunity to demonstrate their faith and their works.”¹¹² Another article called for citizens to ensure that “Slavery shall be rebuked by freedom, and that this iniquity shall not be consummated.”¹¹³ The article “Free Kansas Convention at Cleveland” asserted that the “day for compromise has certainly past” and “there is no time now to falter. Who will not sign the call.”¹¹⁴ These examples portrayed some of the increasing confrontational sentiment of the abolition rhetoric and messaging after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Conclusion

Frederick Douglass made use of his newspaper and platform to influence, organize, and mobilize the Northern public. Frederick Douglass and his newspaper staff used the Nebraska Bill as a key moment of change in the abolition movement and the anti-slavery movement more generally by fueling the outrage to produce action. Douglass changed his approach from a focus on civil disobedience and peaceful resistance to encourage more radical and violent action. He centered the growing Slave Power, the outrage over the unfair passage of the bill, the fear that slavery could defeat liberty, the humiliation of Northern traitors, the hope of slavery’s doom, and the outlet to unleash these feelings through future action. This new language energized Black and white Northerners soon after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act when violent battles took place in Kansas in the following years, known as Bleeding Kansas. Douglass’ focus on centering emigration to Kansas shows the popularity of the emigration debate amongst abolitionists.

¹¹² *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 36.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, no. 51.

Chapter 4

Black Emigration out of the United States

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was a leading voice in the conversation over Black emigration out of the United States. In the years leading up to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Shadd Cary continued to advocate in favor of Black emigration, but this only increased after the Act passed. Shadd Cary understood the signing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 into law as a reflection of the future of slavery and African Americans in the United States. Shadd Cary and other supporters of Black emigration to Canada felt that the Nebraska Bill illustrated the growing strength of the Slave Power and argued that the status of Black Americans would only get worse and emigration was the only way to gain rights prohibited for Black people in America. In the years surrounding the Act, Shadd Cary used her newspaper and wrote in favor of Black emigration to Canada and strongly opposed anti-emigrationists in the United States.

The Shadd Family

Abraham Shadd was a delegate at the first Colored Convention in Philadelphia in 1830 in response to an 1829 race riot in Ohio.¹¹⁵ African Americans continued to hold these conventions for seven decades and centered planning for Black educational, labor, and legal justice. Large groups attend these conventions to learn about Black life in the United States and Canada or hear from prominent speakers like Frederick Douglass or George T. Downing, a Black abolitionist and restaurant owner who advocated for increased employment standards for young African

¹¹⁵ “Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for Improving Their Condition in the United States; for Purchasing Lands; and for the Establishment of a Settlement in Upper Canada, Also, the Proceedings of the Convention with Their Address to Free Persons of Colour in the United States,” Colored Conventions Project Digital Records, accessed March 23, 2024, <https://omeka.coloredconventions.org/items/show/70>.

Americans.¹¹⁶ In this convention, the delegates discussed combating Black oppression in the United States through resettlement in Canada.¹¹⁷ Shadd Cary's education was a mix of formal schooling and learning through her family's involvement in the anti-slavery movement. It was also likely that Mary Ann Shadd Cary was exposed to these emigration ideas and met delegates because her home was close to the convention.¹¹⁸ Abraham Shadd became the vice president of the convention and shifted the focus away from emigration. The September 1831 edition of *The Liberator*, discussed the July 12, 1831, Colored Convention meeting on the issue of emigration and colonization in Africa. In the article, Abraham Shadd called for African Americans to focus on their ties to America and preparing and educating their children to become "useful and respectful citizens" instead of thinking about colonization.¹¹⁹ Mary Ann Shadd Cary's family's involvement in the abolition and anti-slavery movements informed her activism and her prominence in the abolition movement throughout her life even if her ideas differed from her father's.

The Publisher, Activist, and Newspaper Editor

Shadd Cary became a leading voice in conversations about Black Emigration out of the United States. After emigrating to Canada, Shadd Cary expanded her efforts pushing for Black emigration out of the United States by publishing a pamphlet in 1852 titled *A Plea for Emigration; Or Notes of Canada West, in Its Moral, Social, and Political Aspect with Suggestions respecting Mexico, West Indies, and Vancouver's Island for the Information of Colored Emigrants*. In *A Plea for Emigration*. Shadd Cary placed herself in the front of the

¹¹⁶ Gabrielle Foreman, Sarah Patterson, and Jim Casey, "Home," Introduction to the Colored Conventions Movement, February 25, 2021, <https://coloredconventions.org/introduction-movement/>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid

¹¹⁸ "Abraham Shadd," Mary Ann Shadd Cary's Herstory in the Colored Conventions, February 23, 2023, <https://coloredconventions.org/mary-ann-shadd-cary/making-a-delegate/abraham-shadd/>.

¹¹⁹ "A Voice from Delaware!" *Liberator*, September 24, 1831.

conversation over emigration that was growing in the Black Press and Colored Conventions. She encouraged Black emigration to Canada from the United States and emphasized Canada as a safe haven with countless opportunities for Black laborers.¹²⁰ Through her writing, Shadd Cary positioned herself as a central supporter of Black emigration.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary used the Black Press to influence conventions and conversations between activists. In 1853, she became the first Black woman to publish a newspaper with *The Provincial Freeman* in Canada. Shadd Cary and her writing placed her in important debates, organizations, and Black political ideology to help Black emigration efforts through movement, financial support, and thoughts of freedom.¹²¹ Through the Black Press, Shadd Cary tried to influence others to support emigration and increase conversations about emigration at conventions. She was able to utilize her writing as a tool to gain recognition as a woman amongst powerful white and Black anti-slavery leaders.

Shadd Cary was strategic in distancing herself from the messaging and writing in her newspaper. She understood that being a woman could push readers away from her newspaper and messaging. Samuel Ringgold Ward, a Black abolitionist and freeman, helped Shadd Cary publish the newspaper along with Reverend Alexander McArthur who were both named as the editors of the newspaper.¹²² While Mary Ann Shadd Cary was absent at the top of the newspaper header in place of Ward and McArthur's names, she remained heavily involved in all aspects of the newspaper. In 1854, Mary Ann Shadd Cary changed the newspaper to show her own name in the materhead instead of Ward and McArthur, but the paper received harsh criticism and Shadd Cary ultimately resigned the following year.¹²³ In her writing in the newspaper before resigning,

¹²⁰ "Introduction," Mary Ann Shadd Cary's Herstory in the Colored Conventions, March 7, 2023, <https://coloredconventions.org/mary-ann-shadd-cary/>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Jane Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary: The Black Press and Protest in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

¹²³ Ibid.

she used asterisks, her initials, and quoted others to distance herself from the arguments she was making, specifically ones that were controversial including advocating for women's rights and challenging political leaders and activists.¹²⁴ Shadd Cary was strategic in sharing her opinions without letting her gender or ideas stand in the way of her voice being spread.

Shadd Cary's activism spread across national boundaries in the United States and Canada. Discussing the abolition movement, American politics, and the state of Black rights. Mary Ann Shadd Cary used the Colored Conventions and the Black Press to spread her message. She advocated for Black emigrationists, Black women, and marginalized voices in the press while calling for Black activism globally, racial uplift, and Black women's political and economic empowerment.¹²⁵ Shadd Cary shared her criticisms when she thought that activists were wrong or institutions were not working to their capabilities. In January 1849, Shadd Cary wrote to Frederick Douglass, in a letter that was published in *The North Star* about the state of the Colored Conventions. She understood the many audiences of the Colored Conventions from African Americans to Black Canadians and argued that the conventions were not making "practical efforts" and that she "see no need for our distinctive meetings, if we do not do something. We should do more, and talk less."¹²⁶ Mary Ann Shadd Cary understood that some of her perspectives were controversial, especially coming from a woman, but she still defended her causes and ideas through her newspaper and by joining conversations about the conventions.

¹²⁴ Jim Casey, "Parsing the Special Characters of African American Print Culture: Mary Ann Shadd and the Limits of Search Algorithms." in *Against a Sharp White Background: Infrastructures of African American Print*, ed. Brigitte Fielder and Jonathan Senchyne, (University of Wisconsin Press, 2019), 109–28.

¹²⁵ "Colored Conventions Coverage in the Provincial Freeman," Mary Ann Shadd Cary's Herstory in the Colored Conventions, February 23, 2023, <https://coloredconventions.org/mary-ann-shadd-cary/cary-enters-black-organizing-debates/conventions-in-the-provincial-freeman/>.

¹²⁶ "Wilmington, Jan. 25, 1849," *The North Star*; March 23, 1849.

Shadd Cary and the Kansas-Nebraska Act

Mary Ann Shadd Cary left the United States in 1851, but remained involved in Black political conversations in the United States, especially after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. She still reported on the Nebraska Bill and its effects on Black Americans, calling for increased emigration efforts outside of the U.S. In an initial reaction to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, on June 3rd, 1854 a few days after the Act passed Shadd Cary discussed its passage in *The Provincial Freeman*. In the article that is signed off with an asterisk, Shadd Cary believed that the Nebraska Bill would “give life” to the Fugitive Slave Act and is evidence that slavery would spread to the North before the struggle over slavery would come to an end. She then goes on to say that she sympathizes with the people who think they have to stay in the U.S. because they were born there or to help enslaved people rather than leave and gain their own freedom, and claims that those who tell African Americans to stay in the country “are as guilty, we verily believe, as Batchelder or any other slaveholder or slave catcher in the land.”¹²⁷ Mary Ann Shadd Cary assumed that the Act was evidence that slavery would spread to Northern states. She used the Nebraska Bill to emphasize the need to emigrate to Canada and criticize anyone who told Black Americans to stay in the United States rather than gain freedom in Canada. Shadd Cary understood the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in anti-slavery supporters in the United States, specifically African Americans who would face the repercussions of slavery’s expansion.

Shadd Cary commented on American politics after leaving the U.S. and used her newspaper to speak to African Americans to encourage finding independence in Canada or other countries. The article titled *Arrivals* and credited to Issac Shadd was printed on July 26, 1856, in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The article shares that more and more people have been arriving in Canada. Issac Shadd claimed that the people looking to come to Canada were

¹²⁷ “Dr. Pennington’s Brothers Carried Back,” *Provincial Freeman*, June 3, 1854.

forced to leave because they had been living in America waiting for “national prejudice to them as a class, would be modified, and their religious and political privileges would be obtained, but they have been looking in vain.”¹²⁸ He argued that the Nebraska Bill destroyed Black Americans’ hope while attempting to make emigration seem like a better option for many African Americans. The article goes on to talk about the rise of immigration but continues to mention how the Fugitive Slave Act and the Kansas-Nebraska Act have corrupted the North and have forced Black Americans to confront the attacks on their rights and choose emigration over staying in the U.S.

Samuel Ringgold Ward wrote an editorial correspondence discussing the state of American slavery. He described that many oppose the Kansas-Nebraska Act and many believe it would not pass, but he also shared that more slave states have been added, the Nebraska Bill may be successful, the execution of the Fugitive Slave Act was horrible, and the Indiana Constitution and the Free Negro Enslaving Law in Illinois all show that the slavery issue in America is getting worse, not better. Ringgold Ward’s inclusion of the Nebraska Bill in this context shows that Black abolitionists thought of the Kansas-Nebraska Act as a large victory for pro-slavery supporters and American slavery.¹²⁹

While acting as the editor of the *Provincial Freeman*, Shadd Cary followed in her father’s footsteps including herself in the Colored Conventions movement. Although many of the speakers and delegates at the Conventions were men, women still had a large impact as fundraisers, speakers, and spectators.¹³⁰ Still, convention minutes undermine the impact of women in the Colored Conventions. Mary Shadd Cary shared this experience in the convention

¹²⁸ “Arrivals,” *Provincial Freeman*, July 26, 1856.

¹²⁹ Samuel Ringgold Ward, “Editorial Correspondence.” *Provincial Freeman*, Jun 10, 1854.

¹³⁰ “Women’s Roles,” The “Conventions” of Conventions: Political Rituals and Traditions, <https://coloredconventions.org/black-political-practices/womens-roles/>.

and its records. In 1855, Shadd Cary was involved in the National Conventions of Colored People that was held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

For a long time, historians thought that Shadd Cary did not speak at the conventions because she was not mentioned in the minutes, but historian Shirley J. Yee's book *Black Abolitionist Women* changed this narrative. Yee cites this *British Banner* article that highlights the hostility towards women at conventions but also shows Shadd Cary's involvement. There was a motion to have Mary Shadd Cary elected as a member, some men opposed this idea claiming that it was "not a Women's Rights Convention" but there were more votes in Shadd Cary's favor showing her involvement and status as a member of the convention. The *British Banner* article illuminated the feelings many held toward women in the conventions claiming that "Such Conferences are not the place for women" and argued that if Mary Shadd Cary "had in her bosom more of the male than of the female heart, she would have felt ashamed of her position and hastened to hide herself amid the soft obscurities of her own sex."¹³¹ Although Yee was able to show that Shadd Cary was involved in conventions, she did not do so without staunch opposition to her inclusion.

William J. Wilson, a writer, wrote to Frederick Douglass under his pen name Ethiop detailing his experience at the convention. He described Mary Ann Shadd Cary in kind terms and shared that she gave a speech at the convention and called it "one of the most convincing and telling speeches in favor of Canadian emigration" even though he did not support emigration.¹³² While there is not clear evidence what Shadd Cary said in this speech, it is telling that after the Act passed, emigration began to be seen as more convincing to those who had been against emigration to Canada.

¹³¹ Mary Ann Shadd Cary, "American Slavery," *British Banner*, Nov 20, 1855.

¹³² Ethiop, "Letter from Ethiop to Frederick Douglass," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Nov 09, 1855.

Emigration Campaign

In the years immediately after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Mary Ann Shadd Cary and *The Provincial Freeman* newspaper continued to campaign in favor of Black emigration to Canada. An article titled "... Frederick Douglass' Paper,' &c." with the beginning of the title covered. This article printed on June 3rd, 1854 mentioned that they had proposed a Bazaar, or an event to raise money for the *Provincial Freeman*, but Julia Griffiths, who worked in the office of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, announced a Bazaar in Toronto for the Toronto Anti-Slavery Society. The author questioned how a "wire-worker" of Douglass' paper who is opposed to emigration to Canada was holding a Bazaar in Canada. They asked if holding a Bazaar in Canada insinuated that the Toronto Anti-Slavery Society was "opposed to free colored people coming into the Province to settle. And are these the initiatory steps to a public endorsement of anti-emigration views?"¹³³ This author's writing begins to show the more head-on interaction between anti-Canadian emigration people like Frederick Douglass and pro-Canadian emigration supporters like Mary Ann Shadd Cary. The author went on to ask if Miss Griffiths would "leave a few coppers behind" to help support African Americans who emigrated to Canada from the United States. A bit after the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed in November of 1854, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, who was listed as the General Agent of the *Provincial Freeman*, was on her way to visit Michigan, Ohio, and possibly Pennsylvania to lecture about Black emigration to Canada. Soon after the Kansas-Nebraska Act Shadd Cary went to the U.S. to try to urge and persuade more African Americans to leave the country and go to Canada. After the Act passed Shadd Cary and other supporters of Black emigration out of America increased their efforts to make emigration easier and more popular.

¹³³ "Frederick Douglass Paper & etc." *Provincial Freeman*, Jun 03, 1854.

Stephen Myers, a freedman and abolitionist, wrote to Samuel Ringgold Ward about his travels. He claimed that the “majority are silently in favor of Emigration” and although they are in Buffalo, New York they “oppose the Anti-Emigration theory of the New York nation, but are frightened by the great names connected with it.”¹³⁴ Myers painted a picture that Black abolitionists in the U.S. specifically New York were scared to claim that they were in favor of emigration because of the strong anti-emigration force in New York. In July of 1854, Doctor Burke, sent a letter to the Editor of the *Provincial Freeman* sharing his views on the National Convention in Cleveland. He argued that emigration to Canada was better than emigrating to the West Indies. He also argued that the condition of African Americans in the U.S. “cannot be made worse than it is at present, but indefinitely better by emigrating to the Canadas.”¹³⁵ People who supported emigration to Canada tried their best to campaign in favor of Black emigration to combat the strength of the anti-emigration movement in America.

In the *Provincial Freeman*, Shadd Cary warned readers and African Americans about the future they will have in the U.S. In an article titled “Even-Handed Justice” printed on May 13th, 1854 the author questions how long the white population would continue its “despicable conduct to their free and slave population.” They claimed that they do not know but think based on the colonization efforts, specifically mentioning in Nebraska, that “it is a small matter.”¹³⁶ They continue to claim that the current “Yankees” don’t deserve credit from African Americans. Mary Ann Shadd Cary was trying to show that even the emigration efforts in the American West do not mean that things would change for the Black population in the U.S., she was arguing that these efforts did not warrant a thanks from African Americans to the white population. In another edition of the paper, the author shared that an old lady had emigrated to Canada and seemed to

¹³⁴ Stephen Myers, "Letter from Stephen Myers to Samuel Ringgold Ward." *Provincial Freeman*, May 20, 1854.

¹³⁵ Doctor Burke, "To the Editor of the "Provincial Freeman":" *Provincial Freeman*, Aug 12, 1854.

¹³⁶ "Even-Handed Justice," *Provincial Freeman*, May 13, 1854.

“be tired of the freedom they enjoyed. The old lady is more sensible than many younger people.”¹³⁷ Throughout the time of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Shadd Cary tried to persuade the Black audience in the United States of the opportunity associated with emigration out of the country.

Conclusion

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was a well-known abolitionist and used her platform to try to influence Black Americans to emigrate to Canada as she had. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 Shadd Cary continued her emigration campaign and urged people to leave the United States to gain new freedoms in Canada. She shared her worries over the status of African Americans in America and fears that they would never get the rights of Black people in Canada. Shadd Cary and others who supported Black emigration believed that the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 showed the growing strength of slavery and the worsening state of the United States. Mary Ann Shadd Cary’s support of Black emigration shows the differing states of the abolition movement and the effect of the Kansas-Nebraska Act on abolitionists in the U.S. and abroad.

¹³⁷ C, "Report on Emigration of Blacks into Canada West from the US," *Provincial Freeman*, Feb 14, 1857.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 is not linked to Black abolitionists and Black intellectual history despite the strong response to the legislation. By understanding the Black response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, we can dispel the myth that African Americans were narrowly focused on the present state of Black people and were not looking into the future. Black abolitionists understood the importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act as illustrated through the varying and widespread conversations, speeches, and articles concerning the Act.

African Americans emphasized the importance of the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act for all Americans white or Black. They reinforced the shared identity understood between African Americans in the North and those who were enslaved to illustrate how the expansion of slavery was detrimental to the Black Americans in the North. They also intertwined conversations about the Nebraska Bill and the Fugitive Slave Act, depicting the shared impact and danger both pieces of legislation posed to African Americans. In newspapers, abolitionists, Frederick Douglass in particular, made rhetorical choices to challenge white apathetic Northerners to realize the growth of the Slave Power and the danger to their own rights. Through widespread reporting about the nature of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, African Americans reignited the debate over the expansion of slavery and Black emigration.

Frederick Douglass held a strong opposition to Black colonization and Black emigration out of the United States. Douglass was even enraged by Abraham Lincoln's support of colonization during their first meeting even describing his ideals as hypocritical. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, Douglass held steadfast to his anti-colonization

beliefs and encouraged Black emigration to the West, specifically the Kansas territory. On various occasions, Douglass radicalized his language to encourage Northerners, specifically Black Northerners to emigrate to Kansas prepared to fight for the anti-slavery cause. These messages show Douglass' hope for a peaceful end to slavery diminished as he became a more adamant supporter of taking whatever means to end slavery.

While some Black abolitionists echoed Douglass' beliefs, Mary Ann Shadd Cary argued for Black emigration out of the United States. Shadd Cary encouraged Black Americans to leave America and go to places like Canada where she had received new privileges and rights. She went so far as to question how African Americans could stay in the U.S. any longer. After the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Shadd Cary led conversations concerning the eventual spread of slavery to the North urging African Americans to leave the U.S. to gain new freedoms while demonizing those who encouraged Black Americans to stay in the country. Shadd Cary's support for Black emigration out of the U.S. emphasized the growing concern that slavery would continue to grow in the United States and eventually spread to every border.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 greatly impacted Black conversations about freedom, abolition, and emigration. It helped African Americans reach out to white Northerners but also gave way to debates over Black emigration and the future of African Americans in the United States. Through examining Black responses to the Nebraska Bill, it becomes evident that African Americans were highly concerned and focused on their future and the future of America. Despite African Americans' response in the aftermath of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, this connection has not been fully understood by historians. Understanding Black conversations surrounding the Kansas-Nebraska Act is an essential but missing area of Black intellectual history that should be

fully explored to understand Black ideas about their place in America in the face of the emigration debates.

The future of Black intellectual history should shift to pay more attention to the ways that Black Americans engaged with Congressional legislation that we imagine as “white” problems. This exploration can unlock new understandings of the ways Black abolitionists interacted with white politicians or how they chose support for certain candidates. This research could also help acknowledge the impact of Black intellectual dialogue about congressional legislation within the abolition movement. There is still more to uncover about the relationship African Americans had with the Kansas-Nebraska Act and other legislation, but this research can shift conversations from linking laws to certain audiences.

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