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### The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National, and Global Levels

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In the 1820s, the antislavery movement underwent a series of major transformations. Its priorities shifted from worldwide abolition of the slave trade to immediate emancipation of all slaves. Its tactics shifted from insider lobbying of government officials to grassroots agitation. The timing of these developments was similar in Great Britain and the United States. Some transatlantic interpenetration has always been assumed, but scholars have never closely assessed just how important Anglo-American interactions were in revitalizing the movement in this crucial decade.

Addressing this subject requires us to appreciate how challenging it is—even in 2001—to be part of a movement that spans continents. As committed as activists are to advancing their cause on all fronts, they have to prioritize. In the 1820s, it was far more resource intensive than it is today to develop projects that were truly transatlantic in scope. Activists then and now have to consider the impact that international efforts will have on their agendas at the national, regional, local, and household levels. Most theories that attempt to explain activists' multi-tiered strategies can be reduced to either the familiar environmentalist motto, "Think Globally, Act Locally," or its more parochial converse: "All Politics is Local." These are great slogans, but as analytic tools, they are

too static. Whether nineteenth-century abolitionists or twenty-first-century environmentalists, the best activists shift back and forth from one level of engagement to another in order to exploit opportunities and circumvent obstacles. To understand how a transatlantic movement evolves, it is necessary to explore how activists deploy international resources for advantage in national and local struggles and vice versa.

In the early 1820s, the biggest obstacles to creative thinking in the antislavery movement were its national organizations. After 1807 when the United States and Great Britain banned citizens from engaging in international slave trading, the African Institution and the Annual Convention of American Abolition Societies prioritized efforts to hunt down illegal slavers and to promote abolition worldwide. Both preferred lobbying legislators and diplomats to grassroots agitation.<sup>1</sup>

Into the 1820s, the ineffectiveness of these supply-side strategies and insider tactics became increasingly apparent. But most veteran metropolitan leaders of the African Institution and the American Abolition Convention were wary of advocating even gradual emancipation because it meant a frontal assault on the foundations of the transatlantic economy. More receptive to new approaches were activists in what Barbara Fields calls the “middle ground.”<sup>2</sup> In regions at the boundary between slave and free labor economies, pro- and antislavery forces were closely matched. Thus, agitation over slavery resonated in local power struggles. In British port cities, merchants continued to invest in plantations and import slave-grown staples, but this did not stop antislavery activism from brewing. As David Davis has highlighted, James Cropper and other Liverpool merchants were pivotal in rejuvenating British antislavery. In the 1820s, new antislavery societies also sprouted in U.S. border regions. Benjamin Lundy galvanized local initiatives when he relocated the headquarters of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, the first American antislavery

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<sup>1</sup> African Institution, *Report of the Committee...* (London. 1807) and subsequent annual reports. Robert Sayre, “The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism: The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race, 1794-1837” (Ohio State Univ. Ph.D. diss., 1987). David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, 1987), 105-14.

newspaper, from Ohio to Tennessee and then to Baltimore. Middle-ground initiatives were not always more radical than the Convention or the African Institution. But they were more willing to recruit new constituencies and experiment with new tactics.<sup>3</sup>

These middle-ground activists realized that their initiatives could be enhanced by pitching them as part of a broader movement. Conversely, the stronger their local auxiliary was, the more their voices resonated at the national level. More than anyone else in the 1820s, Cropper and Lundy bombarded their respective national organizations with policy proposals. But they found it difficult to get national leaders to listen unless they agreed to fund these initiatives themselves or unless they appeared in London or Philadelphia and demanded action. In their battles to influence their national movements, they resorted to strong-arm tactics. They withheld financial contributions until their views were heeded. Often, they initiated a project at the grassroots and brought it to the national organization as a *fait accompli*. They even staged coups. Lundy and other middle-ground activists convinced the Convention to relocate from Philadelphia to Baltimore. Cropper convinced London leaders to replace the African Institution with a more activist Antislavery Society. When this new association stumbled, he spearheaded several attempts at reorganization. Yet as active as Cropper and Lundy became in their national movements, they never abandoned their commitment to the communities where they lived. They carefully calibrated how nationwide initiatives would impact their local power bases.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground* (New Haven, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> The best source for 1820s American antislavery societies is the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (hereafter *GUE*), 1821-33. For secondary material, see David Brion Davis, "James Cropper and the British Anti-Slavery Movement, 1821-33," *Journal of Negro History*, xlv (1960), 241-58; 46 (1961), pp. 154-73. K. Charlton, "James Cropper and Liverpool's Contributions to the Anti-Slavery Movement," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, cxxiii (1971), 57-80. Merton Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana, 1966). Edward N. Wright, "John Needles (1786-1878): An Autobiography," *Quaker History*, lviii (1969), 3-21.

<sup>4</sup> Rhodes House (British Antislavery Papers) Brit. Emp. S16 E2/1-4: Antislavery Society, Minute Books, 1823-36; S18 C1/16: J. Cropper to T. Pringle and J. Crisp, 15 Feb. 1832. Antislavery Society, *Accounts of the Receipts and Disbursements...* (1823-31). Liverpool Maritime Museum (Cropper Family Papers) D/CR/10/58: J. to Eliza Cropper, 9 Aug. 1831. Cropper to Sturge, 30 Dec. 1825, 14 July 1827, 31 Aug. 1830 in A. Cropper, *Extracts from Letters of the Late James Cropper...* [Liverpool, 1850], ff. 56-7, 61-63, 73-4. Maryland Historical Society, Vertical File: Maryland Antislavery Society, Constitution and Minutes, 1825. Elsewhere, I focus on the intersection of grassroots and national

Developing connections across the Atlantic offered additional leverage for Baltimore and Liverpool activists. As innovative as they were, Cropper and Lundy were not the first antislavery activists to explore transatlantic ties. Slave-trading was a truly global business, and abolitionists recognized that effective opposition would have to be international in scope. From the 1780s, American and British activists collaborated extensively, relying on transatlantic networks maintained by Quakers and other denominations. Even during the War of 1812, the African Institution partnered with the American Convention to track illegal slavers. The colonization movement also emerged from a transatlantic dialogue. Founded in December 1816, the American Colonization Society (ACS) legitimated its project as a bone fide antislavery enterprise by equating it with the Sierra Leone colony founded by British abolitionists. The African Institution welcomed ACS agents to its meetings and offered advice and other resources.<sup>5</sup>

To the extent that 1820s activists prioritized emancipation of slaves over worldwide abolition of the slave trade, they had less of a direct use for Anglo-American ties. The British movement remained transatlantic, but its first priority was eradicating slavery in the Caribbean colonies. In the United States, there was less incentive for national—much less international—coordination, since only state governments were thought to have the power to regulate slavery within their borders.

Still, emancipationists did not discount international connections entirely. Transatlantic networks offered opportunities for resource mobilization. Fund-raising was a major motivation for the international tours taken by William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and others. In addition to cash donations, sympathizers circulated publications throughout the transatlantic world. Formally and informally, they shared ideas and strategies. Transatlantic ties also provided a sense of

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activism in more detail. See “Civic Experiments: Community-Building in Baltimore and Liverpool, 1785-1835” (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. diss., forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> African Institution *Fourth Report* (1810), 13. *Fifth Report* (1811), 27; *Sixth Report* (1812), 8. American Abolition Convention, *Proceedings of the Thirteenth American Convention...* (Philadelphia, 1812). Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Anti-Slavery Cooperation* (London, 1972). Christopher Brown, “Foundations of British Abolitionism, Beginnings to 1789” (Oxford Univ. D.Phil. diss., 1994), 112-27. Stephen Braidwood, “Initiatives and

community for lonely activists at the local level. As importantly, transatlantic endorsements bolstered particular factions competing to prove that their approach was the most potent way to attack slavery. It is well-known that important episodes in the infighting among American abolitionists in the 1830s and 1840s occurred as they competed for support on visits to Great Britain, but scholars have paid less attention to the subtle transatlantic negotiations that occurred in the preceding decades.<sup>6</sup>

While many benefits could accrue from transatlantic ties, there were also costs. Alliances at a broader level did not always enhance mobilization closer to the grassroots. Aid always came with strings attached. Donors' eagerness to assert control could impede the ability of recipients to maneuver locally. Moreover, failure to win a transatlantic endorsement could devastate a project, especially if the nod went to another local faction. For instance, when the African Institution embraced the American Colonization Society, it marginalized the American Abolition Convention. In June 1816, six months before the ACS was founded, the Convention appealed for British assistance for its own colonization initiative—an "asylum" for free blacks in the American west. Yet the Convention was not unanimous in support of this project. On behalf of the Convention, Evan Lewis wrote to Thomas Clarkson. He asked whether the Convention should colonize blacks or "adopt a wise system for their gradual emancipation and general improvement, & admit them by degrees to all the rights & privileges of citizens." Lewis clearly preferred the latter. But his hopes that an endorsement from Clarkson would trump the colonization advocates within the Convention were dashed. Clarkson did not answer Lewis's letter until after he received an appeal from the ACS almost a year later. While his response to Lewis was lukewarm, Clarkson enthusiastically endorsed

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Organization of the Back Poor, 1786-1787," *Slavery and Abolition*, iii (1982), 212-19. P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> Alan Rice and Martin Crawford (eds.), *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass & Transatlantic Reform* (Athens, GA, 1999). Anthony J. Barker, *Captain Charles Stuart: Anglo-American Abolitionist* (Baton Rouge, 1986). David B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York, 1966) and *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984). David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1860* (London, 1991).

the ACS, thereby undercutting the vigorous anti-colonization campaign that Lewis's faction persuaded the Convention to launch. Had Lewis swayed British abolitionists, African colonization may never have developed such strong support in both countries in the 1820s.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the ACS hardly monopolized transatlantic antislavery networks in the 1820s. Clarkson was equally instrumental in setting up an initiative to encourage American free blacks to emigrate to Haiti. This project became a major competitor to the ACS. The Convention continued to correspond with the African Institution, and individual colonization advocates who visited England developed their own contacts. In 1818, for instance, Robert Goodloe Harper was warmly received by British abolitionists. Harper was just as hospitable when one of his Liverpool contacts visited his home in Baltimore the following year. Little did Harper realize that Adam Hodgson crossed the Atlantic on a very different transatlantic mission.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of Hodgson's visit was a detailed investigation of the American economy. After Hodgson returned to England in 1821, he and his close friend James Cropper sent out supplemental queries to American correspondents. This research provided the basis for several tracts that laid out a new approach for the antislavery movement. Given the potential pitfalls of transatlantic ties, why did Cropper and Hodgson reach out beyond the British empire? Anglo-American ties were one area in which Liverpool merchants had a comparative advantage over London activists. As the leading importers of American goods, Liverpool merchants had as much access to the United States as anyone else in Britain. Indeed, British abolitionists had long employed Liverpool ships to carry packages to their colleagues across the Atlantic. By convincing others that Anglo-American ties

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<sup>7</sup> Huntington Library (Huntington Clarkson Papers): [Evan Lewis] to T. Clarkson, June 12 1816; Clarkson to Lewis, 18 Mar. 1817; Clarkson to F. S. Key, 18 Mar. 1817; Key to Clarkson, 8 Nov. 1817; E. B. Caldwell to Clarkson, 10 Nov. 1817. African Institution, *Twelfth Report* (London, 1818). Fladeland, *Men and Brothers*, 90-5.

<sup>8</sup> Bodleian Library, Wilberforce Papers, d. 14/174: Roscoe to Wilberforce, 13 June 1818; Liverpool Record Office ROS #1800: Roscoe to Duke of Gloucester, 13 June 1818; #1801: Gloucester to Roscoe, 22 June 1818; #5804: R. G. Harper to Roscoe, 4 Dec. 1819; #937: Roscoe to T. W. Coke, 3 June 1820; #2037: A. Hodgson to Roscoe, Jan. 1823. British Library Add. MSS 41267A (BL Clarkson Papers) ff. 112-3A: J. Cropper to Z. Macaulay, 5 Aug. 1822. A. Hodgson, *Letters from North America, Written during a Tour in the United States and Canada*, 2 vols., i (London, 1824), 326-7.

were critical to a revived movement, Liverpool activists carved out an influential role for themselves. The Liverpool Society became a co-equal partner with the metropolitan leadership, assigned to oversee developments in England's northern counties, Ireland, and the United States.

Why were U.S. contacts valuable to the movement? Cropper and Hodgson argued that they provided a comparative perspective on conditions in the British colonies. First, the northern states were case studies of societies ridding themselves of slavery. Second, comparative analysis showed that British colonial slavery was more abusive than in the United States. Imperial duties insulated colonial imports from competition with other parts of the world. Free trade would drive down prices, forcing slave-owners to treat their slaves better so that they would be more productive. Ultimately, they would realize that the only way to continue production was to convert to free labor, which was allegedly more efficient than slave labor.<sup>9</sup>

These layers of controversial assumptions should not detain us at present. For my argument, it is as important to recognize that Liverpool antislavery activists used the same venture capitalist techniques to promulgate their arguments as they used to manipulate global commercial markets. First of all, Hodgson's and Cropper's American investigations were no less detailed than the research undertaken by their firms, as well as their competitors, to diagnose the trajectories of the corn, cotton, or sugar markets. Second, their antislavery pamphlets were hardly dispassionate academic expositions. As in the propaganda that their firms distributed, Cropper and Hodgson had no qualms about filtering the information that they gathered to fit their hypotheses. Third, their efforts to recruit supporters for their new approach to antislavery closely resembled the crafty strategies they used to publicize their market research and to target its dissemination to persuade

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Idem., *Letter to M. Jean-Baptiste Say on the Comparative Expense of Slave and Free Labour* (Liverpool, 1823). Huntington Library (Clarkson Papers) CN 33: T. Clarkson, Manuscript Account of Efforts, 1807-24.

<sup>9</sup> British Antislavery Papers S. 16 E 2/1 f. 20-1: Antislavery Society, Minutes, 23 April 1823. BL Clarkson Papers ff. 108-109: Cropper to Z. Macaulay, 12 July 1822. Cropper, *Letter Addressed to the Liverpool Society ... on the Injurious Effects of High Prices on Produce, and the Beneficial Effects of Low Prices on the Condition of Slaves* (Liverpool,

government ministers and other traders to take action. Fourth, they were not opposed to expending economic resources to show their confidence in their own predictions about the antislavery movement or global markets. Finally, Cropper and Hodgson sponsored many different antislavery initiatives locally, nationally, and internationally in order to increase their odds of success, much the same way as they diversified their economic portfolios.<sup>10</sup>

The best evidence of the similarity in techniques for manipulating markets and movements is that Cropper and Hodgson used the information that they gathered about the American economy to do both. In the fall of 1822 when the Liverpool Antislavery Society published its first manifesto, Cropper's firm distributed a pamphlet diagnosing the global cotton market. The timing was no coincidence. The cotton circulars relied as extensively on Hodgson's travels and Cropper's queries as the antislavery pamphlets did. However, their predictions about the cotton market were different than the implications of the antislavery manifesto. So long as prices remained low, the cotton circular argued, American planters had little incentive to buy new slaves or expand cultivation. As a result production would stagnate, and eventually the demand for cotton would outstrip supply. Thus, prices would go up.<sup>11</sup>

Based on their predictions in this cotton circular, Cropper's and Hodgson's firms collaborated in massive speculations at precisely the same moment as Cropper and Hodgson began their targeted investments in vanguard antislavery activism. In other words, their market maneuvering hoped to precipitate exactly the conditions that they argued would be most detrimental to advancing

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1823). A. Hodgson, *Letter to M. Jean-Baptiste Say on the Comparative Expense of Slave and Free Labour* (Liverpool, 1823); Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, *Declaration of the Objects ...* (Liverpool, 1823).

<sup>10</sup> Huntington Clarkson Papers: P. E. Thomas to Cropper, 22 Aug. 1822, and Cropper's attached comments. Liverpool Record Office (Parliamentary Office Papers) 2/59: Cropper to George Canning, 10 Apr. 1817; 6/15: Cropper to John Backhouse, 24 Mar. 1817; 6/16: Cropper to Huskisson, 5 May 1817. British Library Add. Mss. 38741 (Huskisson Papers) ff. 119-20, 256-8: Cropper to Huskisson, 16 Sept. 1817, 18 Aug. 1818. Add. Mss. 38742 f. 10-13: Cropper to David Hodgson, extract, 26 Apr. 1820. Thomas Martin, "Some International Aspects of the Anti-Slavery Movement, 1818-23," *Journal of Economic and Business History*, i (1928-29), 137-48. Stanley Chapman, *Merchant Enterprise in Britain: From the Industrial Revolution to World War I* (Cambridge, 1992), 82-106. Edwin Perkins, *Financing the Anglo-American Trade: The House of Brown, 1800-1880* (Cambridge, MA, 1975).



antislavery. I have not elaborated this contradiction to enter the debate over the motivations of antislavery activists. In the 1822-23 cotton markets, Liverpool merchants perceived their economic self-interests and antislavery goals as directly opposed. But as good venture capitalists, it was not atypical to manipulate markets from both ends. If they did not win on the moral front, at least they would reap economic profits, or vice versa. As we will see, they did not succeed in either speculative enterprise.<sup>12</sup>

The implications of a venture capitalist approach to exerting leverage within the transatlantic antislavery movement became even more apparent after 1827. That year, Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation* reprinted a letter from an anonymous Liverpool Quaker. The substance and argumentative style is vintage Cropper. A crucial document, this 1827 letter marked a new departure for the British antislavery movement. Activists did not maintain the Anglo-American connections that Cropper and Hodgson developed in 1819-23. They were preoccupied with major developments within the empire. But when British agitation stalled in 1827, Cropper and Hodgson looked for ways to re-energize the movement. This time they went beyond requests for information and directly intervened to catalyze antislavery activism in the American public sphere. In particular, Cropper thought that U.S. activists could bolster the cause if they undertook experiments that would prove once and for all the advantages of free over slave labor.<sup>13</sup>

Lundy was hardly the only American whose support Liverpool activists nurtured. In the back of a scrapbook filled with antislavery propaganda, the Cropper family kept lists of contacts at home and abroad, accounting which pamphlets they sent to whom. From at least 1827, the Croppers were regularly shipping packets to the United States. The earliest list (c.1827-9) included editors of all

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<sup>11</sup> BL Clarkson Papers, ff. 108-9: Cropper to Z. Macaulay, 12 July 1822; ff. 110-11, 116-7: Cropper to Clarkson, 5 Aug., 11 Sept. 1822. Cropper, Benson & Co., *Circular on the Cultivation of Cotton* (Liverpool, 1822).

<sup>12</sup> Vincent Nolte, *Fifty Years in Both Hemispheres or Reminiscences of the Life of a Former Merchant*, 2d ed. (London, 1854), 299-302.

<sup>13</sup> *GUE*, 29 Sept. 1827. Compare: *Liberator*, 15 Dec. 1832, 22 Feb. 1834. Cropper, *Letter to Thomas Clarkson* (Liverpool, 1832).

three American antislavery newspapers. Lundy edited the *Genius*; John Brown Russwurm edited the first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal* (1827-9); and Enoch Lewis edited the *African Observer* (1827-8). Three other Americans made the list. All were from Quaker abolitionist families: Isaac Collins, Jr., a New York publisher; Thomas Evans, a Philadelphia druggist; and Thomas Pym Cope, who operated a packet line between Philadelphia and Liverpool.<sup>14</sup>

Between 1829 and 1831, the Croppers updated their list. All of the original correspondents were listed except Russwurm who emigrated to Liberia in 1829. The new contacts included Arnold Buffum, future agent of the New England Antislavery Society who may have met Cropper in the 1820s on business trips, and three other Quakers at the forefront of antislavery activism in Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore, respectively.<sup>15</sup> Replacing Russwurm as the Croppers' contact in the New York free black community was Peter Williams, Jr., an Episcopalian bishop and a future American Antislavery Society leader. The Croppers also sent packets to William Lloyd Garrison and two women: Sarah Grimké and someone named Ann Clay in Georgia.<sup>16</sup> Around 1833, Cropper added four more Americans. Two were clergymen: James Patterson, a Presbyterian minister in Philadelphia, and Charles Wheeler Dennison, secretary of the New York City Antislavery Society.<sup>17</sup> The other two were free black leaders of the African Improvement

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<sup>14</sup> Cropper Family Papers D/CR/12/38: List of correspondents, c. 1827-28. Enoch was the brother of Evan Lewis, who had corresponded with Clarkson about colonization back in 1817. *African Observer* (Philadelphia, 1827-28). *Freedom's Journal*, 9 May 1828. Paul W. Graseck, "Quaker, Teacher, Abolitionist: The Life of Educator-Reformer Enoch Lewis, 1776-1856," (Univ. of Connecticut Ph.D. diss., 1996). Richard F. Hixson, *Isaac Collins: A Quaker Printer in 18<sup>th</sup> Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1968), 174-81. Eliza Cope Harrison (ed.), *Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851* (1975). For Thomas Evans, see: H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* (Knoxville, TN, 1986), 20-1.

<sup>15</sup> The three businessmen were: Joseph Parker, a Pennsylvania Abolition Society leader; Samuel Parsons, a New York radical; and Thomas Ellicott, a Baltimore banker whose family led the Maryland Abolition Society in the 1790s. Cropper Family Papers C/DR/12/43-48. List of pamphlets sent, c. 1829-31. *Colored American*, 15 July 1837. Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital* (Lanham, MD, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia, 1988), 55-6. Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Woman's Rights and Abolition* (1967).

<sup>17</sup> Cropper Family Papers D/CR/12/47: List of American correspondents, c.1833. Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs* (New York, 1876; rev. ed. 1989). New-York City Anti-Slavery Society, *Address...* (New York, 1833). Glibert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (eds.), *Letters of Theodore Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844* (New York, 1934), 123.

Convention, the first national black organization besides the A.M.E. Church.<sup>18</sup> Yet another early 1830s list included James McCune Smith, a young black intellectual and militant.<sup>19</sup>

I have gone into such detail in order to convey the impressive breadth and targeting of these lists. The Croppers largely avoided leaders of the American Abolition Convention and the ACS. Nor did they blanket the leadership of free black communities or the newly-formed radical antislavery societies. They also increasingly diversified beyond the Quaker elite. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, few of their correspondents were well known, but almost all developed reputations as leading militants. Many traveled to England over the next two decades, and were warmly received by the Croppers when they docked in Liverpool. Most were members of the post-revolutionary generation whose self-conscious nation-building and intense reformative spirit has recently been chronicled by Joyce Appleby.<sup>20</sup> In aggregate, they resembled the membership of the Agency Committee—the aggressive branch of the British movement that the Croppers helped nurture using methods very similar to their American outreach.

Viewed from another perspective, however, the youth and inexperience of Croppers' correspondents meant they were more susceptible to influence than movement veterans. Just as they filtered information in 1822, the Croppers were especially selective in what they sent abroad. They focused on pamphlets connecting emancipation to the triumph of free labor and free trade, many

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<sup>18</sup> Junius C. Morel was a Philadelphia free black militant, and Henry Sipkins presided over the second African Improvement Convention and led New York civil rights struggles. *Colored American*, 12, 19 Aug., 30 Dec. 1837, 13 Oct. 1838, 25 Sept. 1841. *Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Color, for Improving their Condition in the United States...* (Philadelphia, 1831). *Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in these United States* (Philadelphia, 1832). *Freedom's Journal*, 21 Mar. 1829; *Liberator*, 26 Jan. 1833. Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 66-7, 70, 81, 85, 96-99; and Winch (ed.), *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Willson's Sketches of Black Upper-Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia* (University Park, PA, 2000), 135-6 n. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Cropper Family Papers D/CR/12/2: List of individuals and towns receiving parcels, c. early 1830s. When the Croppers listed Smith, he was probably still studying medicine and galvanizing emancipation agitation in Glasgow. C. Peter Ripley et. al. (eds.), *Black Abolitionist Papers*, iii (Chapel Hill, 1991), 350-1 n. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

written by James Cropper himself.<sup>21</sup>

Cropper also tried to cultivate influence in America by patronizing his contacts' pet projects, just as he backed his innovative policy proposals to the London Antislavery Society with donations and just as he invested based on his market predictions. Cropper provided substantial support to American antislavery newspapers. In 1827, he persuaded the London Antislavery Society to finance regular publication exchanges with their editors. He also recruited British subscribers. Another major focus was underwriting American free black initiatives. In 1828, for example, he donated to a Philadelphia school for black infants.<sup>22</sup> Seeding innovation at all levels, Cropper was trying to exert influence over those well-placed to remake the movement in his own image.

How did Americans react? Budding radicals were eager to locate themselves in a transatlantic movement for the same reasons that colonization advocates had reached out to the African Institution in the 1810s: resources, information, and legitimacy. It was a sign of prestige to receive a packet from one of the champions of British antislavery. The *Freedom's Journal*, the African Improvement Convention, and other free black institutions were especially grateful for this recognition since little acknowledgement was forthcoming from American abolitionists.<sup>23</sup> Like Cropper, Benjamin Lundy used transatlantic ties to consolidate his own position vis-à-vis national antislavery leaders. Lundy moved to Baltimore to be nearer to transatlantic networks. He regularly acknowledged his debt to English correspondents, especially those in Liverpool.<sup>24</sup>

It is easy to get the impression that resources increasingly flowed in one direction across the Atlantic. But is it plausible that antislavery adopted a neo-colonial model of influence? Especially

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<sup>21</sup> Cropper Family Papers D/CR/12/35: List of antislavery pamphlets at R. Dickenson's (16 Feb. 1828); D/CR/12/36: List of antislavery pamphlets sent to R. Newton, c. 1828. D/CR/12/49: List of pamphlets sent to B. Lundy, 1827; D/CR/12/51: Lending Library, Slater St., list of books, 16 Feb. 1829.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. D/CR/12/30: List of orders for American newspapers, c.1829. *Freedom's Journal*, 9 Nov. 1827, 9 May 1828. *Antislavery Monthly Reporter*, June 1827. British Antislavery Papers S. 16 E2/2 ff. 111-3: Antislavery Society Minutes, 21 Aug. 1827, 15 Apr. 1828. American Abolition Convention, *Minutes of the Twenty-First Biennial American Convention...* (Philadelphia, 1829).

<sup>23</sup> *Freedom's Journal*, 9 Nov. 1827. *Liberator*, 26 Jan. 1833.

<sup>24</sup> *GUE*, Feb. 1822, Jan. 1824, 3 Jan. 1829.

after Parliament emancipated slaves in 1833, British activists had more time and resources to devote to internationalizing their accomplishments.<sup>25</sup> Yet Americans were never blindly influenced by these British overtures. In the first place, it was less clear in the 1820s whether British or American abolitionists had made more progress towards abolition. While northern American states were gradually emancipating their slaves, British colonists were dragging their feet—a fact that Cropper constantly used to galvanize his complacent colleagues.<sup>26</sup> Likewise, many American activists highlighted British initiatives was in order to shame their fellow citizens into action. Maryland Antislavery Society leaders warned that they were at risk of being beaten by “the monarchists of England,” and challenged citizens “to outstrip them in the r 27 Such

competitive nationalism as much as transatlantic coordination fuelled parallel developments in the United States and Britain. Nor were Americans invariably emulating British innovators. In 1827, for instance, Cropper expressed reservations when an American correspondent urged him to copy the aggressive tactics being developed in the United States to boycott all slave-grown products.<sup>28</sup>

Rather than acknowledging their deference to British leaders, American activists bristled when Londoners attempted to exert control just as much as many English provincial auxiliaries did. The Croppers’ correspondents were eager to receive British resources, but they used them in different ways than the donors expected. One reason that the African Improvement Convention movement was so interested in transatlantic connections was that free black leaders wanted the British to assist slaves who had escaped and settled in Canada.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the channels of transatlantic exchange developed by Cropper crucially influenced how British activists perceived the American movement. In 1828, the *Antislavery Monthly Reporter* reported that the Maryland Antislavery Society was in

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<sup>25</sup> Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (London, 1972). James B. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York, 1976, rev. ed. 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Cropper, *Letter Addressed to the Liverpool Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery...* (Liverpool, 1823).

<sup>27</sup> *GUE*, 2 Sept. 1826.

<sup>28</sup> Cropper to Sturge, 14 July 1827 in Cropper, *Extracts*, f. 61-63. R. M. Nuremberger, *The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest Against Slavery* (Durham, NC, 1942).

the vanguard of a revived American movement. This society was a fertile source of innovation, but its received such attention overseas largely because it was the hometown organization in Baltimore where Lundy's newspaper was based.<sup>30</sup>

Even after Cropper became the British subscription agent for the *Genius*, Lundy did not feel a need to ascribe to his tenets. Cropper was only one of a multiplicity of international voices to whom Lundy gave space in his columns. The advantage of publishing a newspaper rather than endlessly pamphleteering as Cropper did was that Lundy could try out particular viewpoints without explicitly endorsing them as his own. For instance, he was quick to reprint Elizabeth Heyrick's radical pamphlet, but he hedged about endorsing her plea for immediate emancipation.<sup>31</sup> And although Lundy published Cropper's 1827 letter, he distanced himself from Cropper's views by insisting that they were "far in advance of American opinion."<sup>32</sup> Nor was Lundy's orientation uniformly Anglo-centric. The *Genius* devoted more space to efforts in Haiti than to British activism. It also mocked British misunderstandings of the American scene, such as when the African Institution feted John Randolph as an ally in the abolition of the international slave trade while ignoring how many slaves this Virginian statesman owned.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, even someone who deployed as much venture capital as Cropper did had difficulties leveraging his contributions to the transatlantic movement. Cropper's transatlantic leadership reached its apex with Garrison's first visit to England in 1833. The relationship between Cropper and Garrison was symbiotic. The success of Garrison's trip depended heavily on Cropper's stage-managing. Similarly, Cropper's transatlantic notoriety was enhanced as he castigated other antislavery leaders who refused to endorse Garrison's agitation against colonization. But after

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<sup>29</sup> Peter Williams, Jr., *A Discourse Delivered... for the Benefit of the Coloured Community of Wilberforce in Upper* (New York, 1830). A. Steward, *Twenty Two Years a Slave, and Forty Years a Freeman* (1857), 208-9.

<sup>30</sup> *GUE*, 26 Nov. 1825, 5 Aug. 1826. *Antislavery Monthly Reporter*, July 1827.

<sup>31</sup> *GUE*, 26 Nov. 1825 – 21 Jan. 1826. David B. Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Anti-Slavery Thought," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, xlix (1962), 209-230.

<sup>32</sup> *GUE*, 29 Sept. 1827.

Garrison returned to the United States, he did as much as anyone to proliferate the movement's transatlantic interconnections. Yet it would be a mistake to imagine that Cropper ever monopolized transatlantic ties in the 1820s. Quaker and other denominational ties remained important. Moreover, Liverpool merchants did not always agree as to which faction of the American movement deserved support. While the Croppers welcomed Garrison when he arrived, Adam Hodgson and others continued to provide hospitality for colonization agents.<sup>34</sup>

However meticulous Cropper was in his approach to manipulating markets and movements, he found his transatlantic contacts more eager to accept his donations than to embrace his ideas. Cropper never got anyone in the United States to undertake free labor experiments. Ultimately, Cropper took on the project himself. Cropper was explicit in correspondence about the antislavery implications of the school he organized for Lancashire peasants in 1834, but neither his contemporaries nor subsequent antislavery historiography paid much attention. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society thanked him for advice but thought British abolitionists could be more helpful if they concentrated on disciplining the newly emancipated and apprenticed laborers in the Caribbean colonies. Garrison and other radicals were enthusiastic proponents of manual labor schools, but they rebuffed Cropper's claims that such institutions should be a preferred route to preparing emancipated slaves to become productive citizens.<sup>35</sup>

The mixed results that Cropper's efforts produced does not suggest a flaw in the venture capitalist model. Venture capital was a risky business. Speculators often lost, even business

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., July, Aug. 1822.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. Oct. 1833. *Liberator*, 1832-4. Garrison to unknown recipient, 27 May 1833, and Garrison to New England Anti-Slavery Society, 20 June 1833 in Walter Merrill, *Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Volume 1: I Will Be Heard!, 1822-1835* (Cambridge, MA, 1971), 234, 237-9. Wendell P. Garrison and Francis J. Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by his Children* (London, 1885), 349-72.

<sup>35</sup> Boston Public Library MS.A.1.2.v.4.39-40: Cropper to Garrison, 17 May 1834. Pennsylvania Historical Society, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers: Cropper to Edwin P. Atlee, et. al. 17 May 1834; Atlee et. al. to Cropper, Jan. 1835. Cropper, *Outline of a Plan for an Agricultural School...* (Liverpool, 1834). Charlton, "James Cropper and agricultural improvement in the early nineteenth century," *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, cxii (1960), 65-78. Paul Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," *Journal of the Early Republic*, xiii (1993).

investments. In 1822, Cropper and his colleagues in Liverpool lost heavily in the cotton markets because prices stayed low due to a bumper crop. Still, Cropper continued to make daring predictions about market production and speculate avidly.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, as a social movement entrepreneur, Cropper floated dozens of ideas that were stillborn. Fundamentally, Cropper's persistent investments in transatlantic ties was more influential than the specific ideas that he advocated. He helped ensure that any antislavery activist who wanted to succeed at the national level in either the United States or Britain had to develop a network that was transatlantic in scope.

So far, I have suggested how 1820s activists leveraged resources at the local, national, and international levels, but I would be remiss, especially at this conference, to ignore the implication of these multi-tiered strategies on gender dynamics in the movement. James Cropper could not have exerted such influence at the local, national, and international level without conscripting his entire household into antislavery activism. Notice that I repeatedly stated that the lists of American contacts were maintained by the Croppers, not James Cropper. Strong evidence suggests that Cropper's daughter Eliza, his wife Margaret, and his daughters-in-law were the keepers of these lists. In all his antislavery work, Cropper relied heavily on them. In addition, he was a generous supporter of women's activism locally, nationally, and internationally.<sup>37</sup> The center of British female antislavery activism was in Birmingham, but the Cropper women emulated James's venture capitalist techniques to exert influence at multiple levels in the movement. Not only did they support free black activism in Antigua, but they increasingly invested in developing an Anglo-American women's antislavery and feminist network. Eliza sent pamphlets from her own collections to Garrison and others in the United States, and the Liverpool Ladies' Negro

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<sup>36</sup> Nolte, *Fifty Years*, 299-302, 317-26.

<sup>37</sup> Cropper Family Papers D/CR/10/60: James to John, Edward, and Eliza Cropper, 27 Jan. 1831. Cropper Family Papers D/CR/10/58 James to Eliza Cropper, 9 August 1831. Cropper invested in railroad stock on behalf of Elizabeth Heyrick, possibly as a sort of annuity in gratitude for her antislavery pamphleteering. D/CR/12/31: Cropper to E. Heyrick, 28 Jan. 1830.



Emancipation Association developed its own transatlantic ties.<sup>38</sup>

British female antislavery societies in Liverpool and elsewhere often garnered more extensive coverage in Lundy's newspaper than their male counterparts. Again, extra-local resources were exploited to impact local struggles. After reprinting the 1830 report of the Liverpool Ladies' Association, the *Genius* urged: "Why, then, are the Ladies in this country less active, less public-spirited, and less enthusiastic than their sisters in England?"<sup>39</sup> At least in Lundy's hometown of Baltimore, the problem was not really that women were less active, rather it was that many of the most prominent ones were committed to colonization. In 1830, the local ACS female auxiliary organized a bazaar which generated \$2,500 in contributions and received national press. Lundy's sought to disprove that antislavery was a less-than-respectable cause for ladies to support.<sup>40</sup> Like the colonization advocates, Lundy and Cropper perceived that often the best way to rouse male contributions was through outreach to their daughters, sisters, and wives.

Thus, the Cropper household was not the only place where family resources enhanced the flexibility of movement entrepreneurs. But to argue that female antislavery organizations were independent is an overstatement. The proliferation of women's antislavery societies in England dates from the same 1827-8 period when Cropper turned to transatlantic ties to revive the stalled national movement. Just as precipitously as the Liverpool Ladies' Association was founded, it receded into the background when the national movement revived. Moreover, while the Cropper women had leverage, they did not necessarily have distinctive voices. Charitable allocations, like all family budget decisions were negotiated around the dinner table. For example, while James Cropper

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<sup>38</sup> *Liberator*, 15 Dec. 1832. Liverpool Ladies' Negro Emancipation Association, *Ladies' Anti-Slavery Associations* (Liverpool, 1827). Idem., *First Report...* (Liverpool, 1828). Birmingham Record Office: Birmingham Female Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves: Ledger, 1825-31. Clare Taylor, *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding* (Edinburgh, 1974), 235. Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> *GUE*, Sept. 1830. See also: Ibid., 18, 25 Feb., 15 Apr. 1826, 12 May, 8 Sept., 29 Dec. 1827.

was that Mary—issuing advice from her command post in Liverpool, sustaining local activist networks, and receiving transatlantic visitors when they first docked in England—was arguably as central to the movement as her husband was in London.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the absence of an undisputed headquarters of the transatlantic antislavery movement was a key factor in creating both the obstacles and opportunities that allowed movement entrepreneurs like the Croppers and Lundy to flourish in the 1820s. As one of the first modern social movements, antislavery was incredibly polyphonic. The cause never developed a unidirectional vector of influence; instead information and ideas ebbed and flowed along multiple

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 15 Jan. – 20 Feb. 1830, May, June, Sept. 1830. Maryland Historical Society MS 523 (Latrobe Family Collection) Box 4: J. H. B. Latrobe, *Reminiscences*, ff. 43-5.

<sup>41</sup> Cropper Family Papers D/CR/10/62: Mary to James Cropper, 29 Aug 1831. See also D/CR/10/66-70: Margaret M. Cropper to Eliza Sturge, 1830-4.

vectors.<sup>42</sup> To those who revived the antislavery movement in the 1820s, transatlantic ties were alluring but not particularly influential. Still, it was not Garrison's visit in 1833-4 that established the precedent for extensive transatlantic connections between the radical antislavery vanguards in England and the United States. Links had been developing for several years under the nourishment of pioneering activists such as Cropper and Lundy. Moreover, the patterns of feedback and influence developed in the 1820s persisted as activists became more sophisticated in using multi-leveled strategies in this and other movements. Exploring how activists maneuver among multiple levels of a social movement highlights the degree to which, even in the early nineteenth century, civil society was just as complexly structured as any business or government agency.

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<sup>42</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1998).