

HIST 103J Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass
Professor David Blight

“The Black O’Connell”: Frederick Douglass’s political and philosophical transformation in
Ireland

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After an eventful voyage across the Atlantic, on August 31, 1845, Frederick Douglass arrived “safe in old Ireland, in the beautiful city of Dublin.”¹ He was accompanied by James Buffum, a fellow abolitionist. The vessel that carried him was the *Cambria*, a 120-passenger paddle steamer of the Cunard line, under the command of Captain Judkins. The events leading up to the voyage had been as exciting as the trip itself, Douglass proving himself ever more talented on the abolitionist speaking circuit, and about to earn even more public attention following the publication of his *Narrative* just months before. Fearing that Douglass would be “spirited away” by slave catchers now that he had revealed crucial identifying details about himself in his *Narrative*, William Lloyd Garrison decided to send Douglass on a nineteen-month speaking tour of Great Britain and Ireland.² The first stop would be Ireland, where Douglass would spend four months, giving a total of fifty slavery and temperance addresses.³

¹ Douglass to Garrison, 1 September, 1845. Quoted in John F. Quinn, “Safe in Old Ireland: Frederick Douglass’s Tour, 1845-1846,” *The Historian* 64, no. 3/4 (Spring & Summer 2002), 536.

² Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, introduction by David W. Blight (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2014), 291.

³ Quinn, “Safe in Old Ireland,” 548.

A particular altercation aboard the *Cambria* provided a good omen for the kind of transformation Douglass would experience in Ireland. During Douglass's voyage across the Atlantic, Captain Judkins invited the ex-slave to address his fellow passengers on the subject of slavery, prompting the outrage of some passengers, who threatened to throw Douglass overboard. By good fortune, there happened to be an Irishman present by the name of Mr. Gough, who was so tall that even Douglass, himself over six feet tall, had to look up at him. On numerous occasions during his Irish tour, Douglass recalled how Gough had awed the indignant passengers into silence, warning that "two might play at that game."⁴ It was a marvelous portent, a glimpse of the freedom that Douglass would experience and the different treatment that he would get once in Ireland, free of the "mobocratic" Americans who, even thousands of miles away from America, still treated Douglass as less than human.⁵

Besides the practical expediency of this trip, the British lecture circuit was a well-worn path for abolitionists. Having abolished slavery in 1833, Britain carried a certain "moral prestige" and was home to a well-established abolitionist community.⁶ By touching their moral sensibilities in vividly retelling his experience as a slave and exposing the hypocrisy of American churches in sustaining slavery, Douglass hoped to compel his British audience to shame their American counterparts. It was classic Garrisonian moral suasion, under which Americans would capitulate to the pressure of "patriotic shame" to abolish the institution that was a "foul stain on

⁴ Anti-Slavery Meeting at the Independent Chapel, Limerick, 10 November, 1845. In Frederick Douglass and Christine Kinealy, *Frederick Douglass and Ireland: in His Own Words, Volume I* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 230.

⁵ Douglass and Foner, *Selected Speeches*, 14.

⁶ This is the term that R. J. M. Blackett uses, quoted in Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford, "Triumphant Exile: Frederick Douglass in Britain, 1845-1847," In *Liberating Sojourn*, edited by Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 2.

[their] character.”⁷ Douglass hoped that through the prism of the international press, his words abroad would have an even more powerful effect, reaching America “borne on the wings of the press beyond the Atlantic waves”, to “fly up and down the regions of the North [...] and reverberate through the valley of the Mississippi.”⁸ Indeed, Douglass’s sojourn abroad would have an intensifying effect in multiple ways. For the Anglophilic Douglass, his trip to Britain was significant beyond just the practical expedient. He viewed a trip to Britain almost as a kind of finishing school, the education that he had never had, where young American gentlemen would go “to increase their stock of knowledge, to seek pleasure, to have their rough, democratic manners softened by contact with English aristocratic refinement”.⁹ The rapturous success that Douglass encountered for the great part of his tour transformed the young orator, and when he returned to America in the fall of 1847, he was a much more confident, internationally renowned, and wealthy man.

Having written three autobiographies by the end of his life, Douglass was well accustomed to analyzing his own life experience. He invokes “Providence” only at his most transformative moments, and the British sojourn of 1845-7 is one of them. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass writes “the allotments of Providence, when coupled with trouble and anxiety, often conceal from finite vision the wisdom and goodness in which they are sent.”¹⁰ And so, what had been sparked by a real fear of recapture into slavery, was transformed into a

⁷ O’Connell quoted in Laurence Fenton, *Frederick Douglass in Ireland: “The Black O’Connell”* (Cork: Collins Press, 2014), 89-90; Term used by Caleb McDaniel, quoted in Daniel Ritchie, “The Stone in the Sling: Frederick Douglass and Belfast Abolitionism,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 18, no. 3 (September 2017), 246.

⁸ Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*,” 163-4.

⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 292. Perhaps the more appropriate term might be “mobocratic”, which Douglass uses to describe the “real American, republican, democratic Christian mob” aboard the *Cambria*, who treated him so poorly. See Frederick Douglass, Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor, *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writing* (Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 14.

¹⁰ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 292.

providential opportunity as significant as his move to Baltimore as a young slave. Though sent abroad as a Garrisonian, Douglass came back his own man. Numerous scholars have recognized Douglass's first tour to the British Isles as pivotal in shaping his personal and political trajectory. Such accounts tend to focus on the international acclaim that he found there and an increasing self-confidence that led to his gradual break with the Garrisonians and his foray into publishing upon his return to the United States.¹¹ However, as this paper will demonstrate, the significance of the tour reached far beyond accelerating a break with Garrison, which was perhaps most nearly expedited by his close friendship with Gerrit Smith, whom he met upon his return.

Furthermore, within the tour itself, Douglass's time in Ireland played a particularly important role in this transformation. The nuances of Ireland's religious landscape, which was deeply tied to its politics, helped Douglass develop a form of pragmatism in his abolitionist approach as his condemnations of the American church were always at risk of touching upon sectarian nerves. The 1800 Act of Union had formally integrated Ireland into the United Kingdom, but there was still strong sentiment in Ireland for their independence, feeling that their treatment by the British parliament was oppressive, that of second-class citizens. This sense of enslavement to the British Crown created a natural affinity between Douglass and the images of poverty and desperation that he saw in Ireland. Most importantly, Douglass's brief encounter with Daniel O'Connell, the great Liberator, would be pivotal in expanding Douglass's worldview to incorporate a broader humanitarianism, a desire to alleviate suffering beyond just slavery within American borders. It is the specific nature of Ireland's sectarianism, its relationship with

¹¹ See R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolition Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983) and Waldo E. Martin, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) for general background on Douglass's conversion to Garrisonianism.

Britain, and Douglass's own formative impressions of Daniel O'Connell that color how Douglass not only returned to the United States famous and more self-assured, but also politically and philosophically equipped to take on the next challenges of his long life.

The Dublin that Douglass landed in was a city in decline, where poorly clothed children, emaciated and haggard, drifted in the shadows of its grand eighteenth-century architecture.¹² Douglass was at once impressed by the splendor and history of the city's buildings as well as deeply affected by the suffering that he saw around him. The pallid faces and sunken eyes of the hungry children on Dublin's streets no doubt reminded him of his years as a slave. Though Douglass was adamant that there was a limit to the analogy between the suffering of the Irish and the suffering of the slave, the resonance he felt with the Irish population was important; just as he saw images of widespread suffering in Ireland, he also found himself treated with a newfound respect, "kind hospitality constantly proffered to him by persons of the highest rank in society—the spirit of freedom that seems to animate all with whom I come into contact."¹³ He was thrilled with pleasure, even as the scenes of poverty filled him with pain. Despite their suffering, the Irish were at least free of the racial prejudice that slavery perniciously sustained in America: if it were possible in Ireland, perhaps Douglass had greater hope for the same in America.

Douglass's host in Dublin was Richard D. Webb, an Irish Quaker and anti-slavery activist who had hosted numerous abolitionists. The Quakers were an important part of Ireland's small anti-slavery movement, comprising the main element in the Hibernian Anti-Slavery

¹² Douglass to Garrison, a few days after his arrival. Quoted in Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York, NY: International Publishers, 1950), 128.

¹³ Douglass to Garrison, 1 January, 1846, in Douglass and Foner, *Selected Speeches*, 18.

Society, which Webb had helped found in 1837. Slavery had been abolished in the British West Indies in 1833, and since then the anti-slavery movement in Ireland was limited to the moral crusading of nonconformist Protestant groups rather than a mass movement.¹⁴ Indeed, the *Cambria* was more highly anticipated for information its passengers might bring on the prospect of war between America and Mexico than for Douglass's abolitionist campaigning.¹⁵ Douglass's first speech at the Royal Exchange, a magnificent building on Dame Street, was a grand success. To a lecture-room crowded to excess, Douglass made a strong impression. In accounts of the event, he was praised for his "manly dignity of manner, which must win him the attention of any audience before whom he may appear" and was assured of a hearty welcome.¹⁶

Douglass's meeting with Daniel O'Connell was undoubtedly one of the most memorable events on his Irish tour. Although the two men only met once, and only for a brief moment, the meeting of the great Liberator of Ireland with a man who hoped to be the liberator of America's enslaved was not only highly symbolic but also deeply personally significant. Douglass had heard of the "fabled orator" and great "moral force" long before his arrival.¹⁷ O'Connell and Garrison had been acquainted for some years, both sharing moral suasionist views and a distaste for political violence. Garrison had regularly reprinted O'Connell's antislavery speeches in the *Liberator*, which Douglass would have read.¹⁸ With the rest of the world who had become inspired by O'Connell's love of liberty and hatred of tyranny, which was not just limited to the plight of Irish Catholics, Douglass was intrigued by the "great man of his country", of the voice

¹⁴ Fenton, "The Black O'Connell", 64.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁶ *Pilot*, 8 September, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 125.

¹⁷ Fenton, "The Black O'Connell", 84-5.

¹⁸ Gilbert Osofsky, "Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemmas of Romantic Nationalism," *The American Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (October 1975): 890-893.

that “swept over the vast multitude, uttered without effort, without gestures, with arms folded upon his deep, broad chest.”¹⁹

Having won the campaign for Catholic Emancipation in 1829, O’Connell now turned to the next battle for greater civil liberty on the part of the Irish people: the repeal of the Act of Union. Engaging similar tactics to the Catholic Emancipation campaign, O’Connell used mass meetings and widespread fundraising to pressure the British government to grant Ireland legislative independence from their quasi-colonial status under the Act of Union, capitulating to the weight of public opinion and the fear of rebellion.²⁰ Using mass support in this way as a major force to provoke change through constitutional politics was out of the question for Douglass at this juncture. Nevertheless, O’Connell’s skill in harnessing and influencing public opinion was no doubt inspirational for the young activist. At this point, it is worth noting O’Connell’s unwillingness to compromise on one issue in particular: the total non-tolerance of slaveholders or their sympathizers. Throughout his Repeal campaign, O’Connell had turned to American supporters for donations. At first, he willingly accepted contributions from the Southern states, feeling that he had no right to deprive Ireland of aid because of his anti-slavery principles, preferring a conciliatory approach to convince them of the wrongs of slavery. However, O’Connell’s moral conscience was pricked by accepting the “blood-stained money” and he decided to reject all contributions to the campaign made by slavery’s supporters.²¹ This

¹⁹ Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 87.

²⁰ For more background, see Fergus O’Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation: Daniel O’Connell and the birth of Irish democracy, 1820-30* (Goldenbridge, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1985).

²¹ Report of the meeting of the Repeal Association in Dublin, May 1843. See Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 94. Douglass returned to this image in his later writings, for example his 1862 lecture “Age of Pictures.” He draws on the memory of the boys swarming O’Connell as an example of man’s tendency to hero-worship those amongst them whom they see as the best version of humanity. He writes, “There walked before them the manhood of their dreams, and every Irishman of them felt larger and stronger for walking in the stately shadow of this one great Irishman.” (John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of*

dilemma was remarkably similar to the Free Church controversy with which Douglass would become embroiled, where Reverend Chalmers refused to send back donations from Free Church supporters in America's slave states. As we shall see, Douglass would remember that one liberator, one churchman, was able to hold the principle of no-fellowship with slaveholders above monetary necessity. What's more, this episode also foreshadows a key point of contention and a potential obstacle to anti-slavery support in Ireland that Douglass would soon discover: whether the anti-slavery issue distracted from, and therefore was secondary to, the cause of Irish independence.

With these favorable opinions, if not awe, in mind, Douglass's first impressions of the Liberator did not disappoint. Toward the end of September 1845, after catching sight of a group of ragged little boys shouting in tones of loving admiration, "There goes Dan! There goes Dan!", Douglass followed the Liberator and sneaked into a meeting of the Repeal Association, where he was speaking.²² At seventy years old, the Liberator spoke for a formidable seventy minutes, spending a large portion of this time on the subject of slavery before turning to Repeal. Douglass was impressed by O'Connell's uncompromising condemnation of slavery, pointing out the very irony between America's love of liberty and its sustenance of slavery that Douglass found so perplexing. Professing his support of America's "democratic spirit," O'Connell said that he "wish[ed] to relieve it from the horror of slavery."²³ In his declamatory, even sarcastic, oratory, O'Connell was able to bridge the gulf between high politics and popular feeling.²⁴ Perhaps this

the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American (New York, NY: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 153-4). No doubt this image also influenced Douglass's own conscious self-shaping as a political activist.

²² Douglass Frederick. "Thought and Recollections of a Tour in Ireland". Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfd.24015/>. Image 11.

²³ Repeal Meeting at Conciliation Hall, Dublin, 29 September, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 154-5.

²⁴ O'Ferrall, *Catholic Emancipation*, 5.

was what Douglass was alluding to when he joked about rough young Americans learning refinement in monarchical England. Later in his career, after breaking with the Garrisonians to pursue emancipation through America's existing Constitution, Douglass would also bridge this gulf, taking a leaf out of O'Connell's book by connecting his commitment to moving public opinion with a more politically pragmatic approach. However, the most important impression that O'Connell's words left on Douglass was the sense of the man as a "broad-hearted philanthropist," whose love of liberty was not confined to the limits of his own green Ireland.²⁵ O'Connell declared himself "the advocate of civil and religious liberty all over the globe, and wherever tyranny exists, I am the foe of the tyrant," which he demonstrated in this event alone by making space to denounce slavery in what was overtly a Repeal meeting.²⁶ After O'Connell finished speaking, Buffum introduced Douglass, whom O'Connell then presented to the audience with tongue-in-cheek arrogance as "The Black O'Connell."²⁷ Douglass gave a few remarks, stating that "while the Liberator shook the chains off the people of Ireland in that hall, he was also knocking the chains off the slaves in America."²⁸ In a stroke of brilliance, Douglass seized the opportunity to join the Liberator's pursuit of liberty with his own cause, knowing that the sheer mention of O'Connell's name would win him several supporters. His remarks were met with loud applause.

²⁵ Quoted in Richard Hardack, "The Slavery of Romanism: The Casting Out of the Irish in the Work of Frederick Douglass," in *Liberating Sojourn*, ed. Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 122.

²⁶ 29 September 1845 speech before the Repeal Association in Dublin.

²⁷ *Liverpool Mail*, coverage of Repeal Meeting, published 4 October, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 153.

²⁸ *Liverpool Mail*, coverage of Repeal Meeting, published 4 October, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 154.

Although this was the only time that Douglass and O’Connell shared a stage, the meeting had left a profound impression. Writing in 1886, nearly four decades after their meeting, Douglass said that “no public man was perhaps more beloved by any people than Daniel O’Connell was by the people of his country.”²⁹ The Liberator loomed large in his imagination as an emblem of an individual who not only loved liberty but would devote himself to the liberty of those beyond his sect. For all that Ireland’s politics was mired with sectarian quarrels, and for all that O’Connell had won himself enemies on account of his Roman Catholicism and the sheer size of his Catholic support base, he was willing to take on tasks beyond just the Irish Catholic constituent. Douglass would continue to praise O’Connell in his anti-slavery speeches throughout Ireland, which was almost invariably met with acclaim, finding both a practical advantage in meeting the orator as well as a personal one. O’Connell’s devotion to liberty helped expand Douglass’s worldview, demonstrated by Douglass’s prompt embrace of broader humanitarian causes upon his return. In 1848, just one year after returning to the United States, Douglass signed the Declaration of Sentiments in favor of Women’s Rights, and by the end of his long life had spoken out in favor of free public education, prison reform and the end to capital punishment, to name just a few.³⁰ It would not be an exaggeration to see O’Connell as a mentor for Douglass, an example in oratory and humanitarianism that Douglass would seek to emulate.

Tying O’Connell to the anti-slavery cause brought great advantages but was not without its drawbacks. Given O’Connell’s huge celebrity, even mythic status, including praise of the Liberator’s demonstrated love of liberty and commitment to anti-slavery was almost invariably

²⁹ Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.

met with applause, especially in the southern stops on Douglass's tour. In Cork and Limerick, whose populations were predominantly Catholic, when Douglass praised the "voice [that] has made American slavery shake to its center", he was met with tremendous cheers.³¹ However, Douglass understood from O'Connell's own experience with the Repeal rent controversy that there were disadvantages to connecting the antislavery cause with one now so strongly identified with greater Irish independence, not to mention the Liberator's strongly Catholic support base. Just a few days after Douglass's first anti-slavery meeting in Dublin, an editorial in the *Waterford Freeman* voiced its suspicion of "certain speeches at anti-slavery lectures lately held in the metropolis." Knowing that it was treading delicate ground, the newspaper questioned the "effect which the reclamation of a nation of white slaves may produce on the condition of their black brother-serfs in a hemisphere distant four thousand miles."³² In their view, Ireland was beset with too many problems of their own, especially regarding their own status within the United Kingdom, to be distracted by the cause of American slaves. The *Tipperary Free Press* concurred, stating "When we are ourselves free, let us then engage in any struggle to erase the sin of slavery from every land."³³ This was a particularly difficult sticking point for Douglass, especially as he travelled through the more rural parts of southern Ireland as the Great Potato Famine was beginning to devastate the population. In the face of such poverty and suffering, Douglass felt some sympathy for those who believed it was more important to resolve Ireland's domestic problems before cobbling together resources in support of African American emancipation.

³¹ *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier*, 16 October 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 186.

³² *Waterford Freeman*, 12 September 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 134-5.

³³ R. J. M. Blackett argues that "in an international moral crusade [...] representatives of an oppressed minority who have little or no power at home are almost compelled to avoid issues of larger political significance." R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 203.

The way that the *Waterford Freeman* editorial defends its position is particularly striking. In order to justify the Irish people in refusing to devote all their energies into anti-slavery efforts, the paper states, “we fear that in this case the erratic benevolence of the *white slaves* of Ireland has done more harm than good for the objects of its solicitude.”³⁴ The tone of this editorial is characteristic of Young Irelander language. The Young Irelanders were a group of nationalists who campaigned for Ireland’s total independence, rather than the legislative independence that O’Connell was pursuing. They distanced themselves from O’Connell because of his strong associations with Irish Catholics. For the Young Irelanders, Irish nationalism was a strictly secular issue, for which reason they disliked Douglass’s fiery speeches which could easily rouse sectarian antagonism as a result of his frequent denunciations of various groups of organized religion.³⁵ For the sake of retaining support for the antislavery cause, Douglass decided to remain neutral on the Repeal issue and mentioned O’Connell only in relation to abolitionism. Unlike Garrison, who had publicly expressed his support for Repeal, Douglass remained adamant that his mission in Ireland was purely an anti-slavery one.³⁶ However, beyond this pragmatic concession, Douglass was not willing to allow the suggestion that the Irish condition was a form of ‘white slavery’ to go unnoticed. Whilst acknowledging the tyranny of British rule in treating its Irish subjects as secondary citizens, Douglass rejected the claim that “we [the Irish] are

³⁴ *Waterford Freeman*, 12 September 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 134.

³⁵ The Young Irelanders would be a thorn in Douglass’s side later in his career. Following a failed uprising in 1848, many Young Irelanders fled to America, among them John Mitchel, who became an apologist for slavery in his New York newspaper *The Citizen*. Along with many Irish Americans, Mitchel held the opinion that it was not the Irish immigrants’ business to resist slavery, being already faced with discrimination from Americans on account of their Catholic faith. Fearing economic competition with free blacks, Irish Americans were concerned above all with assimilating into the American population as smoothly as possible, which joining the antislavery cause would be sure to complicate. For more on Douglass’s difficulties with Irish Americans, particularly in the years following his return to the United States, see Richard Hardack, “The Slavery of Romanism,” 115-140.

³⁶ Quinn, “Safe in Old Ireland,” 547.

slaves here as well as your countrymen in America.”³⁷ To Douglass, this was a fatal error. He retorted, “Slavery was not what took away one right or property in man; it took man himself, and made him the property of his fellow.”³⁸ Drawing a clear divide between slavery and political oppression, beyond a shared physical suffering and hunger, Douglass saw nothing like American slavery on the soil on which he now stood.³⁹ Indeed, on numerous occasions Douglass speaks of his experience of freedom springing from the moment he set foot on this very soil.⁴⁰ If he, as one that has lived in bondage, could feel this freedom so powerfully in Ireland, it could not be possible that the Irish endured the same oppression as the American slave.

Douglass’s management of the Repeal issue and the complex nature of Ireland’s own self-image as another form of politically oppressed people demonstrated the development of a pragmatist politics. He quickly learned the nuances of Ireland’s fraught political landscape, which became all the more complex due to the strength of Irish sectarianism and its connection to politics. In the briefest of explanations, Ireland’s history was rife with religious contention. Britain’s conquest of Ireland in the sixteenth century had established a Protestant Ascendancy, particularly in northern Ireland, who enjoyed greater political power and economic wealth than their Catholic Irish counterparts. For this reason, there had been an increasingly strong association between Irish nationalism and Catholicism, against the Anglican-leaning sentiments of the Protestant population of the north. Given the complexity of this history, it is likely that Douglass himself was somewhat blindsided by the depth of Irish sectarianism. After his first few

³⁷ *Banner of Ulster*, 9 December, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*. 244.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

³⁹ Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 164.

⁴⁰ In his final speech in Belfast on 6 January, 1845, Douglass remarked, “I left [America], and in 11-12 days I set my foot on British soil, and was free.” In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 315.

addresses, James Haughton, a Dublin abolitionist, felt compelled to contextualize Douglass's attacks as only against "those [churchmen] who sustain slavery," to which Douglass exclaimed rather clumsily, "I love religion!"⁴¹

As the sustaining theme of Douglass's anti-slavery speeches was the hypocrisy of American churches, it was inevitable that he should run into hot waters, especially given the religiosity of the Irish population. The first such scrape occurred early in his tour. On 12 September 1845, Webb had arranged for Douglass to speak at the Friends' Meeting House in Dublin, a rare opportunity as traditionally Quakers closed their doors to such meetings, preferring a conservative approach to anti-slavery that was averse to public agitation of any sort. At this talk, the Dublin Quakers were embarrassed by the strength of Douglass's denunciation of the Methodist Church, with Webb spending much of the meeting trying to quieten down Catholics in the audience who were "taking too much noisy delight at the Methodists being so roundly chastised."⁴² Douglass was subsequently banned from the Meeting House but Webb stood by him, demonstrating his support by resigning from the Society of Friends and joining the Unitarians, trading one dissident sect for another.⁴³ It was Douglass's first flavor of the delicacy with which he would have to approach Ireland's religious sensibilities. Of course, Douglass might not have been overly concerned about avoiding trouble. Indeed, in a second appearance at the Dublin Music Hall, the next venue after the Friends' Meeting House debacle, the Quakers received the brunt of the abuse in his attack on the hypocrisy of American churches.

⁴¹ Anti-Slavery Meeting, Dublin Music Hall, October 1, 1845. Quoted in Fenton, *The Black O'Connell*, 80.

⁴² Douglas C. Riach, "Ireland and the Campaign against American Slavery," 287, cited in Fenton, *The Black O'Connell*, 70. There were more than 40,000 Methodists in Ireland in the early 1840s, compared to around 3,000 Quakers. Perhaps Douglass picked his battles when he continued with his cause, even if it meant sacrificing the support of the Quakers.

⁴³ Quinn, "Safe in Old Ireland," 538.

Douglass's next particularly fraught encounter was with the Methodists in Cork.

Although located in the south west of Ireland, Cork was home to a number of denominations and many of the audiences Douglass spoke to were mixed, with a significant Methodist, Quaker and Unitarian contingent—among them Douglass's hosts, the Jennings family. On 17 October 1845, Douglass spoke at an anti-slavery meeting at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. After Douglass finished, Reverend William Reilly, a Methodist minister, rose. He “could not but observe that an animus was evident in the language of Mr. Douglass not at all favorable to the Methodists” and reminded him that Methodists had played a key role in Great Britain's decision to abolish slavery in 1833.⁴⁴ Douglass replied with careful tact that he was speaking only of the churches of America. Another Methodist minister, Joseph W. McKay, could not resist weighing in. He accused Douglass of attacking Methodists in his speech at the Court House whilst Roman Catholics and other sects were passed by, simply to raise an easy cheer from the predominantly Catholic audience present that day.⁴⁵ Douglass had less patience for this comment, remarking that his audience asked too much if they expected him to know a man's religion by his face, and that if the majority of his listeners were Catholics, he believed that simply demonstrated they had “more sympathy with the slave than did the other sects” and therefore did not warrant censure.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Editorial in the *Cork Constitution*, 20 October, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 199. It is worth noting that this same article contains details of a small spat between Douglass and one of its journalists. The article responds to Douglass's comments earlier in the meeting where he chastises a reporter for the newspaper who had described him as “an excellent specimen of the Negro.” Douglass did not take this remark kindly, describing it as a “good advertisement from a slave journal”, and instantly gave up his subscription to the newspaper. The article says that Douglass misquoted the reporter, who had rather written “He is a fine young negro”, asking rather blithely if there is anything uncomplimentary in that, and taking offense to being described as a negro “in a man of his mission [...]. would be a queer subject of complaint.” They ask rather snobbishly “If the persons who are parading their ‘lion’ from platform to platform and from tea-party to breakfast party would teach him [...] to cultivate somewhat more sense and less sensitiveness, they would do him a service.”

⁴⁵ Quoted in Fenton, “*The Black O'Connell*”, 149.

⁴⁶ *Cork Examiner*, 15 October 1845, 20 October 1845, quoted in Quinn, “Safe in Old Ireland,” 546.

Douglass even ventured to point out an “over-sensitiveness” among the individuals of some sects.⁴⁷ His rebuttal was accepted by the audience and, for the rest of his stay, Douglass found that the local newspapers continued to encourage readers to avail themselves of the opportunity to hear him speak.

It was likely that Douglass’s censure of the Methodists had prompted such offense because his audiences tended to be English-speaking and already sympathetic with, or at least attracted to, the anti-slavery cause. In sum, this tended to mean a largely white Protestant audience. The Cork and Limerick newspapers did not take as much issue with Douglass’s speeches, perhaps because these cities had a significant Catholic population.⁴⁸ Indeed, Douglass felt capable of overtly describing the Catholics as “less guilty” of the crime of communion with slaveholders because they at least “put the slave and his master on the same level at the communion table” because he knew that he was speaking in a strongly Catholic location.⁴⁹ He had the political sense to know where it would reap rewards to play to the Catholic contingent and when it would be prudent to hold back; in Belfast, he dropped all references to Catholics, knowing that they would not be well-received in the Protestant metropolis. Nevertheless, the *Limerick Reporter* regretted that Douglass gave his anti-slavery meeting in a Methodist chapel, thus giving a “sectarian appearance to a cause that equally belongs to all” and feared that the choice of this location would have deterred some people from attending.⁵⁰ The veracity of this

⁴⁷ Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 149.

⁴⁸ Quinn, “Safe in Old Ireland,” 547.

⁴⁹ *Limerick Reporter*, 14 November, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 237. Douglass is alluding here to his own experience attending the Methodist church in New Bedford, following his escape from Baltimore. He was not allowed to sit in the body of the church on account of his race and, to his particular fury, is only asked to come forward for the Eucharist after the white members of the congregation had been served. (See Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 282-283).

⁵⁰ *Limerick Reporter*, 14 November, 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 237.

claim is debatable as, throughout his speaking tour, Douglass gathered audiences much larger than we might expect given the fairly small size of Ireland's official anti-slavery organizations. Indeed, Douglass played almost no role in choosing his speaking venues himself. He was sent abroad under Garrison's watch and resided with Garrisonian contacts, who booked venues according to where they hoped to attract the largest, or most important, audience for their prize speaker. In some ways, Douglass was fortunate to have such contacts that could assure him of an audience in Ireland, but it is also likely that he was not fully prepared for the complexity of sectarian dynamics amongst his audience, which he was particularly predisposed to aggravate given that his lecture topics had at their heart a campaign in the public humiliation of America and its churches. Nevertheless, the likelihood that Douglass was deliberately trying to exclude particular demographics from his lectures is remote: his vivid account of his life as a slave, not to mention the spectacle of seeing Douglass brandish the irons that held his brethren in bondage, attracted many working men off the streets for the promise of an almost sensationalist display.

After touring the cities of southern Ireland, Douglass headed north for Belfast, where he faced a new challenge in navigating the city's particular sectarian character. In this city of the Protestant Ascendancy, "Douglass met with opposition [...] The sects could not bear the touchstone of truth, when applied to their delinquencies in Belfast," noted Richard Allen of Dublin to the *Liberator*.⁵¹ Allen is likely referring to the Free Church debates that Douglass engaged with during his stay. The Free Church controversy had started in 1843, when Thomas Chalmers and a group of evangelical supporters seceded from the Church of Scotland to establish their own church, one that would take a more active role in attending to its congregation's

⁵¹ *Liberator*, March 13, 1846. Quoted in Ritchie, "The Stone in the Sling," 255.

spiritual and educational needs. To support this endeavor, Chalmers turned towards America for help, sending a deputation that raised over £9,000, a significant portion of which came from the slave-holding states of the south.⁵² Abolitionists condemned this action, seeing it as yet another attempt of slave owners to win foreign support or to at least buy their silence, and Garrisonian activist Henry C. Wright began a campaign to send back the “blood-stained offerings” of the Southern Presbyterian slaveholders, a cause that Douglass and Buffum promptly joined upon their arrival in Britain.⁵³ Although the bulk of this campaigning would take place in Scotland, the next leg of Douglass’s tour, Douglass was excited by the opportunity to land a decisive blow on the Free Church issue, noting in a private letter to Webb that Belfast “is the very hot bed of Presbyterianism and Free Churchism, a blow can be struck here more effectually than in any other part of Ireland.”⁵⁴ In this comment Douglass was alluding to the close affinity between the Ulster Protestants of Belfast and their Scottish counterparts. Predicated on distinguishing moral principles and material self-interest, the Free Church controversy shared many similarities with Douglass’s campaign against American churches and their sustenance of slavery and was consequently an important stand for Douglass to take. In similarly shameful conduct, both Chalmers and the American churchmen that Douglass attacked “forget that a Church is not for making money, but for spreading the Gospel.”⁵⁵ What’s more, the Free Church’s acceptance of money constituted a direct challenge to Douglass’s attempt to isolate proslavery churches both in America and abroad and therefore it was necessary to call these actions out.

⁵² Cited in Alasdair Pettinger, “Send Back the Money: Douglass and the Free Church of Scotland,” in *Liberating Sojourn*, ed. Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 32.

⁵³ *Letter from the Executive Committee of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society to the Commissioners of the Free Church of Scotland*, April 2, 1844.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 10.

⁵⁵ Alasdair Pettinger, “Send Back the Money: Douglass and the Free Church of Scotland,” in *Liberating Sojourn*, ed. Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 34.

Given the Free Church leanings of many of Belfast's inhabitants, tackling this issue was likely to prompt some furor, but the way in which Douglass approached the matter was particularly hazardous. On 12 December 1845, Douglass gave a lecture at the meeting of the Belfast Anti-Slavery Society at Rosemary Street Presbyterian. After opening with his routine exposition of the fallacy of a proslavery reading of the Bible, Douglass turned to the Free Church controversy. Courageously, he chose to contrast Chalmers' position with that of O'Connell: unlike the Free Church, this "mere politician" would not allow the "price of blood" to pollute the Repeal cause, referring to O'Connell's aforementioned decision to refuse donations from southern Americans. When Douglass then asked his audience, "Would the Church of Christ retain what the politician would not so much as touch?" he hit a nerve.⁵⁶ In contrasting Chalmers with O'Connell, Douglass entered dark waters. Indeed, the Roman Catholic politician was so thoroughly despised in the Protestant metropolis of Belfast that he once had to sneak out of the city under a false name while campaigning for Repeal. After this speech, some papers reduced their coverage of the meeting, leaving out passages unfavorable to the Free Church, and a handful of leading clergymen refused to attend subsequent meetings.⁵⁷ Even so, the meeting came to two important resolutions: that Christians are bound to protest chattel slavery as it finds no support in scripture, and that British and Irish churches should persuade their sister denominations in America that it is their duty to end fellowship with slaveholders, being contrary to the gospel.

First with the Methodists and then with the Free Church, Douglass had come under fire for appearing sympathetic to Catholics, as well as for playing one sect against each other,

⁵⁶ *Banner of Ulster*, December 16, 1845. Quoted in Ritchie, "The Stone in the Sling," 252.

⁵⁷ Fenton, "The Black O'Connell", 181.

depending on the make-up of his audience. His sojourn in Ireland took him into interesting territory because for the first time, Douglass was dealing with a significant Catholic population amongst his audience. Richard Hardack argues that Douglass was anti-Catholic, feeling more at home with his Unitarian hosts in Cork (the Jennings family), who were themselves outcasts in the predominately Catholic city, and that in general he preferred to give speeches to Methodists and Quaker audiences. In this way, Hardack argues that Douglass envisioned a “specific antislavery hierarchy in which Catholics always occupy the periphery.”⁵⁸ However, there is little evidence to support this view in the speeches that Douglass gave while in Ireland. It is more likely that part of the reason Douglass’s audiences might have had a more Protestant character was that these groups tended to already associate themselves with the anti-slavery cause and, as mentioned earlier, were English-speaking and well-to-do, precisely the audience that Douglass would want to attract for his purposes. Any anti-Catholicism in Douglass’s speeches more likely arose in relation to his animosity toward Irish Americans later in his career than with the Irish that he encountered in 1845.

Douglass tended to run into trouble when he did not clarify that he spoke specifically about American churches in his condemnation of the Methodists, Quakers, and other churchmen who held fellowship with slave owners. Thus, in learning to navigate the sectarian dynamics amongst his various audiences in Ireland, Douglass gained crucial practice developing a political pragmatism alongside a broader definition of slavery as a “cause of humanity,” with which a true Christian, regardless of denomination, could sympathize. Rather than emphasizing the creation of a fellowship amongst many colonized people, Douglass more consistently asks for the end to

⁵⁸ Hardack, “The Slavery of Romanism,” 117.

fellowship with the oppressors, such as the Irish Presbyterians with their sister denominations in America. In this way, by adjusting his language in light of the audience to which he spoke, Douglass cultivated a kind of local politics whose alliances shifted according to the immediate goal, without sacrificing the broader tactic of moral suasion and “patriotic shame.”⁵⁹ His experience in Ireland was crucial in developing this nuanced approach, even independence, within Garrisonian tactics.

Toeing the sectarian line was a challenge for Douglass, because it was as detrimental to his cause to appear categorically opposed to all religion as it was to appear predisposed to any one group. However the quarrels between religious groups in Ireland played out, these groups were all united in the strength of their religiosity. Some Protestant ministers in attendance of the antislavery meetings saw Douglass’s accusations as not only offensive but also pernicious, betraying an ugly infidelity to the Christianity they professed through their attacks on the “best members” of the Christian Church. For this reason, Douglass decided to add an appendix to the second edition of his *Narrative*, clarifying that “what I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper.”⁶⁰ In fact, he roused Webb’s hostility when he further insisted upon including testimonials from two Presbyterian ministers, as Webb feared that this would stoke precisely the same sectarian sensitivities that had already led Douglass into dark waters.⁶¹ Douglass’s refusal to concede this issue demonstrates an increasing self-confidence, particularly

⁵⁹ See Hardack, “The Slavery of Romanism,” 123.

⁶⁰ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, ed. David W. Blight (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2017), 117.

⁶¹ Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 136.

in ownership of his life-story and how he wished it to be presented to the world, in which his trip to Ireland played the first pivotal role.

Many scholars have described the transformative effect of Douglass's British tour, usually referring to Douglass's increasing independence from his Garrisonian mentors.⁶² Having already seen glimmerings of this independence regarding the printing of his *Narrative*, we see this thrown into stronger relief toward the end of Douglass's Irish tour, in the breakdown of his relationship with Webb. After parting ways with Douglass in Cork, Webb wrote privately to Maria Weston Chapman, Garrison's associate at the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, with whom Webb was in regular correspondence in order to keep an eye on their protégé's progress. In this letter, his opinion of Douglass is strikingly vehement: "He is in my opinion by much the least likeable and the least easy of all the abolitionists with whom I have come into intimate association."⁶³ Indeed, Webb betrays considerable racial prejudice when he writes that Douglass was "a sort of reclaimed wild beast and that it won't do to gauge him by our civilized rules," alluding to his fear that Douglass "should go astray [...] I would bitterly regret if anything occurred to mar his usefulness."⁶⁴ Besides the publishing quarrel, Webb is likely remembering his dispute with Douglass regarding joining forces with Henry C. Wright, who had been touring Scotland and Ireland for two years to fundraise for Garrison's proposals that antislavery states secede from the Union and draw up their own constitution. Douglass refused to connect with Wright in Limerick, believing that engaging the disunion question would distract from his

⁶² Alan Rice argues that Douglass "arrived in Britain as the raw material of a great black figure; [but left] ...in April 1847 the unfinished independent man, cut from a whole cloth and able to make his own decisions about the strategies and ideologies of the abolitionist movement." (Alan and Crawford, "Triumphant Exile," 3).

⁶³ Richard D. Webb to Maria Weston Chapman, 16 May 1846. Quoted in Quinn, "Safe in Old Ireland," 543.

⁶⁴ Richard Webb to Maria Weston Chapman, February 26, 1846. Quoted in Ritchie, "The Stone in the Sling," 257. Richard Webb to Maria Weston Chapman, September 1, 1846. Quoted in Ritchie, "The Stone in the Sling," 262.

antislavery mission.⁶⁵ In this refusal, Douglass not only showed that he was beginning to chafe under Weston's and Webb's paternalistic treatment but also foreshadowed that he would prefer a pragmatic strategy to Garrison's rather quixotic radicalism regarding the antislavery issue, much in the same way that he refused to join Garrison in vocally supporting Repeal.

Having shared the stage with *The Liberator*, having been widely acclaimed in the Irish press, and having been hosted by Lord Mayors and notables, it is no surprise that Douglass should leave Ireland more confident and independent-minded. As testament to his newfound confidence, just a few months after his return to America, Douglass moved to Rochester, New York and launched his own abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, with £445 from his British friends. The production was safely distanced from Garrison's *Liberator*, but a competitor, nonetheless.⁶⁶ Further to these first inklings of a break with Garrison, looking more closely at Douglass's Irish tour, we encounter a more specific kind of transformation. Under the "soft, grey fog of the Emerald Isle," which provides a blindness to skin color, but not a deafness to Douglass's words, Douglass found a dignity and respect for liberty that was totally absent under "the bright, blue sky of America."⁶⁷ In Ireland, Douglass did not find the slightest manifestation of that "hateful and vulgar feeling" against him that was ubiquitous in America: "lo! The chattel becomes man."⁶⁸ The speed of this change is remarkable. When Douglass gave his first public

⁶⁵ Quinn, "Safe in Old Ireland," 547.

⁶⁶ Tom, Chaffin, *Giant's Causeway: Frederick Douglass's Irish Odyssey and the Making of an American Visionary* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 147.

⁶⁷ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 297. It is noteworthy here that Douglass chooses "Emerald Isle" rather than "Great Britain". The Emerald Isle more nearly refers to Ireland, showing that perhaps within his sojourn abroad, Ireland held a preeminent position in his imagination as the place where he felt most affinity, particularly in connection to the Irish people who had also felt their liberties curbed by a colonizing power, from whom they were still not yet totally free.

⁶⁸ Douglass to Garrison, 16 September 1845, *Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Foner 1: 120. Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 297.

remarks before the audience at the Repeal meeting in Dublin, he apologized for addressing them, regretting that he was an uneducated man and had never been a day at school.⁶⁹ Four months later, at his last address in Belfast, Douglass's tone was rather different: "I trust I shall not be deemed presumptuous or egotistical, when I say, that, from my present position, I see points in my humble history which seem marked by the finger of God."⁷⁰ In Douglass's view, there was an almost Providential meaning to his Irish mission, the journey which transformed him and gave him new life. Douglass does not overstate the case: he did return to America a free man, for the price of £150.⁷¹

It is difficult to assess the extent of the impact that Douglass's Irish tour left in Ireland. However, there is no doubt that Douglass left a strong impression on any audience who had the chance to hear him speak. Upon his departure, the Irish wished Douglass well, with one correspondent of the *London Inquirer* writing from Belfast: "May God strengthen him to carry out his purpose! Let the 'apologists' but go to hear him: and though they had previously even resolved to reply to his observations, they will be struck dumb in his presence."⁷² Likely due to the more pressing issue of alleviating the suffering wreaked by the Famine, Ireland's anti-slavery movement remained small. The Quakers focused all their energies on famine relief efforts and in 1849, seeing the suffering that the Famine had wreaked, Webb did not even entertain the idea of holding an anti-slavery bazaar in Ireland, which would be looked on as a piece of "philanthropic knight errantry."⁷³ Indeed, Douglass himself felt some discomfort in pushing the antislavery

⁶⁹ *London Standard*, 1 October 1845. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*. 150.

⁷⁰ *Belfast Commercial Chronicle*, 7 January 1846. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 314.

⁷¹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 300.

⁷² *Liberator* (from the *London Inquirer*), 27 February 1846. In Douglass and Kinealy, *In His Own Words*, 320.

⁷³ Quoted in Fenton, "The Black O'Connell", 193.

cause while Ireland was contending with so much suffering at home. In the “wailing notes” of the Irish, Douglass saw much to remind him of his former condition as a slave and confessed he would feel ashamed to lift his voice against American slavery, did he not believe that it was a cause of humanity in which the whole world was concerned.⁷⁴ Indeed, it was precisely his exposure to the plight of the Irish during the Famine that contributed to his broadening concept of humanitarianism. Douglass was coming to view his fight against slavery as part of a larger global struggle against all social injustices. He did not go through Ireland with “eyes shut, ears stopped, or heart steeled” and became more certain that “the sooner the wrongs of the whole human family are made known, the sooner those wrongs will be reached.”⁷⁵ Douglass began to view suffering as a concern of humanity as a whole, one which would experience universal uplift and moral improvement if such suffering could be erased from within their ranks. Like O’Connell before him, Douglass came to view himself not only as an American slave, but as a *man*, bound to use his powers for the “welfare of the whole human brotherhood.”⁷⁶

Douglass proved himself able to transcend the age-old divisions in Ireland between Catholics and Protestants, and between nationalists and supporters of the Union, a none-too-small feat. Along with the political pragmatism that we see Douglass develop in navigating these complex divisions amongst his Irish audience, we also see a more calculating side to this pragmatism in the Anglophilia that Douglass betrays at times. He tended to expose such prejudice in relation to his temperance meetings, another significant cause that Douglass tackled on his British tour. He was largely unsuccessful in winning the Irish public to the temperance

⁷⁴ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 80. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, 141.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 166.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 165.

movement, which might explain Douglass's rather thoughtless assessment that drunkenness, rather than a state of political oppression, accounted more significantly for the grievances of the Irish population.⁷⁷ While this might be bitterness over the failure of his temperance speeches or an attempt to sidestep a deeper engagement with Ireland's political problems, Douglass might also be making a political calculation. Knowing the delicacy of Anglo-Irish relations, Douglass refused to allow for the possibility of testifying that British policies were responsible for Ireland's troubles, which would risk alienating the British public and therefore sacrificing a key antislavery support base.

In May 2011, Nettie Douglass, the great-great-granddaughter of Frederick Douglass, laid a wreath at O'Connell's crypt at Glasnevin cemetery. She was met at the graveside by Anne Quinlan, the great-great-great-granddaughter of O'Connell. In 2006, a mural of the black abolitionist was painted in Belfast, drawing a parallel between the struggle for African American rights and those of the Irish Catholics. In May 2011, another memorial to Douglass was waiting to be unveiled in Cork. In such ways, Ireland remembers O'Connell's commitment to antislavery and the way that Douglass shaped his legacy. These monuments pay tribute to Douglass's uncompromising commitment to a broad vision of reform, cementing a symbolic connection between the cause of Ireland and the cause of the African American who had experienced his first taste of true freedom on its shores almost two centuries ago. Angela Murphy observes a deep connection between Douglass and O'Connell that became increasingly entrenched following Douglass's return to America in his continued admiration of *The Liberator*: "the image of Douglass in Ireland has been a sort of mirror of what O'Connell was for the United States in

⁷⁷ See Douglass's comments in Fenton, "*The Black O'Connell*", 112.

the years after his death.”⁷⁸ Douglass carried the memory of Daniel O’Connell and his unwavering commitment to liberty right into the final years of his life. When a young man visited his Cedar Hill home seeking advice, Douglass, himself now the aged mentor to an eager ingenue, lifted words straight from O’Connell’s lips: “Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!”⁷⁹

It was the impression left by O’Connell, the complex challenge of preaching moral suasion in a land of deep sectarianism, and the Irish people’s fundamental respect for Douglass as a *man*, that created a unique transformation. More than simply becoming more self-assured, Douglass left with a new political vision. Throughout his long life, Nicholas Buccola argues that Douglass remains consistent in his commitment to an inclusive and humanitarian liberalism, which eventually set him apart from thinkers like Martin Delaney and W. E. B. Du Bois, who saw Douglass’s embrace of a classical liberal commitment to individual rights and the concept of mutual responsibility as too conservative for the radical uplift of the black population.⁸⁰ If such claims are true, we see the evolution of this commitment to liberalism played out in miniature in Ireland, where Douglass widened his humanitarian outlook whilst also learning political pragmatism as he shifted from under Garrison’s influence and balanced the sensitive nerves of Ireland’s religious population. In four short months, O’Connell’s words and Douglass’s own experience seeing first-hand Ireland’s suffering awakened Douglass to a new vision of broad humanitarianism, committed to devoting his attention to the “wrongs and sufferings” of the “great family of man.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Angela F. Murphy, “Though Dead He Yet Speaketh: Abolitionist Memories of Daniel O’Connell in the United States,” *American Journal of Irish Studies* 10 (2013), 34-5.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 206.

⁸⁰ Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: in Pursuit of American Liberty* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012), 1.

⁸¹ Quoted in Fenton, “*The Black O’Connell*”, 189.

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