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Beyond the "Proper Notice": Frederick Douglass, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the Politics of Critical Reprinting

Abstract This essay takes the critical reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* as an occasion to rethink modern constructions of critical authority while arguing for a print culture approach to literary criticism. Although scholars of antebellum culture typically focus on critical responses that are most readable by twenty-first-century standards (lengthy, signed reviews by readily identifiable critics in prestigious journals), paradoxically the less authoritative liminal critical forms (unsigned, unoriginal criticism circulated as reprinted reviews) displayed the centrality of criticism to nineteenth-century social and political life in the United States. Drawing on an expanded archive of eclectic critical forms, this essay denaturalizes and expands our sense of antebellum critical culture, examining the ways Frederick Douglass exploited the material diversity of contemporary print culture as part of his antislavery strategy, reprinting responses to Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel in an array of nontraditional critical forms to achieve pragmatic political goals. In so doing, Douglass transformed literary criticism from evaluation and entertainment into a powerful weapon in the war against slavery and the promotion of the interests of African Americans, applications that reaffirm the essay's claim for the importance of a material approach to critical culture.

Keywords literary criticism, antebellum periodicals, African American print culture, reception studies

In July 1852 editor, orator, abolitionist, and former slave Frederick Douglass included within the pages of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* an account of a recent three-day trip to Ithaca, New York. In recounting the details of his tour, Douglass paused to express his astonishment at the "pleasing change in the public opinion of the place" in its stance toward slavery since his last visit ten years earlier. He observed that while the Fugitive Slave Act and the cumulative effect of antislavery lecturers and papers must be held partly

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responsible for this shift, "It must be conceded that the most efficient agent in changing the sentiment of Ithaca, as well as elsewhere, must be set down to the circulation of 'UNCLE TOM'S CABIN.' That book is but at the beginning of its career, and it goes like fire through a 'dry stubble,' sweeping all before it" ("Letter from the Editor," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 30, 1852).[1] While acknowledging the important work Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel had accomplished, however, just one day earlier Douglass also recorded his surprise and discomfort when, arriving at a scheduled address to the black congregation of Zion Church, he discovered that the audience was, "contrary to my expectation, and partly to my wishes, largely composed of white persons." He further notes, "There are some things which ought to be said to colored people in the peculiar circumstances in which they are placed, that can be said more effectively among themselves, without the presence of white persons. We are the oppressed, the whites are the oppressors, and the language I would address to the one is not always suited to the other." Douglass adds, "I aimed to impress upon my friends, in my speech, the importance of helping themselves," a lesson that took on a decidedly ironic tone given the largely white audience. Although the dissonance between his message and the context was glaring, Douglass made no attempt to mask or apologize for the contradiction. Instead, he rendered it legible to his readership by narrating it through the form of an editor's letter, comprised of three days' worth of journal entries recording his travels and experiences in Ithaca, a form that provided enough space for such contradictions to express themselves. For while, on the one hand, Douglass couldn't help but marvel at the positive impact that Stowe's novel was having on the white population, on the other, he insisted that Northern blacks needed to take their future into their own hands and expressed concern that to speak without restraint required a venue "without the presence of white persons."

It was this same question of who should plead the cause of African Americans that formed the crux of Douglass's debate with black nationalist Martin R. Delany over *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. On this point, Delany does not mince words: "We have always fallen into great errors in efforts of this kind going to others than the *intelligent* and *experienced* among *ourselves*; and in all due respect and deference to Mrs. Stowe, I beg leave to say, that she *knows nothing about us*, 'the Free Colored people of the United States,' neither does any other

white person—and, consequently, can contrive no successful scheme for our elevation; it must be done by ourselves" ("Letter from M. R. Delany," *FDP*, April 1, 1853). Yet by 1852, Douglass was too pragmatic to make such categorical claims or to deny aid from white allies. As he responds to Delany,

> That colored men would agree among themselves to do something for the efficient and permanent aid of themselves and their race "is a consummation devoutly to be wished"; but until they do, it is neither wise nor graceful for them, or for any one of them to throw cold water upon plans and efforts made for that purpose by others. To scornfully reject all aid from our white friends and to denounce them as unworthy of our confidence, looks high and mighty enough on paper; but unless the back ground is filled up with facts demonstrating our independence and self-sustaining power, of what use is such display of self-consequence? ("Remarks," *FDP*, April 1, 1853)

This clash between pragmatism and principle, results and rhetoric, was visible throughout the literary criticism appearing in *Douglass' Paper*. For Douglass, as Robert S. Levine (1992, 74) notes, the moral and aesthetic value of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* resided in its capacity to effect social change, its "cultural work" in Jane Tompkins's (1985) formulation. Douglass's approach to literature and criticism was practical and instrumental, rooted in the ability of each to combat slavery and promote the elevation of the race. It was this pragmatic attention to outcomes that prompted him to chastise Delany for assertions that might appear "high and mighty enough on paper" but produced no quantifiable results. Or as Douglass puts it regarding Stowe's recent tour of England, "Heaven, according to Swedenborg, consists of '*uses*'; whether this be so or not, down here among men, things are valued according as they are useful, or discarded and thrown away as they are useless. The colored people in this country, will in the end, stand or fall by this test" ("Mrs. Stowe's Visit to England," *FDP*, April 15, 1853). While Douglass's remark refers specifically to the necessity of industrial schools for black freedmen and to the prospect of financial assistance from Stowe, it applies equally to Douglass's sense of the critical vocation. For Douglass, that is, both literature and criticism were valuable to the degree that they were "useful" and dispensable when they weren't. In practice, however, this meant that much of the literary criticism Douglass included in his paper privileged political

utility over aesthetic evaluation, while discarding longstanding markers of critical authority such as originality, length, known authorship, or even generic signposting as a review. Rather, more frequently critical content was reprinted from other periodicals, left unsigned, contributed by correspondents, or embedded in forms not clearly denoted as literary criticism. Indeed, while Douglass included a Literary Notices section in most issues, the literary discussions of greatest urgency and broadest cultural stakes—those tied to slavery, social uplift, and the political prospects of African Americans—seldom were restricted to the review section and instead were spread throughout the paper's featured contents.

If Douglass's expansive definition of criticism made up a deliberate editorial strategy, however, it could also make it difficult for readers to discern Douglass's own critical opinions, as amid reprinted articles and unconventional critical forms his direct authorial voice could at times seem notably absent. O. A. Bowe, a correspondent from nearby Herkimer, New York, remarks, "Among the most encouraging signs of the times, I think we may reckon the publication and wide diffusion of Mrs. Beecher Stowe's graphic and powerful work, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'" Of Stowe's novel, however, he states, "I do not recollect to have seen any proper notice, either editorial or communicated, in your columns." This editorial silence strikes Bowe as a missed opportunity: "It is, indeed, a mighty book—a perfect moral thunderbolt—and is making dreadful havoc among the 'refuges of lies' in which the political, clerical, and cotton apologists for slavery are accustomed to hide themselves" ("A Word from Old Herkimer," *FDP*, July 30, 1852). Yet despite Bowe's objection, by July 1852, Douglass had already printed not one but several critical responses to Stowe's novel, including letters from Ethiop [William J. Wilson] and William G. Allen, as well as an unsigned literary notice by either himself or his literary editor, Julia Griffiths. For Bowe, however, none of these pieces quite registered as a "proper notice," at least none that could be confidently taken as Douglass's response to Stowe's novel. As if to prove Bowe's point, in the same issue Douglass published the account of his travels in Ithaca, with his conflicted sense of the impact of Stowe's novel on the American public. In doing so, Douglass revealed a critical dissonance between the familiar sort of review that Bowe was calling for (and failing to find) and the brand of hybrid, eclectic, reprinted critical forms that Douglass favored.

To consider literary criticism in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* is to reflect on the very nature of criticism itself: what counts as criticism and what generic assumptions we bring when we study the United States' critical past. The editorial privileging of unsigned, unoriginal, genre-blurring literary criticism was hardly limited to *Douglass' Paper*. Rather, it was a staple of antebellum critical practice in antislavery papers like the *Liberator* (Boston) or the *National Era* (Washington, DC), early African American periodicals like the *Rights of All* (New York) or the *Colored American* (New York), and in the antebellum periodical press more broadly. As Meredith L. McGill (2003) has shown, reprinting was ubiquitous within antebellum literary culture, destabilizing literary history's emphasis on originality. For Ryan Cordell (2015, 418), the prevalence of reprinting within antebellum newspapers specifically reoriented conceptions of authority away from individual authorship and toward repetition, circulation, and the "network author," "a model of authorship that is communal rather than individual, distributed rather than centralized." In contrast to quarterlies and monthly magazines, which often prided themselves on original content, as Ellen Gruber Garvey (2012, 30–31) suggests, given the demands of frequent publication, newspapers relied heavily on reprinting both for copy and coverage outside their local purview. Far from haphazard, this practice of clipping and reprinting was orchestrated by a developed system of periodical "exchanges" that, as Frances Smith Foster (2005, 727–28) observes, was commonplace in the early black press as well, with newspaper exchanges recorded in Douglass's regular distribution lists. His reliance on clipping and reprinting from a vast print culture, meanwhile, as Garvey (2013) suggests, was a powerful rhetorical strategy employed by other antislavery advocates like Theodore Dwight Weld, Sarah and Angelina Grimké, and Stowe herself in both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its *Key* (1853).

Yet while reprinting features prominently in current scholarly conversations and while studies of American criticism are as old as the institutional study of American literature itself, little attention has been paid to the widespread practice of critical reprinting or to the ways reprinted reviews reconfigure entrenched assumptions about critical authority. Despite the vitality of print culture studies as a methodology for revising and complicating ossified narratives of literary history, scholarly treatments of American criticism remain surprisingly conservative in their criteria of critical value. They continue

to rely on a selective roster of sources and a narrow definition of criticism that paradoxically replicate Bowe's limited sense of the "proper notice," with its focus on originality, attribution, and generic self-identification, as the standard-bearer of critical authority. This essay works accordingly to bridge the fields of book history and critical history, arguing that a material approach to literary criticism and a sensitivity to the diversity of critical forms enrich our understanding of the cultural role of criticism in antebellum America and today.

In developing this larger methodological intervention, I offer two interrelated claims. First, I argue that antebellum critical culture relied on a diverse range of critical forms beyond reviews and literary notices, many of which were diffuse, anonymous, unoriginal, tangential, and generically hybrid, and that taken together they unsettle naturalized notions of critical authority. The unprecedented scale of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s success cast this critical diversity into relief, propelling critical practice into reflexive self-examination while taxing its generic bounds still further. In doing so, it highlighted the political potential inherent in literary criticism broadly and individual critical forms specifically, including forms typically dismissed by modern scholarship as marginal, if critical at all.

Second, I argue that in his capacity as editor Douglass wielded the power of reprinted, generically hybrid criticism to create a polyvocal critical forum that privileged the values of community debate over the authority of a single critical perspective, his own included. In choosing the two canonical, if not hypercanonical, texts of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, my intention is not to suggest that either is fully representative or exceptional in its evocation and display of antebellum critical practice. While there were certainly other novels that generated a political response in their reviews and while literary criticism has never in its long history *not* been political, even (if not especially) amid assertions of disinterestedness or objectivity, the cultural ubiquity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made this political agency impossible for observers to ignore, accelerated its embrace by segments of the literary population heretofore reticent to take fiction seriously, and gave these political valences material shape through the forms that various critical constituencies seized on to promote their respective agendas. The sheer extent of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*'s critical reception within antebellum culture laid bare the variety of critical forms in operation by 1850 as well as the political utility that even the

most unassuming of those forms could carry. The critical response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* thus offers a prime occasion for rethinking the material bearings of literary criticism itself, what counts as criticism, and the various ways criticism functions within US culture.

To be sure, neither Stowe nor Douglass is at any risk of scholarly neglect. Since the 1980s *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has become a representative text of New Historicism, a case study in feminist, cultural, and reception-based scholarship. Douglass, as John Ernest (2007) and Eric Gardner (2009, 6–10; 2015, 9–14) have separately cautioned, has long served as a lodestone in studies of antebellum black writing in a fashion that risks obscuring rather than revealing the vitality and diversity of early African American print culture. Yet this attention is hardly new: Douglass's and Stowe's contemporaneous fame prompted near-constant cultural commentary. Douglass's embrace of reprinted, generically eclectic criticism by a chorus of voices under the banner of his own name—a simultaneous assertion and subversion of Michel Foucault's author function—complicates charges by Ernest and others that continued scholarly attention to Douglass comes at the expense of other antebellum black voices. To the contrary, Douglass exploited his prominence to create a platform for other members of the black community, both known and obscure, to debate issues central to the well-being of the community while solidifying a black critical counterpublic. No one was more aware of the problematics of "the politics of representative identity," as Levine (1997) terms it, of the risk of being a stand-in for his race, than Douglass himself, and he used the venue of his paper to counteract this tokenizing tendency. For though the journal blazoned his name across its front page, Douglass's editorial policy favored debate and community dialogue rather than autocratic insistence on ideological conformity. His use of reprinted reviews, meanwhile, came to embody materially the cross-racial antislavery strategy that Douglass articulated in his debate with Delany, with reviews simultaneously asserting and effacing the identity of their writers while providing a flexible space for controversial views. Finally, the fact that scholars have previously discussed the reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the black press at some length, turning it into a model of critical reception studies, offers an opportunity to examine the ways scholarly technologies shape critical history. That no small amount of ink has been spilled on this topic, in other words, enables a

clearer view of the complex, reciprocal relationship between generic definitions of literary criticism in the critical present and constructed narratives of critical history, as well as between the digital technologies of twenty-first-century scholarship and our understanding of the print-based critical practices of the past.

In returning to the critical reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Douglass' Paper*, then, I redirect our gaze from the center to the fluid edges of critical practice. I focus not on original, signed reviews by familiar figures but on less-stable critical iterations: hybrid texts, often with unattributed or mixed authorship and circulating in forms that carry low or uncertain cultural authority. By focusing on the material periphery of critical discourse, we gain a more comprehensive picture of antebellum critical practices as well as how in Douglass's hands criticism shifted from the Literary Notices section to the front page, from second-order discourse into the main event. We see this political agency expressed not in the authority of the individual critic—not in Douglass as critic himself—but in the dispersed, unoriginal, fragmentary, generically ambiguous critical forms that Douglass used to cultivate critical communities. In this sense, this essay is both an attempt to historicize critical practice and to reveal literary criticism's cultural power. In the process, it offers a fresh view of Douglass's political priorities through the unlikely context of reprinted literary criticism, an unassuming discursive form whose very power resided not in its consolidation but in its decentering of critical authority.

Critical Norms, Critical Forms

To see the strategy inherent in Douglass's use of criticism first requires a comparative sense of critical norms in the 1850s, the diversity of forms that criticism took, and the hierarchies of critical prestige and cultural authority attached to these forms. If Bowe's invocation of a "proper notice" strikes us as nebulous today, it was equally so in 1852, gesturing at a fixed center of critical practice that by the 1850s had begun to fracture amid the expansion and diversification of antebellum critical culture. Between 1830 and 1860, American criticism went through its first great period of expansion, fueled by the rise of industrial print, increasing literacy rates, and growth of the book and magazine trades. Over the past century, scholars from Norman Foerster (1928) and William Charvat ([1936] 1961), to John

Stafford (1952) and Perry Miller ([1956] 1997), and more recently to Nina Baym (1984) and James L. Machor (2011) have offered accounts of antebellum American criticism rooted in aesthetics, competing ideologies of literary nationalism, or debates over established genre conventions, respectively. From a print culture standpoint, however, the growing prominence of criticism was a direct result of the increased production and availability of books combined with the expansion of the periodical press, an anxiety among readers of there being too much to read, and a commensurate sense that critics could help readers navigate the perceived flood of information. Though the first American magazines began appearing in the 1740s and, with them, book reviews, the rise of industrial print in the 1830s and 1840s ushered in what Frank Luther Mott (1930, 341–42) has described as the "golden age of periodicals." While in 1825 there were fewer than 100 non-newspaper periodicals, by 1850, there were approximately 600. And while, as Mott (1941, 216) records, there were approximately 1,200 newspapers in 1833, three times as many as in England or France, by 1860 that number had increased to 3,000, not including the thousands of short-lived papers that came and went during the same period. This rapid growth of the periodical trade brought criticism to the center of the American cultural scene, with reviews serving as an aid to book selection, a mode of intellectual digest essential to the dissemination of knowledge, and a form of pleasurable reading in its own right.

Since the early decades of the nineteenth century, the standard-bearers of critical authority in the United States were the lengthy essays published in the quarterly reviews such as the *North American Review*, the *American Whig Review*, the *Dial*, and the *Christian Examiner*, journals drawing on the influential British model of the *Edinburgh Review*. Essays in these quarterlies signaled their seriousness of purpose through their length, their intellectual rigor, and the cultural authority of their critics. As Charvat (1961, 5–6) notes, the critical authority of these men was reinforced by their primary professions as lawyers, doctors, ministers, and even an occasional president; they employed the books under review as occasions to sermonize liberally on the topics at hand. Second in prestige to quarterlies were book reviews in popular monthly magazines, journals like *Graham's*, *Godey's*, or Lewis Gaylord Clark's *Knickerbocker*, wide-circulation magazines that turned authorship into a professional trade by paying

writers well and raised subscription numbers to unprecedented levels through fashionable, entertaining fare by popular contributors. This increasing reliance by publishers like George Graham and Louis Godey on a growing cadre of critics of established reputation—figures such as Edgar Allan Poe, James Russell Lowell, Margaret Fuller, Edwin Percy Whipple, or William Alfred Jones—was reinforced by the growing popular taste for literary gossip and "personality" criticism. Critics became minor celebrities in series such as *Graham's* "Our Contributors," Poe's "Literati of New York City" in *Godey's*, and Clark's popular "Editor's Chair" column in the *Knickerbocker*, in which, as Perry Miller (1997, 15) notes, the comings and goings of critics became entertainment in its own right. Fuller's career move from editor of the *Dial* to contributing literary editor of the *New-York Tribune* gestures at a third critical context, meanwhile, as reviews and notices became prominent features in wide-circulation daily and weekly newspapers. Even more than with quarterlies and monthly magazines, the critical context of newspapers blurred the line between politics and literary criticism, both ideologically and in the material intermingling of their diverse contents, as literary events were often front-page stories rather than belletristic affairs relegated to the Literary Notices section.

Beyond original reviews and essays in these three prominent critical contexts—quarterlies, monthly magazines, and daily/weekly newspapers—criticism also circulated through a range of other less frequently cited forms. These contexts shaped a piece of criticism's argument, orientation, and sense of cultural purpose. They ranged from literary lectures and introductions to anthologies, prefaces to novels, and published collections of reviews, on the one hand, to blurbs, advertisements, brief literary notices, and excerpted, fragmentary, unattributed, and reprinted notices, on the other. While some of these eclectic forms—Nathaniel Hawthorne's preface to *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), for instance, or Ralph Waldo Emerson's "American Scholar" address (1837)—feature prominently in American critical history, by and large scholars gloss over or ignore other more diffuse, fragmentary, and less generically recognizable critical forms, their critical legitimacy undermined by brevity, anonymity, unoriginality, and generic hybridity. When these disparate critical expressions do appear in critical histories or literary anthologies, their material and cultural contexts are frequently flattened, if not removed altogether.

In this Nortonization of criticism, diverse critical forms are homogenized into the familiar tissue-paper pages of *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* and thereby stripped of their complex cultural employments, social engagements, and generic negotiations.

If scholars such as Miller (1997) and Baym (1984) have privileged prestigious or high-circulation journals like the *North American Review* or *Graham's* in their critical histories, in practice it was commonplace for editors to reprint critical reviews from obscure, short-lived journals or from local newspapers, cutting and pasting at the editor's discretion, while citing only the source rather than any named critic.[2] This general disregard for reprinted criticism, despite its cultural prevalence, is less a fault of scholars than a sign of the changing scholarly times, of new technologies and shifting methodologies, particularly the emergence of searchable digital periodical databases in tandem with a renewed interest in the material experience of literary consumption that is an ongoing legacy of book history. This combination of new digital technologies and an ideological return to the archive has enabled new generations of scholars to reclaim the critical margins, organizing countless two-line fragments, advertisements, and critical responses printed outside the domain of a journal's review section into a coherent narrative while using powerful search engines to identify the origins of a reprinted piece, what editorial changes it underwent, and even who wrote it. If scholarship has tended to focus on more predictable, authoritative critical forms—lengthy, attributable reviews in established journals—as often as not antebellum readers confronted the sorts of brief, unsigned reprinted notices that filled *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, a daily confrontation with peripheral modes of criticism that shaped the day-to-day, page-by-page haptic experience of perusing an antebellum periodical.

If Douglass's reliance on reprinted criticism makes it difficult to get a clear view of Douglass as critic, the question of literary criticism in *Douglass' Paper* is complicated further by the fact that, unlike prominent critics such as Poe or Fuller, Douglass issued no explicit remarks on the practice of literary criticism generally or an African American critical enterprise specifically. Yet as Elizabeth McHenry (2002, 114–29) has argued, Douglass's editorial commitment to literature and criticism is evident within the pages of his various journals through both the manner and the extent of his treatment of literary subjects. For McHenry, in reconstructing Douglass's critical voice, three principles

become evident. First, Douglass sought to provide a forum for the promotion of black authors, whose work he both excerpted and reviewed. Second, he measured literature by European American and black American writers dually according to both political *and* imaginative standards, asserting creative license for black writers and freeing them from what McHenry calls the "verbal bondage" (120) of a compelled verisimilitude. Finally, by placing work by European, European American, and black writers side by side within the pages of his papers, he advanced the radical idea of "creative parity" (124) between black and white writers. Though critical principles began to coalesce especially around Douglass's reviewing of a series of slave narratives, as McHenry notes, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* provided a "concrete center" and "a point of departure" (127) for Douglass's consideration of the role of literature and criticism within efforts for black liberation, elevation, and equality. For Barbara Hochman (2011, 78–103), meanwhile, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was more than a focal point for discussions; it was a cultural watershed that for Douglass and the antebellum reading public more generally legitimated fiction as a literary genre, disarming a still-lingering resistance to the novel as a discursive form. The success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was also the single largest factor in overcoming the widespread resistance to fiction in the early black press, visible not only in pioneering newspapers like *Freedom's Journal* (New York) and the *Colored American*, but in Douglass's first journalistic enterprise, the *North Star* (Rochester, NY), which, compared to his later periodical ventures, treated fiction less often and with greater ambivalence.

While in the *North Star* (1847–51) Douglass encouraged literary pursuits primarily for the purposes of self-culture, community building, and to refute charges of black intellectual inferiority, when the journal merged with the Liberty Party's newspaper in June 1851 to form *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1851–63), the same month that the serialization of Stowe's novel began in the *National Era*, Douglass's inclusion of both literature and literary criticism became more extensive and less confined to moral and intellectual improvement. Literary treatments became increasingly prevalent not only in the Literary Notices and Miscellanies sections but as front-page news. Among the literary treatments included, Douglass and Griffiths prioritized reviews of works by black authors like the poetry of Phillis Wheatley and Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857). The editors also

routinely reviewed antislavery novels such as Richard Hildreth's *The White Slave* (1836) and Mary Langdon's *Ida May* (1854), reformist works like Thurlow Weed Brown's temperance novel *Minnie Hermon* (1854), and proslavery anti-Tom novels like Mary Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852) and W. L. G. Smith's *Life at the South; or, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" as It Is* (1852). The literary coverage extended to canonical writers as well, with Griffiths including pieces by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Fenimore Cooper, John Greenleaf Whittier, Lydia Maria Child, and even an excerpt from Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846). In looking across the Atlantic, she included works by Sir Walter Scott, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Felicia Hemans, while for eighteen months Douglass dedicated the final page of his paper to a lengthy serialization of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (McHenry 2002, 123–25). The editors included less well-known fiction as well, often of a political nature, ranging from Wilson's original story "Terance Ludlam" (1854) and Laura J. Curtis's radical woman's rights novel *Christine; or, Woman's Trials and Triumphs* (1856) to Elizabeth Livermore's *Zoë; or The Quadroon's Triumph* (1855). Nor was Griffiths above including lighter fare, excerpting from Fanny Fern's *Fern Leaves* (1853), reviewing Ellen Louise Chandler's *This, That, and the Other* (1854), and including a range of short sketches by Stowe and Dickens. In the Miscellanies section, finally, discussions ranged from "The Author of 'Jane Eyre,'" "Anecdotes of Milton," and a sketch of *Blackwood's* critic Christopher North (John Wilson), to Henry Ward Beecher on "The Duty of Owning Books." And then, of course, there was the fanfare that accompanied the release of Douglass's expanded autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855).

It was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, however, that above all dominated literary discussions in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Typically, scholarly accounts of the critical reception of Stowe's novel in *Douglass' Paper* focus on responses with a specific critical profile: contributions by prominent black spokesmen (Douglass, Allen, William J. Wilson) that were long enough to be generically recognizable as a review and written explicitly for Douglass's paper. These commentators also tend to offer critical—or at least skeptical—readings of Stowe's novel, balancing an acknowledgment of its political efficacy with a critique of its degrading representation of blacks, its commercialization, and its conservative espousal of colonization. In cases where authorship is ambiguous, as with unsigned reviews in the Literary Notices section,

scholars like Stephen Railton or McHenry occasionally attribute the authorship to Douglass by default, even in some cases with reviews that bear Griffiths's explicit signature "JG."[3] Within this broader discussion, several critiques are almost invariably singled out for consideration. These include the initial unsigned notice praising the effects of the novel written by either Douglass or Griffiths; Allen's critique of Tom as too pious, along with his attack on Stowe's colonizationist stance and his insistence on amalgamation as the only path forward for the United States; Wilson's wry account of Uncle Tom mania in Brooklyn; and Douglass's report of a visit to Stowe's house in Andover, Massachusetts, in which he endeavored to convince Stowe of the pressing need for an industrial college for black freedmen. The centerpiece of most accounts, meanwhile, is the heated epistolary exchange between black nationalist Martin Delany and the more-restrained Douglass over the question of whether Stowe, a white woman, could or should speak for the black race. Taken together, the collective portrait we receive in these accounts is of an engaged community of black intellectuals who cautiously responded to both the promise and potential perils of Stowe's novel within the pages of the era's foremost black periodical.[4]

While there is much truth to this account, the handful of reviews of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* typically foregrounded by scholars makes up only a small fraction of the critical responses to the novel that appeared in *Douglass' Paper*. In the ten-month interval that elapsed between Wilson's report from Brooklyn in June 1852 and the opening volley of the Douglass-Delany exchange in April 1853, Douglass published scores of other responses, the majority of them reprinted from other papers. He did so at the height of the novel's popularity, moreover, between publisher Jewett's release of the two-volume book edition in March 1852 and the tapering of sales in late 1853. In his account of the novel's reception in *Douglass' Paper*, Levine (1992, 75–77) proves duly sensitive to both uncertain authorship and the presence of reprinted material, devoting several pages to reprinted articles that appeared in the year between Ethiop's report from Brooklyn and Delany's first letter. As Levine suggests, Douglass as editor thereby offered testimonials regarding the influence and accuracy of Stowe's depictions, charted the book's reception in England, and responded critically to anti-Tom novels. Yet Levine's account doesn't fully convey either the extent or the formal and thematic diversity of the material that

Douglass reprinted in response to Stowe's novel. This is less a comment on the thoroughness of Levine's study, which refocused scholarly debates over Stowe's novel by placing African American voices at the center (providing a new model of reception studies in the process), than evidence of the expanded access to periodical archives enabled by the rise of OCR capabilities, keyword-searchable periodical databases, and digital humanities projects like Railton's *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, resources unavailable to Levine in 1992. These technological developments make it possible for twenty-first-century scholars, myself included, to identify, collate, and evaluate all mentions of Stowe's novel, however cursory or indirect, from two-line blurbs on sales numbers to critical discussions buried in seemingly tangential or unrelated articles. With this expanded periodical archive, building on Levine's foundation, we see the degree to which discussions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* permeated political debates over slavery both in *Douglass' Paper* and in antebellum culture at large.

Frederick Douglass, Critical Reprinter

In the single year that elapsed between April 8, 1852, when the first notice of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared, and April 1, 1853, when Delany's first letter was printed, Douglass included no fewer than seventy-five pieces that responded to Stowe's novel in some form or other. Of these, more than forty articles, well over half, were culled from other papers, a percentage that increases to two-thirds when one includes reprinted addresses, minutes, and proceedings that addressed Stowe's novel. That is to say, the majority of Douglass's critical engagement with *Uncle Tom's Cabin* came not through editorial commentary or original reviews but secondhand through reprinted articles. From the perspective of literary history, the challenge of reprinting in assessing the critical legacy of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* is that it threatens to undermine the critical authority of Douglass's voice as well as that of his paper. As a result, there is a scholarly tendency to apologize for reprinting and to assimilate diverse and eclectic voices, sources, and discursive genres into a unified editorial vision. Though Levine (1992, 73), following Quarles (1968, 83–84), is right to suggest that Douglass's "selection process needs to be considered as a central part of his efforts to shape a particular way of reading the novel" and to remind us that the journal blazoned Douglass's name across its banner in every issue, still, the individual pieces were rarely signed. This absence

of attribution poses a problem for scholars, as even within editorial content like the Literary Notices section, it is frequently impossible to determine whether Douglass or Griffiths was the author. This constant ambiguity is compounded by the fact that Douglass did occasionally sign pieces "Ed." or Griffiths mark her notices "JG," highlighting in the process just how many of their contributions *weren't* signed.

If twentieth-century critics are anxious to attribute authorship to Douglass, paradoxically, Douglass often seemed unconcerned that any piece be credited to him. Despite the fact that the journal carried his name, he was remarkably willing—indeed, ideologically committed—to publish positions with which he strongly disagreed, as is evident in his heated exchange with Delany over *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Introducing a letter by Delany in the *North Star*, he writes, "Identity of color, does not forbid a difference of opinion: and having a common object, does not prohibit a free expression of that difference" ("The Letter of Mr. Delany," *North Star*, June 27, 1850). Respectful, spirited disagreement was the hallmark of a free press for Douglass. In practice, Douglass's near-constant lecture engagements and antislavery traveling drew him away from the editorial chair for long periods, as evidenced by the frequent printed apologies for his editorial silence. The result was that letters from correspondents and reprinted articles were as characteristic of *Douglass' Paper* as were editorials by Douglass himself. If most scholars point to the strong authorial stamp that the journal's title inevitably exerted over the paper's diverse contents, Douglass himself, in responding to William Lloyd Garrison's charge of egotism for the paper's new name, dismissed the title as little more than "simple, unpretending and truthful," certainly less grand or presumptuous than the *Liberator* or the *National Era* and more functional, for "it is 'Frederick Douglass' Paper,' in name, and in fact." As he sardonically quips by way of conclusion, "Do let a colored man in the United States have the pleasure of calling something after his own name, even though it should savor a little of 'egotism'" ("George Thompson, R. D. Webb and the Liberty Party Again," *FDP*, November 6, 1851).

To be sure, Levine is correct to point out that reprinting and editorial selection were part of Douglass's antislavery strategy. Instead of a unified perspective rendered legible under the author function of Douglass's name, however, that strategy more closely resembled what Lara Langer Cohen (2012, 164) describes as a "patchwork

aesthetic," a practice of reprinting, assembly, and collage that was widely employed within the early black press. To understand African American print culture, Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (2012, 14) suggest, requires new critical paradigms that dispense with the traditional emphasis on originality, print capitalism, and authorship as principles of value and coherence. "As literature written *by* (rather than *for* or *about*) African American persons is the almost universal criteria for defining African American literature," Cohen and Stein note, "theoretical arguments for displacing the author have usually been read as hostile to the intellectual and political project that has carved out space for that literature." This revisionist paradigm, with its embrace of *un*original, *un*remunerated, and *un*signed writing, helps make sense of Douglass's career as literary critic, in which he privileged other voices over his own and expressed critical opinions by reprinting a generically diverse array of criticism from other sources.

Nor can the response to Stowe's novel in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* be either subsumed under Douglass's individual interpretation or reduced to a unified "black response." Rather, in curating the response to the novel in his paper, Douglass included multiple conflicting viewpoints, often in the same issue and on occasion within the same article. To do so, he relied on the generic power of a diverse array of critical forms: letters, addresses, minutes, testimonies, reviews, prefaces, sales notices, advertisements. And while Douglass frequently remediated these forms to suit his purposes, he also exploited the inherent capacities of specific generic forms. This savvy awareness of the signifying potential of diverse and overlapping generic forms and methods of circulation was, as Sarah Meer (2009; 2012) suggests, typical of Douglass's strategy as an editor. Indeed, as a critic, Douglass displayed his understanding of the cultural work of both literature and literary criticism not through direct editorial statements but through the variety of generic critical forms that he included in his paper. Ultimately, as Levine (1992, 78–79) proposes, these forms collectively point to a "social-transformative reading" of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and of literature more generally, that estimated a literary work based on its cultural impact rather than its aesthetic value. This instrumental sense of the utility of criticism is visible, I suggest, through the types of critical forms Douglass reprinted. There, the value of criticism generally was linked to its practical power to effect social and political change, and more locally, Douglass's use of specific critical forms worked to promote both strategic political goals and the broader

nurturing of a black critical public sphere. To see Douglass in his capacity as critic accordingly requires an openness to forms of criticism that for various reasons—brevity, anonymity, unoriginality, or a nonliterary focus—have traditionally undercut their authority, and even legitimacy, as literary criticism. Such liminal forms often don't strike us as criticism at all, yet they paradoxically gesture at Douglass's nimble, wide-ranging, and activist conception of the critical vocation, as well as his privileging of community debate over the sovereignty of a single viewpoint.

In the May 27, 1852, issue, for instance, Douglass reprinted the minutes of a meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* featured as a main topic of discussion. The treatment of the novel began when James McCune Smith moved that the society officially record its gratitude to Stowe for writing the novel. "Its success—unexampled as it was—proved the depth and breadth of the anti-slavery feeling in this country," Smith asserts. "The writer . . . touched a vein richer than California gold, and [will] be followed by a host of Grub street imitators." As Smith reflects, echoing Theodore Parker, "If there was romance in the country, it was in relations between masters and slaves, and in the mixed relations growing out of them" ("American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society," *FDP*, May 27, 1852). As the meeting proceeds, the attendees eulogize Stowe's novel and record its positive influence on the acceptance of romance in the country. Smith goes on to "criticise the critic of the Literary World," while Louis Tappan and others personally acquainted with Stowe and the *National Era*'s editor, Gamaliel Bailey, narrate personal anecdotes regarding the book's origins and serialization. Society members recount anecdotes about the novel's reception, discuss strategies about its proposed reprinting in a cheap pamphlet edition, and debate its colonizationist sympathies. In short, we see a range of reactions and the various ways in which the novel's cultural impact was measured. We see the manner in which Stowe's contemporaries discussed the novel and how it came to exert a political impact, a process described not through abstract encomiums or the perfunctory recourse to Abraham Lincoln's apocryphal sound bite about the "little woman who started the war" but rather through the novel's treatment within the proceedings of an *actual* political gathering. Above all, the antislavery society minutes gave material shape to Douglass's sense of the cultural and political work of criticism.

This particular discussion of Stowe's novel is, I suggest, emblematic of the dialogic nature of literary criticism within *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. While these sorts of unwieldy critical responses—eclectic and meandering, contradictory and anecdotal—are seldom discussed in scholarly accounts of the novel, they possessed many advantages for an editor like Douglass. For one, they were free in terms of both cost and critical labor. They also allowed Douglass to present a clash of critical opinions instead of a single reader's response, amplifying the political resonance of criticism by collapsing the distance between literary-critical discussions and adjacent political debates. If Douglass's deployment of reprinted criticism for political ends was implicit in much of his journal's critical contents, it was all but explicit when he reprinted remarks on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* couched within the minutes of antislavery society meetings, transcripts of congressional proceedings, or addresses from foreign fund-raising celebrations in Stowe's honor. At other times, he authenticated the truth of Stowe's literary portraits through testimonials from Southerners or with accounts of real-life incidents that for observers seemed torn from the pages of Stowe's novel, evidence of that ubiquitous epigram, "Truth is stranger than fiction." The longest response to the novel, meanwhile, came in Douglass's reprinting of Henry Ward Beecher's exhaustive reconstruction of the controversy surrounding Reverend Joel Parker's threatened libel suit of Stowe, a 9,000-word account of a single sentence that Stowe attributed to Parker in her novel in a footnote: Parker's notorious assertion that slavery has "no evils but such as are inseparable from any other relation in social and domestic life." In his exacting reconstruction of the events of the controversy, spanning the front page of two issues of *Douglass' Paper*, Beecher adjudicated the precise relationship between fiction and fact through a blend of letters, legal consultation, citations, and personal reminiscence ("The Reply of Henry Ward Beecher," *FDP*, November 5 and 12, 1852).

At the other end of the spectrum was the ticker tape stream of two-line blurbs culled from other papers in which Douglass reported on the ever-increasing sales of the novel, on translations in Germany and France, the warm reception in Hawaii, or the astonishing account on August 5, 1853, of a man who, difficult to fathom, had not yet read *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Douglass reprinted more recognizable critical forms as well. On December 17, 1853, he copied a lengthy biographical sketch of Stowe by an "Alabama Man" originally published in

Fraser's Magazine. He printed accounts of dramatizations and dioramas of Stowe's novel as well as reviews, both original and reprinted, of anti-Tom novels. He paid close attention to the British reception of Stowe's book, reprinting the entirety of Sir Arthur Helps's lengthy response to the novel in *Fraser's*, the Earl of Carlisle's introduction to the British edition of the novel, and the *London Examiner*'s frequently reprinted review, "Uncle Tom's Cabin in England," which also circulated widely in pamphlet form. He printed addresses delivered at celebrations held in Stowe's honor during her trip to Great Britain in Glasgow and Belfast. He reprinted reviews of reviews, critics responding to other critics, even an apologist attack or two, including lengthy passages from George Graham's virulently racist screed, "Black Letters, or Uncle Tom Foolery in Literature."

The newspapers Douglass drew from, meanwhile, were as eclectic as the critical genres they inhabited. While he clipped most frequently from the New York *Independent* and the Washington, DC–based *National Era* and from papers issued in New York City, upstate New York, and London, he also drew from periodicals as geographically diverse as the Honolulu *Friend*, the Leeds *Mercury*, and the international *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Paris). All said, in a two-year period, Douglass reprinted articles from more than twenty-five different papers, while many of the notices he selected were themselves reprints already. On only one occasion did he apologize for the necessity of drawing from a specific periodical, namely, when he reprinted a letter by William Wells Brown from Garrison's *Liberator*, prompting Douglass's justification, "We copy the above letter from the *Liberator*, because we are always glad to lay anything from Mr. Brown before our readers" ("Letter from William W. Brown," *FDP*, June 10, 1853).

In each case, reprinting served as both copy and antislavery strategy. As with Stowe's *Key* or Theodore Dwight Weld's *American Slavery as It Is* (1839), notices from Southern papers gave credibility to authenticating accounts, while articles from Northern proslavery papers like the *Boston Post* increased the value of any positive notices they issued. Notices from British papers lent an air of neutrality, of opinion unbiased by vested regional interests, while papers from exotic locales revealed the impressive reach of the novel's influence, as did statistics of Jewett's ever-increasing print runs. Nor did reprinting imply lesser intellectual value; many of the most searching examinations of Stowe's novel in *Douglass' Paper* came not from original

contributors but from reprinted reviews. This is true of Helps's nuanced meditation on the challenge of political action in the face of seemingly insurmountable evil and the incisive essay "Negro Intellect.—Ellis and Douglass, and Uncle Tom," reprinted from the *National Era*, in which the unknown contributor "E" critiques the model of black victimhood represented by Uncle Tom, suggesting that both Douglass and the "learned black blacksmith" Harrison W. Ellis, viewed by some as the model for Stowe's Uncle Tom, were both preferable to Stowe's vision of pious submission. As the anonymous critic writes, "Such a demonstration for fitness for freedom, and all the offices of civil life and business, is worth much more for the cause of emancipation than all the sacrifices which submission can make to the spirit of masterdom. Let us have more blacksmiths, scholars, orators, philosophers, and natural noblemen of the race. We have victims enough already, and sympathy for suffering will be most profitably replaced by admiration for evincible magnanimity" (E., "Negro Intellect.—Ellis and Douglass, and Uncle Tom," *FDP*, July 15, 1853).

In using the above review, Douglass exploited yet another benefit of reprinting: the ability to distance himself from opinions that might strike readers as radical or offensive. For while much of the success of Stowe's novel lay with its evangelical spirit as embodied by Tom's piety, for the above reviewer, Tom's religion encouraged submission only. "Piety, as in the case of Uncle Tom, and apparently in that of the Rev. Ellis," the reviewer asserts, "is capable of being prostituted in the service of slavery. Because it acts upon the life mainly as a sentiment, it can be perverted into a sort of spiritual and moral handcuff, and made to answer the master as a restraint upon natural liberty." In Stowe's famous letter to Douglass, written on July 9, 1851, as she was still composing the serialized novel, the author cautioned Douglass against his distrust of organized religion evident in his 1845 *Narrative* (Stowe 1999, 59). By ventriloquizing such apostasy through the mouths of anonymous critics cited from other papers, however, Douglass could both expose the "spiritual and moral handcuff" of Christian piety while continuing to solicit Stowe for contributions to his project of a black industrial college. Through reprinting, that is, Douglass could voice controversial critiques without bearing personal responsibility for them.

This editorial buffer applied not only to reprinted material but also to original contributions. As with the essay "Negro Intellect,"

Douglass occasionally gave space to views that were more radical or militant than those he explicitly espoused in his capacity as editor. On August 6, 1852, for instance, in one of the earliest responses to the novel, Douglass published a letter by a correspondent from Sodus Bay, New York, under the signature "Sans Nom." The letter argued that the clear moral of Stowe's novel, in keeping with the example of George Harris, is that the North needed to arm fugitive slaves. For the contributor, this is no idle opinion; rather, the inevitable result of reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is "that it is proper and necessary to provide arms for fugitives at convenient places, and to encourage and instruct them in their use; and that for this purpose 'material aid' should be called for to constitute a fund to be called 'The Fugitives' Arms Fund' or any other appropriate name" (Sans Nom, "Little Sodus," *FDP*, August 6, 1852). Such a suggestion, anticipating the militancy of John Brown, would have been disconcerting, to say the least, to those Northerners who saw moral suasion or colonization as the answer to the problem posed by slavery, who preferred Uncle Tom's piety to George Harris's forceful resistance, to say nothing of Southerners who feared black revolt. Yet like the reprinted review from the *National Era*, Douglass could not be held personally accountable for such militant views, though he came close to endorsing violent revolt himself in "The Heroic Slave," with its ennobling account of Madison Washington and the *Creole* revolt. Whereas in Sans Nom's piece Douglass used the epistolary form to distance himself, in "The Heroic Slave," serialized in four installments in March 1853, Douglass shielded himself through the fictional veneer of the short story as Robert Stepto (1986) has suggested.

Those responses to Stowe's novel original to Douglass's paper and those most frequently cited by scholars—critiques by Allen, Wilson, and Delany—did not take the form of traditional reviews at all or appear in the Literary Notices section. Rather, they appeared as letters to the editor, a generic framing that, as Meer (2012) suggests, simultaneously gave shape to a community of readers, fostered a sense of intimacy, and encouraged debate within that community. This reliance on epistolary criticism from correspondents turned *Frederick Douglass' Paper* less into a mouthpiece for Douglass himself than into a community forum harking back to the late eighteenth-century public sphere, a discursive model that, as Robert Fanuzzi (2003) has argued, was central to the self-conception of the abolitionist press.

This is not to say that contributors agreed in their responses to Stowe's novel. Rather, by channeling the critical reception of Stowe's novel through a range of correspondents, Douglass presided over a spirited debate while consolidating a network of black intellectuals, as he did even more directly in May 1853 in his call for a Colored National Convention. To approach Douglass in his capacity as editor, indeed, runs counter to the prevailing emphasis, both in his own day and ours, on his embodied form, on the circulation of his daguerreotype image and his body on the lecture circuit in the service of the antislavery cause, and in the visible refutation of charges of racial inferiority. Yet, as editor, Douglass effaced his embodied persona just as frequently as he promoted it, privileging polyvocality and dialogism instead of making his paper into a platform for his own voice alone.

His editorial preference for published correspondence instead of conventional reviews, meanwhile, enabled Douglass to promote ties with white allies and to seek philanthropic assistance from Stowe for his proposed industrial college, even while pieces within his paper delivered pointed critiques of Stowe's novel. Allen, in one of the earliest epistolary notices, for instance, worries that Tom is too pious, noting that he himself prefers resistance to submission, before chastising Stowe for her espousal of colonizationism. Ultimately, he argues, it is only by racial amalgamation that the nation will advance, a view not particularly popular with whites of either the antebellum North or South ("Communications. Letter from Wm. G. Allen," *FDP,* May 20, 1852). Or Wilson, writing as Ethiop, mocks the debased *Uncle Tom* mania sweeping through Brooklyn, a frenzy that marks abolitionism as the reigning ism of the moment, with Stowe's novel displacing the old black stereotypes of Zip Coon and Jim Crow in shop windows with the new and improved stereotypes of Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe. Wilson laments that whites are leading the abolitionist charge rather than blacks and moreover inverting the natural order in a manner that bodes ill for both antislavery efforts and the future of the black race (Ethiop, "From Our Brooklyn Correspondent," *FDP*, June 17, 1852). Such opinions contrast sharply with the unsigned Literary Notice of April 8, 1852, in which either Griffiths or Douglass announces, "The friends of freedom owe the Authoress a large debt of gratitude for this essential service, rendered by her to the cause they love." The editor's sense that Stowe "invests her characters with a reality perfectly life-like" flies in the face of critiques by Allen and Delany, while

the assertion that "we doubt if abler arguments have ever been presented, in favor of the 'Higher Law' theory," clashes with the numerous commentators who viewed Tom's Christian piety as an impediment to his freedom, if not an outright shackle ("Literary Notices. Uncle Tom's Cabin," *FDP*, April 8, 1852). Then, of course, there are the debates between Delany and Douglass over whether any good can come from whites like Stowe pleading the antislavery cause. Although Douglass sides with Stowe in this debate, as editor he includes numerous articles that take issue with both Stowe and her novel, Delany's letters among them. The result is that Douglass possesses two voices: his direct authorial voice, which tends to be more moderate, and the more unruly, cacophonous voice heard in his capacity as editor, in which he selects pieces of a more militant, critical nature. Douglass's use of reprinted criticism helped him accommodate these two voices, giving material expression to his evolving political pragmatism by allowing him to pursue two potentially antithetical editorial objectives at once: creating an unrestricted forum for debate within the black community and continuing to cultivate productive relationships with more moderate white antislavery allies.

In short, reprinting was not simply a matter of editorial convenience, nor was it used to replicate Douglass's individual editorial viewpoint. Rather, the eclectic range of discursive forms that Douglass gathered in response to Stowe's novel gave shape to his sense of the cultural and political work of criticism. Each instance of reprinting and each discursive genre he used represented a strategy through which he sought to extract political gains from fiction, a realm he addressed much more frequently after the serialized publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the launch of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in 1851. This practice of reprinting reviews was, of course, not limited to *Douglass' Paper* or to the antislavery press. In venues such as *Douglass' Paper*, however, reprinting dovetailed with concerns over the politics of critical identity, with who exactly should advocate on behalf of African Americans, and with anxieties over the unity of the black community. At the heart of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* was a series of tensions between the antebellum public sphere and a black counterpublic; between the imagined community that such papers worked to create and realities of fragmentation, dispersal, and dissensus that Benedict Anderson's (1991) print culture thesis frequently belies; and between black nationalist principles of racial autonomy and a political pragmatism that prioritized results over rhetoric.

By reading literary criticism in the context of the material and generic forms that transmitted it to readers, we gain a greater appreciation of the complex and wide-ranging role that criticism played in nineteenth-century US culture during the first age of industrial print. Today, in the first decades of the twenty-first century, amid the transformations of the digital revolution, an attention to the material practices of critical culture continues to offer new ways of viewing our critical landscape. In a moment of self-proclaimed crisis within the humanities, amid diminishing enrollments of English majors, the constriction of academic publishing, and disappearing book review sections, a print culture methodology with an eye for proliferating forms of criticism helps us answer those Cassandras who loudly proclaim the death of a discipline, the end of theory, or the close of the Gutenberg era. Instead, we might see the dispersed, communal vision of critical authority visible in *Douglass' Paper* as offering an alternative vision to the concentrated authority of scholarly monographs or critical reviews at major journals, anticipating the sorts of online critical communities represented by reader comments sections, Amazon.com reviews, or even the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. Douglass's use of critical reprinting allows us to reconfigure critical value in ways less concerned with authorship, generic conventions, or originating context than in the uses that criticism accrues through circulation, remediation, and editorial appropriation, dimensions particularly salient to the reiterative, networked critical pathways of the twenty-first-century digital media landscape. If Douglass's promiscuous clipping and reprinting of criticism obscured authorship as frequently as it preserved it, today an ethos of attribution prevails, with embedded links, Twitter handles, and Google searches providing a trail of digital breadcrumbs to a remediated text's original source. Still, the continuities—and discontinuities—are productive.

Finally, if Douglass's use of reprinted reviews helps us see our critical present in new ways, perhaps the most dramatic act of remediation comes today in the digitization of periodical archives themselves. As Meredith L. McGill and Andrew Parker (2010) suggest, the digital media of the present enable us to view the print media of the past through new eyes. Twenty-five years ago, scholars working with antebellum periodicals sat in archives, paged through journals by hand, scrolled microfiche, consulted bibliographies like *Poole's Periodical Index*, and combed the footnotes of scholarly biographies, methods

that produced a more in-depth knowledge of fewer periodicals. Today digitized periodicals and new search tools allow us to do much of the same work from the comfort of our homes, providing unprecedented access to not just the center but the far edges of antebellum print culture. As our access to expanding archives changes, our narratives change with it, reinforcing one final time the constitutive impact of critical form on critical history, in this case with the evolution of academic research practices. Such ease of access to a seemingly endless array of evidence, as Maurice S. Lee (2014, 164) cautions, is not without risks, contributing to a culture of flimsy, unfalsifiable evidentiary practices and "intertextual promiscuity." And while digitization makes previously inaccessible, scattered, and physically vulnerable archives widely available, the process of digital remediation from page to screen, as James Mussell (2012, 20–1) reminds us, sacrifices the original material form.

My own sense is that we must carefully balance the expanded access provided by digital databases and keyword searches with continued direct engagement with the physical texts themselves, as each confrontation yields different insights and understandings. In the twenty-first-century archive, computer and codex sit side by side, with scholars toggling back and forth from screen to material text, from the algorithms of the search engine to the newspaper spread. And while our media may differ from those of the antebellum period, as we move from print to screen and back again, the methodological imperative remains the same. To grasp the complexities of critical culture, we need to remain attentive to the signifying power of critical form, the uses it reveals, and the cultural tensions it exposes. Hidden in the materiality of literary criticism is the story of its past, present, and future; its conflicts and capabilities; its communities and commitments; and a final affirmation that literary criticism, in whatever new and unforeseen forms it takes, will continue to remain central to the way US culture makes sense of itself.

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Notes

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1 References to *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (hereafter *FDP*) will be cited parenthetically in the text.

2 Though Baym's *Novels, Readers, and Reviewers* (1984) is invaluable in its survey of antebellum critical practices and though she includes unsigned and brief notices as part of her archive, nonetheless, as she notes in her prefatory remarks, "I have used as my sources original reviews of novels—any and all novels—appearing in the most widely read periodicals of the antebellum period" (7), further specifying that of the twenty-one periodicals that make up her sources, none fall below five thousand paid subscribers (14).

3 Perhaps the most glaring of these instances is Griffiths's signed response to George Graham's "Black Letters" ("Literary Notices. Graham" [February 25, 1853]), which Railton (1999) attributes to Douglass. Indeed, for as valuable as Railton's *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* database is, it should be noted that Railton's dating of pieces, as with his attribution, is often unreliable. For an equally problematic blurriness regarding the problem of attribution, see McHenry 2002, 347–48n94.

4 The best account of the reception to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* is Levine 1992, and 1997, 58–98. For other treatments of the antebellum black reception to Stowe's novel, see Banks 1993; Willsky 2013; McHenry 2002, 125–29; and Brown 2007.

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