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The Rhetorical Fragmentation of the Abolitionist Cause Post-Emancipation:
A Case Study of Abolitionist Debate Surrounding Voting Rights in Reconstruction America

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses the fragmentation of the abolitionist movement after the end of the American Civil War and after the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution realized the movement's goal of ending the institution of slavery. During Reconstruction, abolitionists suffered differences of opinions and competing priorities that ultimately resulted in the loss of the momentum they had amassed by *legally* ending slavery. This thesis constitutes a case study of the debate surrounding the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment amongst abolitionists, attempting to untangle the moral and political complexities that the likes of Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony had to reconcile as they sought to advance voting rights and equality. While highlighting the fundamental differences of opinion on the best way to proceed with respect to the Fifteenth Amendment and analyzing these separate arguments, I maintain that both sides (e.g., the American Woman Suffrage Association/Douglass vs. the National Woman Suffrage Association/Stanton/Anthony) were driven by a shared commitment to challenging oppression and advancing the rights of marginalized communities. They recognized Reconstruction brought forth a newfound sense of urgency—an opportune moment they strove to embrace. At the same time, the project also identifies the tensions and disagreements these speakers faced on questions of race and gender. The final chapter and conclusion of this project offer Frances E.W. Harper's rhetoric of coalition-building as a counterpoint to the racial prejudices stoked by Stanton and Anthony. Harper's distinct position represented a path many former abolitionists refused to consider and a model for future movements similarly torn over how to proceed in the face of diverging priorities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

While previously united by the common goal of ending the institution and practice of slavery in the United States, the Abolitionist movement fragmented after the Thirteenth Amendment. That Amendment's passage—following its approval by Congress and ratification by the requisite number of states in 1865—realized the movement's core objective. By the end of the Civil War, millions of previously enslaved African Americans from across the country were now legally free. Abolitionists—and the country—divided on the question of the extent to which African Americans should now enjoy equality. Some radical Republicans believed African Americans should now stand as equals and that the federal government was primarily responsible for accomplishing as much, whereas more moderate and conservative Republicans (as well as much of the country's white population) failed to adopt such an egalitarian position (Wilson, *Reconstruction Desegregation Debate* 10). Ultimately, people who agreed in principle to end slavery now had broad differences of opinion on how to proceed.

After the end of the Civil War, abolitionists disagreed on the necessity of their role moving forward. Some subscribed to what rhetorician Kirt Wilson describes as the “general consensus” among radical Republicans and the rest of the country at the time: that “African Americans remained, as a race, inferior” (*Reconstruction Desegregation Debate* 10). Others refused to compromise on long-held beliefs in absolute, material equality, persisting in their declarations that all persons deserved—and ought to have at that moment—the rights, privileges, and protections enshrined in the country's founding documents.

One particular split between two prominent abolitionists may serve to encapsulate this assertion. Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison were eminent figures in the antebellum abolitionist movement. Both fervent abolitionists had long advocated for the complete abolition of the institution of slavery. However, after the Civil War, Douglass argued that slavery had not “died an honest death” because its destruction resulted from military advantage on behalf of the Union rather than from the mortification and redemption of white Americans. The purpose of the abolitionist movement, according to Douglass, was the emancipation and the elevation of African Americans. Even with emancipation now achieved, Douglass was resolute that the task of elevation still remained; a task which now required pursuing the expansion of voting rights to African Americans, a group whom the government had historically disenfranchised from the entire political system. Garrison, while not necessarily opposed to the idea, did not feel as strong of an urgency to secure the right to vote for African Americans, arguing that emancipation and elevation were one in the same (Gamber 361). Speaking before an 1865 meeting of the American Anti-slavery Society, Garrison declared, “My vocation, as an Abolitionist, thank God, is ended.” Douglass responded, “Slavery is not abolished until the Black man has the ballot. While the Legislatures of the South retain the right to pass laws making any discrimination between black and white, slavery lives there” (quoted in Gates 25). This marked a significant rift between Garrison and Douglass. The answer to the question of ‘how to proceed from here’ lacked the consensus previously seen. Ultimately, Douglass continued to advocate for universal suffrage and a number of other causes thereafter. In the words of historian Henry Louis Gates, Douglass knew the “only real way to guarantee the gains of Reconstruction ... would be through the ballot box,” recognizing suffrage as a prerequisite for true freedom (25).

Therefore, many abolitionists saw the opportune moment that Reconstruction provided for the advancement of their other interests beyond solely abolishing the practice of slavery. They used their own priorities, in response to the situation that was handed down to them by the country's leaders and Reconstruction Congress, to chart their next goals for advancement and equality. However, Congress's decisions (e.g., the decision to craft a Fifteenth Amendment without protections for women) introduced new pressures for the once-allied abolitionists. Some members of the former abolitionist movement adopted competing priorities, leading them to pursue divergent (and sometimes mutually opposed) rhetorical paths. At the top of these competing priorities was perhaps the issue of suffrage, which became the most bitter source of division amongst former abolitionists.

Historical Context

The roughly twelve years immediately following the end of the American Civil War brought a period of unprecedented political and social change, one that we now commonly refer to as "Reconstruction." The task before the country's leaders at the beginning of Reconstruction was not one to be taken lightly. Rather, Reconstruction leaders had the demanding and formidable task of restoring the Union, which required rebuilding the South, reintegrating the former Confederate states into the Union, and addressing the need to provide civil rights and political representation for newly freed African Americans. Accordingly, Reconstruction was—and remains today—a highly complex and controversial period in American history.

The antebellum period before the Civil War was characterized by the debate over abolitionism, a broad movement to bring an end to slavery in the United States. The abolitionist

movement materialized from the commitment of a wide range of individuals and groups to end slavery. Abolitionists attempted to persuade others using moral- and religion-based arguments, political action, and civil disobedience. Abolitionists believed that slavery was a moral evil and that it was fundamentally incompatible with the principles of democracy and human rights. Many abolitionists believed that their cause was one which they had a prevailing and serious responsibility to address (McPherson 3-4). This common interest in ending slavery became a position around which abolitionists of all walks of life could unite. Ideographs (i.e., symbols representative of and constitutive of a wider set of ideological assumptions; see McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’: A Link between Rhetoric and Ideology”) of justice, equality, and individual freedom were prevalent in abolitionist rhetoric. Many abolitionists believed in the power of the individual and that their efforts could bring about real change to make the world more equal and more just. Moreover, abolitionists believed that education and knowledge were essential tools for creating this change for which they strived, and they often focused on educating the public about the realities of slavery and the importance of abolition. Thus, the agreement of abolitionists that slavery was fundamentally wrong and needed to end, and their subsequent education and discussion efforts, thrust the question of slavery into the public field.

Throughout the abolition debate, the States found themselves divided on the question of immediate and universal emancipation of all enslaved persons. And, due in part to their convictions on this matter which had arisen to be in the eyes of politicians and the public alike, the States entered what became a four-year civil war. This Civil War was the greatest existential threat the country had endured up to this point in its nearly century-long tenure. Coming out of the war victorious was no easy feat for the North, but it soon became clear that simply winning the war would be only the beginning of a long, arduous process to restore the Union.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Following the end of the Civil War, the wishes of abolitionists came true as slavery ended in the United States by virtue of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment. Yet after the formal end of slavery, abolitionists struggled among themselves to interpret their successes, convince people of the continued importance of supporting further civil rights causes, and identify common goals going forward. The problem of maintaining momentum after a major movement accomplishment is not unique to this situation—other equality movements (and, more broadly, social movements) can experience this, too.

Social movements believe they are a righteous force “with the moral obligation to act in the name of, and for the good of, the people” (Stewart et al. 15). As such, they interpret the existing conditions (the “environment”) and they try to convince people of the legitimacy of their beliefs. However, in doing so, social movements inherently encounter opposition as they attempt to persuade people. Social movements often face great challenges, and some are eventually able to achieve that for which they fought. Once this is achieved, though, there is a struggle to maintain the movement.

Through analysis of social movements, there appears to be persuasive functions that are “indispensable to the success and maintenance of social movements” (Stewart et al. 49). The first is how social movements must transform perceptions of social reality. The authors quote William Gamson that social movements inherently “struggle over the definition and construction of social reality” (50). In order to convince people on the merits of their beliefs, leaders of social movements must construct their own perceptions of the past, present, and future and attempt to convey these perceptions to others, with the hope that these perceptions will be taken on as their

own. The second function that social movements use is altering perceptions of the leaders/supporters themselves. The authors explain how many social movement supporters see themselves as “innocent, blameless victims of oppression,” with one of the examples they gave being how white abolitionists contended they were victims of pro-slavery mobs in the North and of brutal slave owners in the South (Stewart et al. 59). Shaping how the supporters and leaders are perceived plays an important role in their ability to be effectively persuasive. The third function of social movements is prescribing courses of action. This pertains to the ‘who,’ ‘what,’ and ‘how’ of how social movements intend for their goals to be achieved.

In identifying the ‘who,’ the authors explain the importance of ideographs, saying, “ideographs link rhetoric and ideology” (Stewart et al. 72). Michael McGee contends that ideographs are “the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology,” one that in using the rhetor “presumptuously suggest[s] that each member of a[n] [audience] will see as a gestalt every complex nuance in them” (7). Ideographs are symbols that represent larger ideas or concepts directly and carry a persuasive force that goes beyond the mere communication itself, in the literal sense of the words shared. By employing ideographs, a rhetor can shape and mold the audience's perception, invoking shared understandings and cultural associations to sway opinions and garner support. Further, ideographs serve as powerful tools for constructing and promoting ideological frameworks as they allow for the consolidation of complex and nuanced ideology into a symbol which—even when used solely—can elicit strong emotional and persuasive responses, making use of the collective consciousness and memory of an audience.

The fourth and final essential function that social movements need to be successful is finding methods by which the social movement can be sustained. Social movements tend to last for many years, over which time the environment in which they operate may change drastically.

As such, social movements must change, too. Furthermore, social movements need to justify setbacks and delays that occur along the way, and they may also need to redefine their immediate goals should progress be made (Stewart et al. 80). Social movements do this by maintaining viability and visibility. Importantly, the authors explain how some social movements are ironically “too successful too soon,” in that they attain some of their goals but then lose continued support because the cause seems less urgent (Stewart et al. 82). Thus, social movements are tasked with maintaining a sense of urgency and relevance among their followers.

Rhetorical criticism is the method I have used to write this thesis. Approaching this thesis as a rhetorical critic is what sets this apart from a history paper. While the historical context of the texts/primary documents is important to our understanding of Reconstruction, a complete understanding of the era requires interpreting how discourses (in the form of primary texts) constructed meaning through rhetoric.

Rhetorical critics may rely heavily on history to connect ideas within their arguments. This is because understanding the situation in which discourse occurs is necessary to our understanding of the text/speech itself. In fact, in “The Rhetorical Situation,” Lloyd F. Bitzer observes that rhetoric is situational. Bitzer writes how “a rhetorical situation must exist as a necessary condition of rhetorical discourse, just as a question must exist as a necessary condition of an answer” (6). Bitzer defines a rhetorical situation as comprised of three constituents: an exigence (“an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be”); an audience (“a rhetorical audience consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change”); and constraints (parts of the situation that “have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence”).

Bitzer advances that each rhetorical situation invites a response, specifically a “fitting response, a response that fits the situation” (10). According to Bitzer, the role of a rhetorical critic then becomes to: (1) evaluate whether a rhetor made a fitting response, and (2) deduce the rhetorical effectiveness as determined by the situational constraints. In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” philosopher and critic Jacques Derrida further describes how critics should pay close attention to the texts they are studying, avoid formulaic analyses, and bring their own unique perspectives to bear on their analyses. Another important insight from Derrida is that critics should approach texts with humility—“A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible,” so we should be cautious to believe that we have fully understood all there is to understand from any particular text (Derrida 63). Derrida also encourages critics to take positions that go against the status quo—that change the narrative or our understanding rather than simply adding to that which we already know or believe.

For rhetorical critics, it is essential to remember that text and context exist in a dynamic relationship to one another. Kirt Wilson further comments on the role that the rhetorical situation / context should play in a critic’s analysis. Wilson argues that we should see “context as a product of hermeneutic and rhetorical behavior and not a static historical situation in which the more important work of oratory transpires” (“Racial Contexts of Public Address” 221). Essentially, Wilson proposes that contexts are “dynamic” — that “there is no text without context and no context without text” (“Racial Contexts of Public Address” 213). That is, texts and context are dependent on one another; there is a relationship between both that leads to their continuous evolution.

It is also imperative for critics to transcend mere description and engage in constructing compelling arguments. Wayne Brockriede argues that “useful rhetorical criticism ... must

function as an argument” (165). Brockriede believes that critics must go beyond simply describing (i.e., “narrat[ing] one or more rhetorical experiences ... without making a claim”; contains no “inferential leap”) (169). Rather, critics must make claims—and provide the reasoning and evidence they considered when making their judgments. When a critic “advances a significant argument about a concrete rhetorical experience,” this allows the reader to confront the critic’s work “usefully,” perhaps by challenging the reasoning of the critic (174).

Furthermore, an approach to rhetorical criticism emerges that seeks to reconcile the tension between strict textual analysis and contextual analysis. James Jasinski provides an approach to criticism that somewhat bridges the divide between a strict textual analysis (that for which Michael Leff would argue) and analysis using contextual factors (that for which Michael McGee would argue). Jasinski calls this approach “conceptually oriented criticism,” which he describes as “proceed[ing] more through a process of *abduction* which might be thought of as a back and forth tracking movement between the text and the concept or concepts that are being investigated simultaneously” (256). Ultimately, Jasinski believes that conceptually oriented criticism would best look like “the constant interaction of careful reading and rigorous conceptual reflection.” Like Derrida, Jasinski also believes that criticism should not be done methodologically. Jasinski writes, “Methodologically driven criticism generally proceeds through a process of deduction: a general method is applied to a specific case or object” (256). Jasinski sees this almost formulaic approach to be inconsistent with his belief that rhetoric is not deductive.

For the purposes of this thesis, I approach rhetorical criticism with a nuanced understanding: I recognize the importance of considering the historical situation in which this discourse existed, and I account for the dynamic nature that context inherently plays when it

comes to our analysis of text and speech. I employ Brockriede's emphasis on the necessity of constructing persuasive arguments backed by reasoning and evidence and Jasinski's endorsement of a dynamic interaction between textual analysis and conceptual reflection. I hold that, in the context of Reconstruction, such a nuanced approach to rhetorical criticism becomes particularly relevant. This approach offers a framework to navigate the diverse perspectives, tensions, and competing priorities inherent in this period and how they shaped the discourse I analyze.

Thesis Preview

I now return to the brief interaction between Douglass and Garrison, with which I began this thesis, as I believe their disagreement casts light on the basis of the argument which I will explicate in subsequent chapters. It appears that former abolitionists, when tasked with adjusting to a post-slavery United States, struggled to convalesce around a single opinion on what their role would be moving forward. Individual abolitionists seem to have been attracted to different foci as they navigated their Reconstruction lives, and their fundamental differences of opinion (e.g., Douglass and Garrison's disagreement on the continued role of abolitionists and, in a greater sense, the degree of true equality that should be enjoyed by African Americans) disallowed any attempt for Reconstruction leaders to repurpose the momentum gained by support of abolitionism into subsequent movements for equality.

After the Civil War, abolitionists found tension amongst themselves when they began to determine their role in Reconstruction America. Some abolitionists, such as Garrison, absolved themselves of a continued duty. These abolitionists believed that they had already done *enough* in securing the definite end of slavery in the United States, believing that perhaps their

commitment to such ideals of ‘equality’ and ‘justice’ no longer demanded them to pursue further work on behalf of African Americans in Reconstruction America. Others did not believe that their work was done. In this thesis, I explore one priority (of many) that select former abolitionists adopted and around which they decided to regroup: the issue of voting rights. This analysis forms a case study, serving to offer an example of how differing opinions and competing priorities manifested among the abolitionists as they tried to repurpose the momentum gained by support of abolitionism.

In the antebellum United States, it was not uncommon for supporters of abolition to also be supporters of women’s suffrage, and vice versa. Abolitionist Frederick Douglass, the only known African American signatory of the Seneca Falls Convention’s Declaration of Sentiments, was an ardent supporter of women’s rights. In fact, his speeches before the Convention recounting his enslavement and his experiences with injustice were instrumental in bolstering support for and helping attendees recognize the essential nature of suffrage (McMillen 94-95). Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, perhaps most well known for their work fighting for women’s suffrage, were also key supporters of abolition. As such, following the end of the Civil War and the ratification of laws making slavery illegal, one—seemingly logical—turn that abolitionists made was convalescing around movements for suffrage.

Voting rights were seen as a material issue for abolitionists following the end of the Civil War.¹ The reinvigorated support for advancing voting rights, though, soon diverged as broad differences of opinion emerged as to what the suffrage movement would look like. Whereas

¹ With the ratification of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments respectively ending slavery and granting citizenship to all persons born in the United States, there was suddenly an influx of persons for whom a right to vote could be sought. With citizenship, though, the right to vote did not follow immediately. The Constitution left the issue of voting to the States; no federal ‘right to vote’ was bestowed upon those to whom the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship (McMillen 162).

abolitionists pursuing the advancement of voting rights were in agreement with the notion that universal suffrage was necessary, the timeline that the suffrage movement would take became a point of contention. Abolitionist Wendell Phillips saw the legislature's passage of Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments as indicative of a Congress whose "primary concern was the condition of former slaves" (McMillen 161). Phillips and other like-minded abolitionists supported pursuing the extension of voting rights to African American men first—with the enfranchisement of women and universal suffrage being something to accomplish at a later time. Phillips declared, "This hour belongs to the negro," aligning his support with securing the rights and freedoms of former slaves at the expense of women's rights for the time being (quoted in McMillen 161). The Republican-controlled Congress ultimately chose to adopt a similar goal for the national agenda. The prevailing Republican belief was that enfranchising Black men could provide them with a significant political advantage in the South, where a large proportion of the county's Black population lived and also where Democrats had long dominated the political landscape (McMillen 162). Republicans banked on Black men to vote Republican—seeing that they were the party that championed abolition and the preservation of the Union—and provide Republicans with their first real chance to maintain a foothold in the South.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony did not subscribe to this approach to suffrage, rejecting on moral grounds the expediency enshrined by the Republicans' support of suffrage only for Black men. Directly responding to Phillips' claim, Stanton wrote, "This is the Nation's hour. This is the hour to settle what are the rights of a citizen of the Republic; and upon the right settlement of that question depends the life of this nation" (Stanton and Anthony 28). Stanton and Anthony saw universal suffrage as necessary to the success of the country's political system. Frederick Douglass initially agreed with Stanton and Anthony; however, he chose to

align his support behind the proposed Fifteenth Amendment, which would extend suffrage to all men on the basis of race, but notably not sex. Douglass—after observing the urgent need for Black rights and the momentum amassing from broad Republican support for the enfranchisement of Black men—adopted the pragmatic approach of supporting the Fifteenth Amendment. On the other hand, Stanton and Anthony remained firm and intransigent, uncompromising on their belief in the necessity of universal suffrage but also going down the dangerous (and perhaps resentful and envious, on their part) path of arguing that women deserve the right to vote more and should be afforded it first if the right to vote could not be offered to all on the basis of race and sex simultaneously.

Chapter 2

Egalitarian Arguments from Stanton and Anthony

When Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were introduced in 1851, they “initiat[ed] a friendship and working partnership that would last a century.” While each had distinct personalities, their styles complemented each other: “Elizabeth’s exuberance, optimism, and passion were balanced by Susan’s self-discipline, independence, and tireless dedication” (McMillen 109). Stanton and Anthony were preeminent leaders of the antebellum women’s rights movement. Both long harbored a fundamental belief in the necessity of equality on the basis of sex. Throughout the late 1840s and the 1850s, the pair advocated for their goals through conventions and speaking arrangements. They viewed suffrage as a critical waypoint for achieving the equality they so fervently desired. In an 1854 address to delegates gathering to revise New York’s constitution, Stanton made the following argument for women’s suffrage:

We demand the full recognition of all our rights as citizens of the Empire State. We are persons; native, free-born citizens; property-holders, tax-payers; yet we are denied the exercise of our right to the elective franchise. We support ourselves, and, in part, your schools, colleges, churches, your poor-houses, jails, prisons, the army, the navy, the whole machinery of government, and yet we have no voice in your councils. We have every qualification required by the constitution, necessary to the legal voter, but the one of sex. (quoted in McMillen 123).

Belief in the inherent equality of the sexes was nothing new for Stanton. The Declaration of Sentiments, introduced by Stanton at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1847, proclaimed that “all

men *and women* are created equal” (emphasis added; quoted in McMillen 91). However, as history shows, these pleas for suffrage fell on deaf ears and failed to persuade state legislatures.

The advent of the Civil War ultimately ushered in a period of profound setback for movements for women’s rights. Much to the dismay of Stanton and Anthony, support for women’s rights dissipated during the war, as “women on both sides of the conflict were essential to the war effort,” working as nurses, teachers, etc. (McMillen 151). In the words of fellow suffragist and abolitionist Martha Wright, “When the nation’s whole heart and soul are engrossed with this momentous crisis . . . it is useless to speak if nobody will listen” (quoted in McMillen 149). Accordingly, there were no national conventions for women’s rights held during the war.

However, coming out of the four-year war, Stanton and Anthony took advantage of the heated discussions arising from the chaos of early Reconstruction to reinvigorate support for women’s rights. Stanton, speaking in the wake of the war’s end, stated that the war had “unsettled all our government foundations,” and she sought to secure justice for women as the country attempted to reconcile and reconsolidate itself (quoted in McMillen 160). According to historian Sally G. McMillen, “Having done so much to support the Union war effort and the antislavery cause, reformers [such as Stanton] believed that elected officials would at last reward them with the rights they had been demanding since Seneca Falls” (160). This was not the case, though. Prevailing sentiment amongst the Republicans soon identified African Americans as the group for whom the Reconstruction Congress would seek further equality. In 1865, Republican Congressman (and former Civil War General) James Garfield argued that “each man has a right to be heard on all matters relating to himself . . . Let us not commit ourselves to the absurd and senseless dogma that the color of the skin shall be the basis of suffrage. Let suffrage be extended to all men of proper age, regardless of color” (“Ulysses S. Grant”). Stanton did not subscribe to

this call for the *exclusive* enfranchisement of freed Black men, declaring that “no country has had or ever will have peace until every citizen has a voice in the government. Now let us try universal suffrage” (quoted in McMillen 160). Stanton would not rest until suffrage was a right afforded to all.

Need for Universal Suffrage

Stanton and Anthony frequently tied universal suffrage with the idea of a republican form of government. Stanton held that the world had never yet seen a “genuine Republic,” noting that she believed such would require unrestricted suffrage afforded to all its citizens (Stanton and Anthony 26). To achieve the success of a representative democracy, Stanton and Anthony contended that the right to vote was inherently necessary. And Stanton particularly was seldom silent on the shortcomings of the implementation of republicanism in America, noting whole classes of citizens to whom the right to vote was denied. Stanton viewed suffrage as “the great lever by which you can obtain justice.” Therefore, by affording suffrage to all citizens, a government would be ensuring that “every avenue of education and every avenue of work [would] be freely opened” (Stanton and Anthony 163). Stanton saw the lack of suffrage for disenfranchised classes in America as indicative of intrinsic failure of Republicanism in practice. Before an 1868 meeting of the Working Woman’s Association in New York, Stanton declared, I tell you that the ballot is the foundation of every right. And you will never get work upon fair and equal terms with men until you possess the right to suffrage. A disenfranchised class is always a degraded class. The moment we have the ballot, men will see the importance of educating us. (Stanton and Anthony 163).

Universal suffrage, or the lack thereof, became a critical point in Stanton and Anthony's arguments. Believing suffrage was the crux of realizing the true opportunity afforded by a representative democracy, Stanton and Anthony demanded suffrage for all persons. Anthony regarded persons without the right to the ballot as "powerless...simply because they are without the ballot," and she therefore demanded that the ballot be given to all, regardless of sex or color (Stanton and Anthony 173).

Stanton and Anthony not only aired their arguments for universal suffrage before women's conventions, but also importantly before conventions of Black men. Speaking before the New York State Colored Men's Convention in October 1868, Anthony pleaded to the attendees that "now is the time to establish the government of our State, as well as the nation, on the *one Democratic Republican principle—the consent of the whole people*" (Stanton and Anthony 184).

Gender Equality

At the same New York State Colored Men's Convention, though, Anthony contended that "the grievances of colored women are a thousand fold greater than those of colored men," seeing Black women as the most disenfranchised class in America, suffering the most injustice. Anthony further asked the Black men at the convention "to remember the women by your side," meaning Black women, "and secure to them all you claim for yourselves" (Stanton and Anthony 185). This plea epitomized Stanton and Anthony's commitment to equality, but perhaps more so to gender equality specifically.

In a lecture on Reconstruction before a crowd in Brooklyn, New York in 1867, Stanton declared,

The essential element of government is equality; an idea that came not to bring peace on earth but a sword; an idea at war with its antagonist, caste or class; from the beginning, one ceaseless protest of the human soul against all authority and oppression, against all inequalities of rank, against despotisms, and monarchies and slaveholding Republics. In the panorama of the past, behold the mighty nations that have risen one by one; but all fell. Behold their gorgeous palaces, broad temples, pyramids, and thrones, all crumbled together to dust. Every crowned head in Europe, at this very hour, trembles upon his throne. And see upon this Western continent, the people divided, distracted, our leaders fallen, our scouts lost in the wilderness, our once inspired prophets blind and dumb. Why have the mighty fallen? Why have these nations of the earth perished one by one? Equality, the vital principle of national life was wanting in all alike. What sound health is to the physical man, equality is to the government. There is no life or peace possible without it. (Stanton and Anthony 27).

Stanton saw her commitment to the success of America and its democratic ideals as akin to a commitment to equality, attributing the downfall of nations to a lack of equality for all persons. And on the premise that women, on the sole basis of their gender, fail to share equal opportunity to participate in government and secure liberty for themselves, Stanton and Anthony dissent to the institution of government at the hands of men.

In the same 1867 lecture, Stanton quoted the opening of the New York state constitution as reading, “We, the people of this State, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, in order to secure its blessings, do establish this Constitution,” with the first section of the first article then

reading, “No member of this State shall be disfranchised, nor deprived of any of the rights secure to any citizen thereof” (Stanton and Anthony 29). Stanton took great issue to the hypocrisy that the implementation of this constitution by the “white male citizen” espouses. In highlighting this particular “inconsistenc[y] and absurdit[y],” Stanton raised how women remained wholly disenfranchised, a stark contradiction to the “grand, broad, liberal, comprehensive enunciation” of equality in suffrage that the constitution demanded (Stanton and Anthony 30).

In a written “Appeal for Equal Suffrage,” signed by both Stanton and Anthony, the Woman’s Suffrage Association of America raised how “woman is taxed equally with man on her property and earnings, and held amenable to every law; that she is punished by fines, imprisonments, and death,” and yet her right to suffrage remained unseen (Stanton and Anthony 188). And, in response to the allegation that perhaps women do not wish to vote (e.g., that they wish for men to represent their interests on their behalf), the appeal further claimed it a “satire and slander of both [women’s] intellectual and moral sense to say that under such circumstances [women] do[] not wish to vote” (189). The argument that women faced the same taxes and laws as men but did not share the same rights, namely when it came to suffrage, became a critical rebuttal to the propagation of ideas and laws that extended the rights of man before the rights of women were equally obtained. This hypocrisy irritated Stanton and Anthony to no end.

Call for Simultaneous Extension of Voting Rights

Amidst debate surrounding the proposal of Northern Republicans to enfranchise Black men, Stanton and Anthony constructed a narrative criticizing the hypocrisy arising from Northern Republicans’ desire to reconstruct the Southern states “as long as their own

constitutions are not purged of all invidious distinctions among their citizens” (Stanton and Anthony 26). Stanton viewed the duty of their Northern representatives as one “not to secure female suffrage, or colored suffrage, of African suffrage, or Chinese suffrage, but *citizen suffrage*” (emphasis added; Stanton and Anthony 72). Their duty became to determine whether suffrage “is a Natural Right or a gift of Society” (72). To Stanton and Anthony, the Northern desire to shape the affairs of the Southern states when they themselves lacked the true degree of equality to which their constitutions reportedly ascribed was the epitome of hypocrisy. How dare the Republicans propose to go into Southern states—educating them on suffrage and proposing “manhood suffrage”—when their women at home lacked suffrage.

Anthony, returning to an appeal for Republicans to act as their country’s government and founding principles required of them, stated how “Republicanism is either a lie, or is the truth. If it is the truth, then it should be applied to all, without distinction” (Stanton and Anthony 144). Anthony contended that disenfranchisement was a “far greater crime” than slavery, for those who “have the ballot in their hands [could never] have been enslaved” (144). In denying suffrage to women—or at least in not trying to afford suffrage to all—Stanton and Anthony saw this as “the violation of the great fundamental principles of Republicanism” (144).

Ultimately, Stanton and Anthony wholeheartedly advocated for the extension of voting rights on the basis of both gender and race. Anything else, they believed, would be an egregious blow to the face of the country’s democratic system of government. In a June 1868 speech to the Union League, Anthony remarked,

If you ask for the ballot-box for the black man, demand it also for women. Either the ballot-box is a right or it is not. If it be an inalienable right, it is as much the right of the

black woman as it is of the white. And you can't ask it for any class of men, without asking it for all the women who are deprived of it. (Stanton and Anthony 145).

The idea of giving suffrage to all men before women was incompatible with their view of the ineffable need for further equality for women on the basis of gender.

Chapter 3

Arguments for Immediate Enfranchisement from Douglass

Coming out of the Civil War, Frederick Douglass knew that the legal end of slavery would simply not be enough to ensure the true freedom and liberty that he believed should be afforded to all persons. Douglass maintained that the Civil War brought forth “great changes [and] great progress,” but he was firm in his assertion that “there must be a great deal more,” that “much more yet remains to do” (Douglass 53). Douglass clearly understood the relationship between the freedom afforded by the abolition of slavery and the long-lasting freedom that the right to vote would secure (Gates 24). Douglass believed that “slavery is not abolished until the black man has the ballot,” for he feared that “while the Legislatures of the South retain the right to pass laws making any discrimination between black and white, slavery still lives there” (Douglass 83). Slavery may have been *legally* brought to an end in America by virtue of the Thirteenth Amendment, but Douglass predicted that ‘slavery’ (i.e., the ownership and control of African Americans at the hands of white Americans) would persist through the political systems established in the country. For example, Douglass believed that “while they [white men] retained in their hands the power to exclude us [Black men] from political rights, they [white men] could have reduced us [Black men] to a condition similar to slavery,” only this time under some other name (Douglass 85).

The only way to avoid this fate, according to Douglass, was to enfranchise Black men—obtain the right to vote for Black men, thus allowing them to determine their own political future. Douglass, then, began advocating for “the immediate, unconditional, and universal enfranchisement of the black man, in every State of the Union” (Douglass 62). Douglass argued

that “ours is a peculiar government, based on a peculiar idea, and that idea is universal suffrage” (63). Douglass appealed to the very nature of America as being a democratic republic, noting that it would be an “exception, . . . brand[ing] [Black men] with the stigma of inferiority” to deny them suffrage, for they were citizens of America (63).

Douglass went so far as to declare that Black men were “entitled to the benefit of the elective franchise” (Douglass 58). His support for this declaration relied “on the fundamental truths of the Revolution of 1776, that taxation and representation should go together, and that the right to govern was derived from the consent of the governed” (Douglass 58). He also cited the Declaration of Independence: “The Declaration says all men—all men are created equal” (Douglass 144). He was adamant that “color should never by example of the Constitution be a criterion of the right of liberty” (144); and with liberty being so closely tied to the right to vote, “the right [to vote] cannot be denied on account of complexion” (132). Therefore, Douglass asked “for [his] race only this simple right of which they had been deprived, and which, as freed men, now belonged to them:” the right to vote (Douglass 122).

Also to establish it prudent for Black men to demand suffrage for themselves, Douglass offered further explanation as to why Black men deserved suffrage. Douglass brought attention to the contributions of Black men, specifically in the fight to preserve the Union. Douglass argued that “if [Black men] know enough to shoulder a musket and fight for the flags, fight for the government, he knows enough to vote” (Douglass 66). Douglass raises how Northerners called upon Black men during the nation’s time of great need:

What have you asked the black men of the South, the black men of the whole country to do? Why, you have asked them to incur the deadly enmity of their masters, in order to befriend you and to befriend this government. You have asked us to call down, not only

upon ourselves, but upon our children's children, the deadly hate of the entire Southern people. You have called upon us to turn our backs upon our masters, to abandon their cause and espouse yours; to turn against the South and in favor of the North; to shoot down the Confederacy and uphold the flag—the American flag. You have called upon us to expose ourselves to all the subtle machinations of their malignity for all time.

(Douglass 66).

And, for this reason, Douglass held that “the American people are [duty] bound ... to extend this right to the freedmen of the South” (66). Douglass thought that, because Black men had been called upon and fought valiantly to overcome the South’s attempts to secede from the Union, Black men then deserved the right to have a say in the very government for which they fought.

A Critical Need for the Immediate Enfranchisement of Black Men

Douglass saw post-war America as a “critical moment for the colored people of this country” (Douglass 89). Douglass was concerned with the status of Black men in America, so long as they lacked meaningful political representation. Douglass claimed the right to suffrage for the Black man “because physically, intellectually, morally, and religiously he is a man, because he is a citizen subject to the laws, and being thus amenable, desires the right that will give some dignity to his citizenship” (119). Douglass continued, saying that “for 200 years the colored people of this country have moved among us as dwarfs; with no education, no churches, no hope for the future.” The transcript for Douglass’s address notes how Douglass “graphically pictured the horrors of Slavery with its concomitants, the lash, the bloodhound, and the auction-block” (119). Douglass also suggested that Black men were “weak and need[ed] protection,” and

that Black men had earned suffrage “by coming to the rescue when the Nation was in deadly peril” (120). Therefore, Douglass reiterated his plea that “without the elective franchise, the negro would still be practically a slave. Individual ownership [i.e., “slavery”] has been abolished; but if we restore the Southern States without this measure, we shall establish an ownership of the blacks by the communities among which they live” (Douglass 120).

Douglass was also concerned that, if substantial change were not enacted then during Reconstruction, the time may never come for the enfranchisement of the country’s Black citizens. Not having suffrage would constitute “his liberty [being] a mockery” (Douglass 62). Douglass feared, “This is the hour . . . I fear that if we fail to do it now, if Abolitionists fail to press it now, we may not see, for centuries to come, the same disposition that exists at this moment. Hence, I say, now is the time to press this right” (62). Here, Douglass is talking about the exceptional situation brought forth by Reconstruction, and that no such situation may exist again which would provide the means to demand suffrage for Black men.

Response Regarding Suffrage for Women

Throughout his speeches, Douglass was clear that suffrage for women was, too, a moral and political necessity. Douglass demanded the ballot for women “because she is a citizen, because she is subject to the laws, because she is taxed” (148). Douglass was resolute in his belief that “the ballot box . . . is the safety valve of our institutions” (150), and that “a republican form of government is the strongest government on earth when it is thoroughly republican” (156). For this reason, Douglass truly believed in universal suffrage:

I am here to advocate a genuine democratic republic; to make this a republican form of government, purely a republic, a genuine republic; free it from everything that looks toward monarchy; eliminate all foreign elements, all alien elements from it; blot out from it everything antagonistic of republicanism declared by the fathers--that idea was that all governments derived their first powers from the consent of the governed; make it a government of the people, by the people and for the people, and for all the people, each for all and all for each; blot out all discriminations against any person, theoretically or practically, and make it conform to the great truths laid down by the fathers; keep no man from the ballot box or jury box or the cartridge box, because of his color—exclude no woman from the ballot box because of her sex. (Douglass 158)

Douglass maintained that Reconstructionists ought to “let the government of this country rest securely down upon the shoulders of the whole nation,” and that this would require suffrage for all citizens (158).

However, as prevailing Republican interests more closely aligned with the Fifteenth Amendment only affording suffrage to all male citizens, Douglass did not hesitate to use this momentum to secure suffrage for Black men, even if it meant women may not obtain this right immediately. Douglass saw suffrage for women as “a desirable matter,” one that is ultimately righteous and would eventually need to be obtained for the good of our democratic institutions; however, he made the distinction that suffrage for Black men was “a question of life and death” (Douglass 147). Douglass asked, “Shall we at this moment justify the deprivation of the negro of the right to vote because some one else is deprived of that privilege?” (62). For Douglass, the answer to this question was simple. “The negro needs suffrage to protect his life and property, and to receive an education. He needs it for the safety of reconstruction and the salvation of the

Union; for his elevation from the position of a drudge to that of an influential member of society,” Douglass argued (178).

This did not mean, though, that Douglass remained any less ideologically committed to universal suffrage. Douglass’ opinion was unchanged: “[the vote of women] is necessary to the welfare and purity of society” (183). Universal suffrage, Douglass said, would result in “our Government [being] the strongest ever seen, and [] lasting until the end of the world” (175). But he maintained that, for Black men, suffrage “means something more than an abstract idea” (175) that without suffrage Black men “dies—he is exterminated” (183). Douglass argued that “you women have representatives. Your brothers, and your husbands, and your fathers vote for you, but the black wife has no husband who can vote for her” (175). Women had people who would take their interests into account, but for the country’s Black population, no such consideration would be taken. Douglass saw the chance to secure suffrage for Black men as an urgent necessity that “cannot be postponed” (Douglass 177). Otherwise, Douglass feared a devolution into a state of de facto slavery.

Even as Douglass himself notes, he has “always championed women’s rights” (176). Douglass said that he would be “heartily willing to see every woman enfranchised in this land, even while I am disenfranchised,” renewing his commitment to the rights of women even at his own expense (183). But, as far as his energy and urgency is concerned, he had to support the enfranchisement of Black men immediately. Though, it did sadden him that women and Black men could not “go along together” (Douglass 185). In an 1868 address before a suffrage convention, Douglass said, “If you [women] will promise to take the negro right along with you, take him under your protecting wing, and see to it that we get our rights as well as you, I am for you, and if you do not I am for you” (186). Douglass was willing to see the elevation of women

even if it meant African Americans would be left behind—and he would go as far as to support this cause. But he far preferred that this breakthrough in suffrage could be accomplished simultaneously.

Douglass had to make a pragmatic judgement. He was responding to extraordinary circumstances, and he decided to push as far as the public would accept in this rare moment. To Douglass, the unique conditions brought forth by the Civil War ensured the public would be willing to accept the affordance of suffrage to all men. Douglass likely feared that attempts to push for an even more sweeping extension of suffrage to include women might push the public too far, jeopardizing the opportunity for all. In struggling with the question of how much equality could be secured in this opportune moment, Douglass made the decision that it was most necessary and most achievable for Black men to secure suffrage. That decision ultimately divided him from his former allies Stanton and Anthony.

Chapter 4

A Racial Hierarchy Argument Against Exclusive “Manhood Suffrage”

When debate began on the issue of a constitutional amendment regarding suffrage, “a significant number of reformers and most members of the Republican party agreed with [Wendell] Phillips: black suffrage trumped a women’s right to vote” (McMillen 160). The prospect of Black men getting the right to vote before women was something with which Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were categorically opposed. Stanton and Anthony, therefore, began a crusade to reinvigorate support for universal suffrage. Though, under this guise, it soon became clear that their deepest priority was to secure the right to vote for women, perhaps at any cost. Resorting to overt racism, Stanton and Anthony subsequently made arguments denouncing the Republican party’s insistence with enfranchising Black and immigrant men before women. In the eyes of Stanton and Anthony, women had been working for the last three decades to secure their right to vote, and the idea that women should “stand aside and see Sambo walk into the kingdom first” appalled Stanton (quoted in McMillen 161). When it later came to the question of whether to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment—which provided only “manhood suffrage”—Stanton and Anthony refused to support the amendment, a position for which they ultimately chose to start their own novel suffrage organization, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), intended to rival the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) on the issue of ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. Stanton and Anthony’s NWSA did not support the Fifteenth Amendment, rather proposing a constitutional amendment that would secure the right to vote for women (McMillen 174).

At a May 1867 meeting of the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), Stanton took to debating a fellow member on the prospect of Black men getting the right to vote before women. Member Charles Remond argued that, “it might be that colored men would obtain their rights before women would; but if so, . . . they would heartily acquiesce in admitting woman also to the right of suffrage” (Stanton and Anthony 63). Stanton feared this was not the case. Stanton responded, “I would not trust [Black men] with all my rights; degraded, oppressed himself, he would be more despotic with the governing power than even our Saxon rulers are,” believing that Black men would use their political power (should they be granted suffrage), to block suffrage for women. Another member pointed out that “the right [to vote] should be accorded at the earliest possible moment” to Black men, raising the morality of denying them the right to vote just because women would not simultaneously be afforded the right. Stanton remained firm, though, in her assertion that she was unwilling “to have the colored man enfranchised before the woman” (Stanton and Anthony 63). Charles Remond did appear to agree with the premise of Stanton’s argument, albeit reluctantly. Remond took issue with the expediency argument for which the suffrage of Black men was deemed most important, so he ultimately sided with Stanton. Though, Remond mentioned that doing so was “extremely trying,” for he “could not conceive of a more unhappy position than that occupied by millions of American men bearing the name of freedmen while the rights and privileges of *free* men are still denied them” (Stanton and Anthony 64).

Stanton and Anthony embraced suffrage for educated white women at the expense of securing suffrage for all persons. This was their own rhetorical response to the threat of losing the momentum amassed after achieving the key milestone of abolishing slavery. Yet their position cannot be excused as merely a product of its time. Even during Reconstruction, fellow

advocates of women's rights and suffrage firmly rebuked Stanton and Anthony's choices. Civil rights activist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper offered an incisive critique of Stanton and Anthony's tragic devolution in accepting racist assumptions. In this chapter, I trace how Stanton and Anthony's rhetorical choices represented a problematic response to tensions over the 15th Amendment. I then illustrate how Harper offered an alternative rhetorical path that her fellow activists failed to take.

Argument of Necessity to Secure Suffrage for Educated (White) Women

With the idea that women deserved to obtain suffrage first, Stanton and Anthony refocused their narrative to firmly denounce suffrage for Black men, sharing how they thought it would be "wiser and safer to enfranchise the higher orders of womanhood than the lower orders of black and white, washed and unwashed, lettered and unlettered manhood" (Stanton and Anthony 72). Stanton was not willing "to see the lowest orders of manhood placed over their heads," referencing "blacks, barbers, and ignorant foreigners," while women have "no voice in their own personal interests of the welfare of the nation" (Stanton and Anthony 72-73). Stanton believed that the "ballot in the hand of woman . . . will surely right many wrongs," ultimately holding that "helpless and dependent, women must ever be the victim of society" (Stanton and Anthony 84).

This claim that suffrage for women would "right many wrongs" became a key point of Stanton and Anthony's argument. Anthony asserted,

I am ready to prove what the ballot will do for women by showing what it has done for men. What makes the working men of America so independent and respected but because

they hold in their hands the ballot? But women are powerless; and I say they drag men's labor down as well, simply because they are without the ballot. (Stanton and Anthony 173)

If suffrage were to be handed down "piece by piece," Anthony believed that the country should "give it first to women, to the most intelligent & capable portion of the women at least, because in the present state of government it is intelligence, it is morality which is needed" (Stanton and Anthony 239). Anthony contended that providing women with suffrage would change "the pecuniary position of women," allowing the inherent 'good morality' of women to help address an America that is previously dominated by the ill will of men.

For these reasons, Stanton and Anthony "object[ed] to the proposed amendment because it is an open, deliberate insult to the women of this nation," and they believed that not providing women suffrage would leave the country devoid of all the benefits that women voting could provide (Stanton and Anthony 196). Establishing "manhood suffrage," Stanton was firm, would create "an aristocracy of sex [as] the governing power of this nation," reducing "women . . . to the lowest depths of her political degradation" (Stanton and Anthony 237). While there is an understandable degree of frustration that Stanton and Anthony must have been feeling as the predominate political force shifted towards the immediate enfranchisement of all men with women being left out, Frances E.W. Harper noted another choice that was available to Stanton and Anthony, one they failed to see or support.

Insights from Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

Perhaps one of the best pieces of criticism towards Stanton and Anthony's approach comes directly from the time period. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, in her 1866 speech "We Are All Bound Up Together," addressed the ultimate need for women's suffrage: "I say, then, that justice is not fulfilled so long as woman is unequal before the law." An African American woman who spent all her life battling oppression on the basis of race, Harper was no stranger to being disenfranchised. But she was firm in her belief that "society cannot afford to neglect the enlightenment of any class of its members." In doing so, Harper rejected the gender and racial essentialism that Stanton and Anthony so frequently employed. Harper spoke about how "I do not believe that giving the woman the ballot is immediately going to cure all the ills of life." But she went further to say that,

I do not believe [sic] that white women are dew-drops just exhaled from the skies. I think that like men they may be divided into three classes, the good, the bad, and the indifferent. The good would vote according to their convictions and principles; the bad, as dictated by preju[d]ice or malice; and the indifferent will vote on the strongest side of the question, with the winning party.

Harper criticized the limited scope of Stanton and Anthony's arguments, which primarily focused on advocating for the suffrage of educated white women. Instead, she advocated for what scholars today might call an intersectional approach, recognizing the importance of addressing the needs and rights of all marginalized groups.

To raise awareness of the different experiences that, say, women of color experienced in America at the time, Harper declared,

You white women speak here of rights. I speak of wrongs. I, as a colored woman, have had in this country an education which has made me feel as if I were in the situation of Ishmael, my hand against every man, and every man's hand against me. Let me go tomorrow morning and take my seat in one of your street cars — I do not know that they will do it in New York, but they will in Philadelphia — and the conductor will put up his hand and stop the car rather than let me ride.

Harper further underscored the importance of unity among different groups in the suffrage movement. She argued that the fight for women's rights should not be divided along racial lines or limited to specific demographics. Instead, she called for solidarity among all those who sought justice, emphasizing that the oppression of one group is connected to the oppression of others. Ultimately, Harper's speech can be seen as a critique of Stanton and Anthony's "educated white woman" narrative, which employed an exclusionary view on suffrage and the struggles of women in America.

Harper's criticism effectively showed that other rhetorical choices were available to Stanton and Anthony and the women's suffrage movement. Harper held that the schism between those who supported the enfranchisement of Black men versus of women was artificially inflamed by the course that Congress chose. That schism was nevertheless not a historical inevitability. She recognized that a more intersectional approach was another available means of negotiating this conflict, and she chastised white activists for choosing an exclusionary approach. Whereas Stanton and Anthony adopted an exclusionary approach to the tensions due to competing priorities and disagreement over how to address the problem of enfranchisement, Harper saw that there were other options available to the movement. Those paths were, unfortunately, not followed.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This thesis delved into the dynamics that plagued the post-Civil War abolitionist movement, illuminating the fractures that emerged in the aftermath of the Thirteenth Amendment's ratification. The period witnessed a divergence of paths among abolitionist leaders, their unity shattered by conflicting strategies and priorities during Reconstruction. It became evident that their visions for achieving equality diverged significantly. Their rifts exposed profound tensions over questions of race and gender, fracturing the movement even as it faced a historic opportunity for progress and lasting change.

When it came to the issue of voting rights and the question of ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, Frederick Douglass again became a key figure in the suffrage movement. Despite his own belief in the eventual need for universal suffrage, Douglass adopted the pragmatic approach of supporting the Fifteenth Amendment, determining that the threat of not having suffrage presented an existential threat to the African American community.

Douglass wholeheartedly believed in the inherent equality of all people. In this regard, he was surely ahead of his time. Douglass also believed in a representative democracy—the grand idea that representatives elected by the people could do what is best for all their constituents. However, when it came to the Fifteenth Amendment, Douglass chose to prioritize African American rights. As a former slave and prominent abolitionist, Douglass recognized the urgent need to secure voting rights for Black men. He believed that the Fifteenth Amendment provided an opportunity for immediate enfranchisement, thereby ensuring that African American men

could themselves participate in the political process and have a voice in shaping their own destinies. For Douglass, this was a crucial step towards achieving broader civil rights and equality for African Americans.

The Republicans banked on the enfranchisement of Black Americans leading to a general expediency of their political interests in the South. Douglass understood this desire, and he was able to approach this issue pragmatically by supporting the extension of voting rights to exclusively Black men. Recognizing that political progress often required making strategic compromises, Douglass was able to align himself with the prevailing interests of the day, knowing that the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment could serve as a stepping stone toward achieving broader civil rights goals in the future, including suffrage for women (for which he had long been an advocate). Aligning himself with the Republican Party on this issue of the Fifteenth Amendment allowed Douglass to build alliances and leverage political support to advance the cause of equality for African Americans.

Douglass had himself long experienced the country's history of racial injustice and discrimination against African Americans. He justified this enfranchisement of Black men—at the immediate expense of suffrage for women—because he truly believed that there was an emergent need for the suffrage of Black men. Douglass feared that, if suffrage were not achieved for Black men at that very moment, it could have been decades or centuries before another opportunity would arise. Believing in the lack of voting rights devolving a citizen into a state of *de facto* slavery, there was no way that Douglass could take this risk.

Douglass also believed that the condition of women (mainly white women, as those to whom Stanton and Anthony alluded) was stable. Whereas Black men were suffering injustice and hate at the hands of perpetrators in the South, Douglass believed that women had their

husbands to vote for their interests, that women could demand suffrage soon thereafter if they so desired. Douglass's greater fear was that, if Black men were not afforded suffrage, then Black women would be the most categorically disenfranchised in America, having truly no one to voice their interests.

This choice to support the Fifteenth Amendment, however, did not change Douglass' support of universal suffrage. As Douglass still frequently asserted, he believed that the suffrage of all citizens is the ultimate goal. He believed that only then would our government be able to function as it was truly designed. Douglass even went so far as to say that he would support the suffrage of women if they were to achieve it first—even if it meant that African Americans did not achieve it simultaneously.

Therefore, when considering Douglass' choice to advocate for the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, I can applaud his pragmatic approach to the situation. Douglass understood that historical opportunities for legislative change were rare and should be seized when they arose. The ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment presented a pivotal moment in history, and Douglass believed that supporting it would bring immediate benefits to his community. Further, he recognized that delaying or opposing the amendment might hinder progress and prolong the denial of voting rights for African Americans. If ever there were a 'kairotic moment' to take a stand—a pivotal moment in which to make a decision—it was this. Douglass aptly read the rhetorical situation with which he was confronted, and his practical approach to securing suffrage for all the country's male citizens to dismantle the systemic barriers that had denied them their basic rights and excluded them from participating in democratic processes. Supporting the Fifteenth Amendment allowed Douglass to challenge and rectify the deep-seated racial inequalities of his time.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, also long-time figures in the suffrage movement, harbored a fundamental disagreement with the approach of Douglass to support the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. Stanton and Anthony could not imagine supporting a constitutional amendment that did not provide suffrage to all. Throughout the debate over voting rights and discussion of the Fifteenth Amendment, Stanton and Anthony remained firm in their support of universal suffrage. Their ultimate goal was an America in which all citizens, regardless of their gender or race, could exercise their right to vote. They argued that any legislation that granted voting rights exclusively to African American men perpetuated gender discrimination and hindered the broader goal of achieving gender equality. Their opposition, ultimately, reflected their unwavering commitment to challenging systemic oppression and advocating for the rights of all individuals, irrespective of gender or race.

Yet Stanton and Anthony were alarmed by the prospect that Black *men* could be handed suffrage before they were themselves. Their concern with the Fifteenth Amendment was twofold: they had serious concerns about more men being afforded the right to vote before any women were. But the issue went beyond the prospect of more *males* being able to vote, but that *lesser males* (as they perceived it) would be able to vote before the (white) women they judged as more educated and virtuous. Stanton and Anthony then turned to the narrative of “educated white women voters” as a rhetorical strategy to advance the cause of women's suffrage. They aimed to challenge societal expectations and stereotypes about women, positioning them as educated and deserving of equal rights. They believed that by appealing to the idea of educated white women as moral and capable citizens, they could gain support from broader society and counter prevailing biases against women's political participation. They also believed that women deserved suffrage in that moment by virtue of women having fought for suffrage for decades. In

this sense, they thought they had earned suffrage—something that they believed Black and immigrant men had not earned up to that point.

While the reasoning of both sides of this issue at some point boils down to fear of their group never themselves achieving suffrage, the loss of momentum that resulted from this split epitomizes my assertion that abolitionists struggled in their post-war efforts. Historian Sally McMillen discusses how the “pride, jealousy, competition, and personal misunderstandings” that resulted from the split over the issue of the Fifteenth Amendment persisted in the suffrage movement and had lasting, detrimental effects. McMillen contends that “women might have won suffrage years earlier had they been able to ignore differences and past mistakes and work together, rather than expending time and energy in jealous, competitive behavior” (183). McMillen believes that the division “are reactions that are too typical of groups seeking to achieve larger goals. Often losing sight of what they most desire, they fight with one another rather than work together for a greater good” (184). But, amongst the disagreements of Douglass and Stanton and Anthony on how to proceed, there is a similarity that continues to persevere through the strife: both sides of this issue were fundamentally committed to challenging oppression and advancing the rights of marginalized communities. The pressures of the post-Emancipation movement to funnel their momentum into continued progress created an artificial schism between leaders who ultimately agreed on this fundamental principle.

Reconstruction was a difficult time for the country—but especially for abolitionists, who failed to convalesce around a single realization of their role in post-Civil War America. And, for those who could agree that fighting for greater equality was their continued goal, many faced the challenges that competing priorities created. Many abolitionists were motivated to pursue causes that they viewed yielding the most ‘good’ for society; they focused on issues they considered to

be of immediate necessity. As historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr. maintains, “despite its relative brevity and the enormous power and vitriol of the forces mounted against it, Reconstruction achieved remarkable historical precedents” (35). But, for some abolitionists, such as Frederick Douglass, they lived to see their work partially or fully dismantled by the Supreme Court and the country in the years after Reconstruction.

Therefore, it is easy to view Reconstruction as a “failed revolution.” By the era’s end “few whites, Northern or Southern, cared to interact with blacks on an equal basis, and people of color never obtained sufficient power to protect their own interests” (Wilson xiv). However, the egalitarianism that we saw during Reconstruction is noteworthy. According to historian Eric Foner, “perhaps the remarkable thing about Reconstruction was not that it failed, but that it was attempted at all and survived as long as it did” (603). The failure of Reconstruction and the years that immediately followed constituted a dark period of American history. But focusing on the significance of Reconstruction not as simply as a failure may be a worthwhile endeavor. Suffragists during Reconstruction—as well as other abolitionists such as Senator Charles Sumner—were ahead of their time; and, notwithstanding the backtracking that the country endured for the next few decades, the era did result in the continued pursuit of equality in the United States, as well as constitutional amendments that continue to bear the test of time (even despite the negative interpretation and implementation that they received immediately post-Reconstruction).

In conclusion, through this analysis of Fifteenth Amendment debate amongst abolitionists, we see how people fundamentally committed to the same egalitarian principles could be torn apart and lose momentum upon accomplishing their biggest goal. The schism that emerged between abolitionist leaders with regard to voting rights exemplifies the existence of the

greater phenomenon that social movements unfortunately lose momentum after reaching major milestones and that this may be due to once-allied leaders of these movements finding themselves at odds as they seek out new directions and face new challenges. Frances E.W. Harper emerged from this analysis as a beacon of coalition-building, offering a compelling alternative to the racial biases and less efficacious approaches perpetuated by some of her contemporaries. Her approach, overlooked amidst the fervent debates of the era, presents a valuable blueprint for future movements grappling with the moral and political crosscurrents that yield divergent priorities and the imperative of maintaining solidarity.

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ACADEMIC VITA

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EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University
Schreyer Honors College, University Park, PA 16802, United States
B.S., *Mathematics*, Concentration in *Systems Analysis*.
B.S., *Statistics*, Concentration in *Applied Statistics*.
B.S., *Communication Arts and Sciences*. Minor in *Political Science*.
With Honors in *Communication Arts and Sciences*.
August 2020 – May 2024

SELECTED EXPERIENCE

Legal Intern,
Bressler, Amery & Ross, P.C., Florham Park, NJ 07932
June 2022 – July 2022

- Participated in Bressler's summer diversity pipeline internship program.
- Was exposed to multiple practice areas in the field of law by interning at a medium-sized law firm in New Jersey.
- Conducted basic background and legal research, drafting memos and other documents for lawyers at the firm.
- Coordinated with the other interns to complete an administrative project over the summer.
- Networked with lawyers at the firm and an assigned mentor.

Resident Assistant (RA), Office of Residence Life
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802
January 2022 – May 2024

- Work to facilitate a safe, welcoming environment within the residence community for all our residents.
- Hold community builder activities for floor and building residents.
- Serve as a resource for residents by listening to their concerns, recommending on-campus resources, or referring them to a professional Residence Life staff member when appropriate.
- Be on duty once weekly from 8 p.m. to 7 a.m., conducting rounds through the residence halls and responding to situations that arise. On call for approximately 500 residents (two residence halls).

MATH 140 Facilitated Study Group (FSG) Facilitator, FISE Program,
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802
August 2021 – May 2022

- Led twice-weekly, one-hour group study sessions for First-year in Science and Engineering (FISE) students, a special living option and academic community at Penn State.
- Delivered a lesson plan and conducted group activities to help students engage with their peers and strengthen their understanding of MATH 140 (Calculus with Analytic Geometry I) concepts.

Grader, Department of Mathematics,
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802
May 2021 – May 2024

- Grade the academic work of undergraduate students for mathematics courses.
- Communicate frequently with professors and teaching faculty.
- Adhere to strict deadlines within which grading work (e.g., homework assignments, quizzes, etc.) must be completed.
- Proctor evening- and final-examinations for undergraduate mathematics students.
- Sample of courses graded: College Algebra I; Plane Trigonometry; Calculus with Analytic Geometry I; Calculus with Analytic Geometry II; Matrices; Partial and Ordinary Differential Equations.

Learning Assistant, STAT 200, Department of Statistics,
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802
January 2021 – May 2021

- Guided students through lab activities for STAT 200 (Elementary Statistics).
- Worked in conjunction with a graduate student Teaching Assistant to answer student questions and mitigate conceptual misunderstandings.
- Attended weekly meetings with the STAT 200 teaching faculty.

Certified Pharmacy Technician,
Rite Aid #11019, Dillsburg, PA 17019
May 2020 – December 2023

- Prepare prescription orders from data entry to final packaging, under the direct supervision of a licensed pharmacist.
- Answer phone calls from patients and prescriber offices.
- Maintain on-hand inventory by ordering sufficient quantities.
- Assist with controlled substance inventory procedures.
- Complete mandatory training to stay current on regulations and Rite Aid policy.
- Since July 2021- Administer vaccines to patients 3 years of age and older.

SELECTED ACHIEVEMENTS

Awarded “RA of the Year” for assigned residence halls.

Office of Residence Life, The Pennsylvania State University

April 2023

Inducted into Mu Sigma Rho (Statistics National Honor Society)

Department of Statistics, The Pennsylvania State University

April 2023

Presented in Undergraduate Showcase

Essay: “The Divisive, Trolling Rhetoric of John Fetterman
and Discussion of its Implications on Contemporary Political Deliberation”

Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University

April 2023

Mary Lister McCammon Scholarship

Department of Mathematics, The Pennsylvania State University

Fall 2022 – Spring 2023

Presented in Undergraduate Showcase

Essay: “Visions of Equality: How Support for Equality Movements Fades
After Major Accomplishments--And Far Short of Lasting Equality”

Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, The Pennsylvania State University

April 2022

William B. Forest Honors Scholarship

Department of Mathematics, The Pennsylvania State University

Fall 2021 – Spring 2022

Named *The Sentinel's* “Teen of the Year”

June 2020

Eagle Scout, Scouts BSA Troop 190, Grantham, PA

October 2019

[Last updated: January 2024.]