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## Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Antislavery and Women's Rights

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### Origin Stories: Remapping First Wave Feminism

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On July 14, 1848, Frederick Douglass printed two announcements on the front page of the *North Star*. The first called on “the Friends of Freedom in Western New York” to “commemorate the day which gave freedom to 800,000 human beings in the West Indian Isles, and also tender a tribute of gratitude for the recent French demonstration of ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.’” The second invited readers to attend a woman’s rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York, five days hence.<sup>1</sup> The two events seemed perfectly paired to *North Star* subscribers who had spent the previous decade fighting for the abolition of slavery and advocating women’s rights within religious and reform organizations. Many had followed events in Europe closely throughout the year, comparing the revolutionary movements unfolding there with their own government’s campaign to expand slave territories through the defeat of Mexico and the acquisition of Cuba.

Historians of antebellum activism in the United States have sometimes noted these international developments, but rarely analyzed them. The origins of American

feminism, for instance, have long been located in London, England. It was there, at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840, that Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Lucretia Mott, and the two plotted to call a woman's rights convention on their return to the United States. Yet few histories have moved beyond that singular moment to explore more fully the international context in which American woman's rights was born. In *Joyous Greetings*, Bonnie Anderson has broken through this feminist isolationism, revealing the dense European, British, and transatlantic networks developed among leading woman's rights advocates from the 1830s to the 1860s.<sup>2</sup> Focusing on a group of twenty core women, including three Americans, and twenty-one of their associates, including seven Americans, she traces the personal and political connections through which these leaders traversed national and oceanic boundaries. Anderson's core women include Mott and Stanton who, with three Quaker friends, organized the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention of 1848.

That meeting brought together three political networks: legal reformers, particularly local advocates of married women's property rights; Free Soilers from central New York; and a circle of radical activists comprised of free blacks and white Quakers.<sup>3</sup> This last group, who tied their fight for gender equity to campaigns for racial equality, religious freedom, economic democracy, and non-violence, forms the core of my analysis here, extending Anderson's argument to a wider cohort of American women and men. The circle was represented at Seneca Falls by James and Lucretia Mott of Philadelphia; Frederick Douglass of Rochester; his Quaker neighbors Amy Post, Catherine Fish Stebbins, Sarah Hallowell, and Mary Hallowell; and a dozen other Quaker activists from central and western New York.

I have described elsewhere the trajectory that brought free black and white Quaker radicals together in Rochester, New York, documenting the range of issues and the vision of universal justice they embraced. Others have provided accounts of similar interracial circles in Philadelphia or have explored the lives of African-American women and men who spoke out on behalf of both abolition and woman's rights.<sup>4</sup> Individuals who were linked to but not residents of the radical communities in Western New York and eastern Pennsylvania—William C. Nell, Charles Remond, Mary Ann McClintock, Nathaniel Potter, Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, Betsey Mix Cowles, and Lucy Colman – have received considerably less attention, but they were critical members of the same activist network. Taken together, these radical universalists demonstrate the deep and abiding concern among many abolitionist-feminists with events and ideas throughout the Atlantic World. From their perspective, the declarations of Tom Paine, the utopian experiments of Frances Wright, the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and Frederika Bremer, the battles against slavery in England, Canada, France, and the West Indies, the rebellions in Ireland, and the revolutionary appeals of French and Hungarian republicans were linked organically with protests against the U.S. war with Mexico, the advocacy of Indian sovereignty, land reform, the free produce movement, the defeat of sectarianism, the abolition of slavery and capital punishment, and the cause of woman's rights.

Two critical facts differentiated this network of antebellum reformers from others. First, interracial relationships and Quaker kinship ties were central to their organization. In Rochester, for example, the friendship between Amy Post and Frederick Douglass formed the lynchpin of an activist network that reached out to Quakers in western, central and downstate New York, eastern Pennsylvania, and the Midwest and to free blacks in

Boston, Canada, New York City, Philadelphia, and Michigan. The pair's presence in Rochester brought Harriet Jacobs, Sojourner Truth, William Nell, Charles Remond, Lucretia Mott, Abby Kelley, William Lloyd Garrison, and dozens of other antislavery and woman's rights advocates to the city. At the same time, Frederick Douglass, Amy Post and their coworkers in the interracial and mixed-sex Western New York Anti-Slavery Society traveled to conventions, fundraising fairs, and lectures in New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, eastern Canada, and the Midwest. They also wrote letters to and articles for an array of radical and reform papers. Second, members of this circle believed that "all these subjects of reform are kindred in their nature." As Lucretia Mott wrote in October 1848, activists "will not love the slave less, in loving universal humanity more." Although most ranked human bondage as the most brutal wrong and therefore the most important and immediate issue, they did not see the eradication of slavery, much less race prejudice, as possible without a "thorough re-organization of Society."<sup>5</sup> This universalistic approach to change fueled their concern not only with a range of social and political problems at home, but also with related events abroad.

In their personal correspondence, published letters, and public actions, these American activists demonstrated time and again the international scope of their political vision. At times, they accepted national or racial stereotypes that circulated in the period, particularly negative portrayals of Turks and, less frequently, of the Irish. Some made what now seem like simplistic comparisons between events abroad and those in the United States, and others romanticized revolutionary movements even after they had turned away from their democratic principles. For the most part, however, they applied

the same standards of justice and equity to international as to domestic concerns and analyzed critical connections between the two.

In the years between the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London and the gathering at Seneca Falls, the interest in international developments ran especially high. Throughout the early 1840s, emancipation day celebrations on August 1, marking Britain's abolition of slavery in her colonies, attracted large crowds of African Americans and small groups of white abolitionists in Boston, Philadelphia, Rochester, Cincinnati, Lowell, Massachusetts, and other northern cities. Parades, speeches and balls were also organized in honor of Toussaint L'Overture's victory on St. Domingue and the abolition of the international slave trade in the United States. Speakers recounted events in Great Britain and the West Indies in dramatic detail, keeping alive the history of the international fight against human bondage. Although such affairs were generally peaceful, participation in them did put individuals at risk. In August 1842, for instance, white onlookers attacked marchers in the emancipation day parade in Philadelphia, touching off two days of rioting.<sup>6</sup> Mob action against black and white abolitionists was nothing new in Philadelphia or in Cincinnati, Boston, and other cities that hosted emancipation day events. The willingness to launch public celebrations in this atmosphere suggests the importance to the black community and to abolitionists of recognizing the international scope of their efforts. The extensive coverage of such events in the *Liberator*, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, and the *North Star* ensured that those who could not attend such celebrations would be fully apprised of their occurrence and their significance.

Lucretia Mott, who had been among those attacked during the 1838 anti-abolitionist riot in Philadelphia, attended a number of emancipation day celebrations. She expressed her international concerns more forcefully, however, in her regular correspondence with British reformers such as Elizabeth Pease, Richard Webb, George and Cecilia Combe, and Richard Allen. The members of this transatlantic Quaker reform circle sent papers and pamphlets back and forth between London, Glasgow, Leicester, Darlington, and Philadelphia, documenting developments on both sides of the Atlantic. These letters, however, were not simply private exchanges, since activists in the United States and England felt free to circulate personal correspondence among family, friends and coworkers, and to publish the most important news received, even whole letters, in the reform press. In summer 1842, Mott wrote Richard Allen, noting that she had published his last letter in the *Standard*. She then proceeded to comment on a recent convention in Paris, the abolitionists' anniversary meeting in London, George lecture tour in Scotland, and Joseph Sturge's campaign for a seat in Parliament. She was especially interested in the clippings that Allen had sent her about William Knibb's London speech on "the privations and sufferings of the poor Irish emigrants to Jamaica" and George Thompson's references in a Glasgow lecture to the cruelties of the "Affganistan" war.<sup>7</sup>

Invitations to visit, attend conventions, and give lectures were often included in abolitionists' transatlantic correspondence. When such efforts were launched, they provided the opportunity for more intensive discussions of international developments and more extensive dissemination of the news. Travelers sent lengthy letters to friends and family and/or the antislavery press, detailing the situation abroad and introducing a

wider American audience to important individuals, organizations, and events. Over the course of the 1840s, as ocean voyages became easier and the transatlantic network stronger, more U.S. activists visited Great Britain, including escaped slaves and free blacks who could compare conditions there with those at home. Charles Remond, William and Ellen Craft, Frederick Douglass, and other African Americans joined white Quaker abolitionists as the most popular and well-received speakers in Great Britain.

Thus, even those in the United States who could not travel abroad and who did not communicate directly with British or other European activists familiarized themselves with international events through letters, the antislavery and reform press and the circulation of books and pamphlets by foreign authors. If they attended antislavery conventions, they might hear epistles sent for the occasion from British antislavery societies or individual abolitionists; and at antislavery fundraising fairs, they could buy goods made by supporters in Bristol, London, Leicester, Dublin, Edinburgh, and elsewhere.

The correspondence among Amy Post, her extended family, and her abolitionist coworkers demonstrates the ways that international influences shaped the activism of those with no direct experience of Great Britain or Europe. In 1844, for instance, Isaac Post wrote to Amy, quoting the writings of Harriet Martineau in response to quarrels between political abolitionists and moral suasionists. Others cited Tom Paine, Charles Dickens, Frederika Bremer, and a host of lesser-known English and European authors on a range of issues. Quaker Sarah Thayer, who lived on the edge of poverty in a small village in central New York, wrote Amy Post “how delightful it would be if I could mingle in such society” as existed in Rochester. In place of that, she read all she could,

including *The Glory and Shame of England* and copies of the *Liberator* sent to her by friends, and wrote Amy frequently for news of events both local and international.

Another Quaker coworker, John Hurn, lived in a Fourierist Phalanx in Wisconsin in 1846, residing in what he called “complete isolation.” Nonetheless, he wrote Amy in detail about the various disputes among abolitionists and concluded, “I should like to see the example of the [British] Anti-Corn Law League followed in all other reforms, which would hasten the ‘good times coming’ considerably.”<sup>8</sup>

Amy Post’s correspondents included kin, friends, and coworkers across the northern United States and Canada. In 1846, Frederick Douglass extended her network to Great Britain. Engaged in an antislavery lecture tour there, Douglass wrote regularly, declaring in his first letter that the Post family was “very dear to me, you loved me and treated me like a brother before the world knew me as it does & when my friends were fewer than they now are.” In England, he claimed, such relations between blacks and whites were considered normal. “I am treated as a man and an equal brother,” and am

es fearful it will unfit me for the pro-slavery kicks and cuffs at home, but I hope not. [P]erhaps [it] will help as my own experience will assure me that such prejudice and abuse is the result of the system of slavery.”<sup>9</sup> Through this exchange of letters, Amy made the acquaintance of Elizabeth Pease, George Thompson, and other British abolitionists. When Douglass returned home and established his antislavery paper, the *North Star*, in Rochester, Post called on these British friends to acquire items for local fundraising fairs to help support the venture.

Isaac Post’s brother and sister-in-law, John and Mary Robbins Post, who lived on Long Island, wrote frequently for news of Douglass’s travels and kept abreast of



international affairs through the *Liberator* and the testimonies at local Quaker meetings. In 1847, Mary Post noted “ what a deplorable condition the Irish are in,” basing her sentiments on a letter read at meeting from Irish Friends regarding the destitution of the famine. A collection was immediately organized to assist them, assuring that further news would be forthcoming.<sup>10</sup> Other Post relatives moved to or traveled in Canada, taking the opportunity to describe the progress made by free blacks and fugitives settled there. Amy’s sister, Sarah Hallowell stayed with cousins Thomas and Phebe Post Willis in Ontario in 1846, and Amy herself made the trip the next year with antislavery coworker Lucy Colman. Colman reported in her *Reminiscences* that they went to “see how those poor fugitives were faring who had sought refuge there.” She claimed that of the nearly 40,000 in the region, “I doubt . . . there was one thousand not acquainted with the name of Amy Post . . . as her home, the ‘central depot’ of the underground railroad, was shelter and comforter to the African race for many years.” When Douglass traveled through Canada on a lecture tour in 1849, with English abolitionists Julia Griffiths and her sister Elizabeth, he called on the Posts’ contacts to set up lectures and provide housing and meals.<sup>11</sup>

In 1846, the mix of domestic and international concerns that captured the attention of radical abolitionists was crystallized in the U.S. war against Mexico. The war challenged activists’ antislavery and pacifist positions and made acutely visible the deeply intertwined character of local, national and global politics. The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society had already gathered signatures of women and men on lengthy petitions protesting the spread of slavery into Texas. Mexico, having outlawed slavery, was placed next to St. Domingue

and England on the roster of civilized nations; and radical abolitionists were certain that the war against it was intended to both expand slavery and impose Anglo-Saxon domination over the Mexican population.<sup>12</sup> By spring 1846, protest meetings were being held throughout the North, and those organized by radical abolitionists explicitly linked the Mexican War to earlier attacks on American Indians and to U.S. politicians' imperial interest in Cuba.<sup>13</sup>

British and American women active in the antislavery and peace movements combined forces to push for peace. At the behest of their British sisters and leading peace men like Elihu Burritt, women activists in Philadelphia organized a public meeting to protest the war in June 1846. Lucretia Mott and Sarah Pugh, long-time members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and delegates from that organization to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, led the meeting. The women drafted a memorial that was sent to their British sisters, in which they lamented “the false love of glory, the cruel spirit of revenge, the blood-thirsty ambition, the swelling breast of the soldier in the field” as well as the danger of extending slave territory. Concerned with the treatment of Mexican women by U.S. soldiers during the war and the consequences for slave families if the conquest of Mexican lands was successful, some called for “women *en masse*” to petition Congress to withdraw American troops.<sup>14</sup>

Women and men organized protest meetings in a number of other communities in the Northeast and Midwest. The meeting in Syracuse, New York, called on laboring men to refuse to serve in Mexico; that at Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, a radical Quaker stronghold, critiqued the “blind obedience” required by patriotism. Those who gathered at Randolph, Ohio, another center of Quaker abolitionism, and Worcester, Massachusetts,

called for circulating antiwar pledges. All of the meetings published protests, sent letters and reports to the antislavery press, or in other ways publicized their efforts more widely. In most cases, women played critical roles, wielding their special place in radical antislavery and peace societies to expand their public and political presence. Betsey Mix Cowles, an abolitionist in central Ohio who developed a close friendship with Amy Post and campaigned against segregated schools and for woman's rights, wrote a play about the Mexican War that suggested territorial gain and political favors undergirded the rhetoric of military glory. In Randolph and Kennett Square, Quaker women signed the call for the meeting, spoke at the gathering, and served on the publication committee.<sup>15</sup>

For radical Quaker women, the Mexican War protests brought together not only their interest in abolition and peace, but also their growing concern over woman's rights. Debates about women's proper roles in antislavery societies during the 1830s and in Quaker meetings during the 1840s generated intense discussions of woman's rights a decade before the Seneca Falls convention. According to Mott, the battle began in 1837 at the first Convention of American Women Against Slavery. Responding in part to attacks on Angelina and Sarah Grimke for speaking before "promiscuous" audiences, the women, black and white, resolved (although not unanimously) "That it was time that woman should move in the sphere Providence had assigned her, & no longer rest satisfied in the limits which corrupt custom & a perverted application of the Scriptures had placed her."<sup>16</sup> Contributing to the division of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1839-40, arguments over women's role also spurred conflicts in the Hicksite branch of the Society of Friends. In this case, the demand for sex equality converged with radical Quakers'

desire to diminish hierarchies within their meetings and to participate in “worldly” antislavery efforts. The Mexican War increased their desire to join such public protests.

Even before the war, radical Quaker women and men were leaving established meetings, or being disowned from them. They and their African American coworkers infused the more progressive wings of the antislavery and peace movements with their vision of sex equality. The New England Non-Resistant Society, filled with radical Quaker activists, had granted women full participation in its meetings from its founding in 1839. William C. Nell successfully advocated women’s rights in the militant New England Freedom Association, a group that aided fugitive slaves, in 1845. That same year, abolitionist lecturer Jeremiah Burke Sanderson wrote Amy Post from the American Anti-Slavery Society meetings in New York City, extolling the advances made in women’s status. “Woman is rising up, becoming free, the progress manifest at present of the idea of Woman’s Rights in the public mind is an earnest [indication] of what a few years comparatively, may effect.” In December 1846, abolitionist minister Samuel J. May of Syracuse, who had helped organize a Mexican War protest meeting the previous July, sent the Posts fifty copies of his “Sermon on the Rights of Women” to be sold at the Rochester fair “for the benefit of the [Western New York] Anti-Slavery Society.”<sup>17</sup>

By 1848, radical black and white activists who had worked together against slavery, war, and sex oppression and had followed parallel movements in the West Indies, Canada, Mexico, Great Britain, and Europe were primed for action. During the winter and spring, antislavery and peace advocates continued to protest the U.S. conquest of Mexico. Activists in Rochester, New York organized a meeting and published the keynote speech; Friends from Wayne County, Indiana, sent a petition to Congress; and

the New England Anti-Slavery Convention and various non-resistance groups published resolutions opposing the war.<sup>18</sup> During the same period, radical Quakers in western New York, eastern Pennsylvania, central Ohio, Michigan, and eastern Indiana made a final effort to transform the Hicksite meeting according to their democratic, abolitionist, and feminist principles. When they failed to do so at the 1848 Genesee Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in Farmington, New York in early June, the dissenters who had not yet been disowned walked out. They immediately reconvened and invited those who had earlier withdrawn from the Society to join in forming the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends. In the new organization, women and men met together for worship and business, hierarchical structures were abolished, individuals were allowed to participate without sectarian tests of their beliefs, and the “promotion of righteousness” through prayer, meditation, and “worldly” activism was considered a sign of true faith. The movement quickly spread and like-minded meetings sprang up in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania; North Collins, New York; Green Plain, Ohio; Wayne County, Indiana; and central Michigan.<sup>19</sup>

James and Lucretia Mott attended the Genesee Yearly Meeting and the founding meeting of the Congregational Friends. They remained in western New York to visit friends, tour free black communities in Canada, and give a series of antislavery lectures. On June 16, the *North Star* announced Lucretia Mott’s appearance at a convention of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society to be held in Rochester on June 20.<sup>20</sup> After her Rochester visit, she planned a trip to the Seneca Indians on the Cattaragus Reservation near Buffalo and then a few days in Auburn, New York, with her sister, Martha Wright.

All of these activities gained added significance from the incredible news of revolutions abroad. In spring 1848, protests against the Mexican War continued as participants anticipated the early summer round of peace, antislavery and Quaker meetings. In the midst of these activities, the French Revolution hit the United States “like a bolt of living thunder.” As Douglass proclaimed in late April, “Thanks to steam navigation and electric wires, we can almost hear the words uttered, and see the deeds done as they transpire. A revolution now cannot be confined to the place or the people where it may commence, but flashes with lightning speed from heart to heart, from land to land, until it has traversed the globe. . . .” While cause for celebration among “the humble poor, the toil-worn laborer, the oppressed and the plundered,” “the despots of Europe, the Tories of England, and the slaveholders of America are astonished, confused, and terrified. . . .” “Only Negroes and Abolitionists,” he declared, can truly rejoice.<sup>21</sup>

On May 9, a “Sympathy with France” meeting was held in Rochester. Douglass reported that some 6,000 persons “of both sexes, and all ages” assembled in Washington Square to hear speeches and express their support for the revolution abroad. The participants resolved “that by decreeing the abolition of Negro slavery, France has covered herself with higher honors than any war could give.” They also applauded the “rights of labor” newly recognized in France, and the abolition of capital punishment for political offenses. Over the following months, the *North Star* provided extensive and detailed coverage of events not only in France, but also in Ireland, England, Denmark, Austria, Sardinia, Silesia, Russia, Spain, Hungary, and the West Indies. Indeed, the “Foreign News” section came to dominate the paper in this period, with rebels in Ireland, Chartists in England, abolitionists in Denmark, and revolutionaries in France, Austria,

Sardinia, and elsewhere posed against the repressive actions of Russian troops, British Tories, and other counterrevolutionary forces.

It was in this context that radical Quakers finally rebelled against the sectarian strictures of the Genesee Yearly Meeting and abolitionists gathered in western New York and elsewhere to assess the future. And in this spirit, the Motts met with Seneca Indians, who were working to adopt their first written constitution. It was likely that Seneca women would be divested of some of their traditional power over tribal decisions, but they would retain the right to vote, something few other American women could even imagine. While building on tribal traditions, Lucretia Mott claimed that the Seneca were also learning “from the political agitations abroad . . . imitating the movements of France and all Europe and seeking a larger liberty. . . .”<sup>22</sup> Following this trip, Mott traveled to her sister’s house in Auburn, visited with her friends the McClintocks in Waterloo, and renewed her friendship with Stanton. With the help of McClintock’s neighbor, Jane Hunt, they organized the Seneca Falls Woman’s Rights Convention. Although no explicit references to international affairs appears in the official record of the convention, many of the participants must have considered the demand for woman’s rights a logical extension of the larger revolutionary agenda.

Certainly the Motts, Frederick Douglass, and the Quaker contingent from Rochester and Waterloo were immersed in developments abroad even as they debated resolutions at home. When the participants at Seneca Falls decided that there was still more business to pursue, the Rochester contingent eagerly accepted the responsibility of organizing a second meeting two weeks hence. Douglass and his Quaker coworkers—Amy Post, Sarah Hallowell, Mary Hallowell, and Catherine Fish Stebbins—must have

viewed the August 2 date for the Rochester Woman's Rights Convention as propitious. They were already deeply engaged in organizing a massive Emancipation Day celebration for August 1, in honor of the British, French *and* Danish abolition of slavery in the West Indies. Speakers invited for the occasion, including Charles Remond and William C. Nell, could now participate in the woman's rights convention as well. In addition, recent appeals to the laboring classes, made by local supporters of the French Revolution, led the Rochester organizers to consider the "industrial" as well as the "civil and social" rights of women and to invite working women to attend the convention. For one weekend, at least, the interracial circle of radical universalists would command the attention not only of their neighbors, but of the wider world.

On August 1, free blacks and white abolitionists from Rochester joined with James and Lucretia Mott, Remond and Nell, and a host of other invited guests to celebrate emancipation in all its wonderful variety. Music, parades, speeches, entertainments organized by African American children and churches, a fundraising fair, and an evening ball filled the day and the night. The next morning several hundred women and men, many of them exhausted but exhilarated by the previous day's events, gathered at the local Unitarian Society to debate woman's rights. The opening moments were filled with tension as the Rochester organizing committee, led by Amy Post, nominated a woman, local abolitionist Abigail Bush, to preside. Mott and Stanton both considered the move "a most hazardous experiment to have a woman President and stoutly opposed it," but Amy Post and her coworkers—including Douglass and Nell as well as a host of local Quakers and kin—prevailed.<sup>23</sup> The revolution was proceeding.



We have only fragments of the speeches and debates from the Rochester Woman's Rights Convention and an incomplete list of participants. We know that there was a report on "woman's place and pay in the world of work" and testimony from a local seamstress corroborating the information. A visiting Quaker, Rebecca Sanford, gave an eloquent speech on the history of women from "Semiramis to Victoria," concluding that women's rise was foreshadowed in "the progress [made] within the past few years by escaped slaves resettled in the environs of the North." And the participants collectively declared it "the duty of woman, whatever her complexion [that is race], to assume, as soon as possible, her true position of equality in the social circle, the Church, and the State."<sup>24</sup>

The scope of concerns embraced by those in attendance can be traced more fully through their activities in the following months. Amy Post and her friend Sarah C. Owen joined two seamstresses in organizing a local Working Woman's Protective Union. Douglass and Nell carried the demand for woman's rights to the National Convention of Colored Freemen, held in Cincinnati, Ohio, two weeks later. Antislavery papers continued their detailed coverage of events throughout Europe, and *North Star* also followed developments closely in the West Indies, providing story after story on the workings of emancipation in Jamaica and the progress of free blacks in Haiti as well as warnings about U.S. intentions in Cuba. Lucretia Mott wrote her friends in Great Britain about the outpouring of agitation in the United States "on the Slavery & Peace question—as well as our recent movement for the enlargement of Woman's sphere. . . . Agitation is in all the churches—ours seems rocked to its center."<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the Congregational

Friends reconvened in October to solidify their ranks and attract new members committed to social justice, religious liberty, and universal emancipation.

In December, the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society held a grand antislavery fundraising fair and a rousing anniversary meeting. In preparing for the event, the Society claimed that “the broad Atlantic forms no barrier to this expansive work of reciprocal righteousness, for we see a noble band of transatlantic women . . . co-operating with us.” At the convention itself, participants thanked the women of England, Scotland and Ireland for their support and resolved to learn from their “English Friends” and challenge the “shameless custom” of segregated education. They also resolved to oppose “the annexation of Cuba, unless it shall be a free territory, and pledged to remain so,” and declared “No Compromise with Slaveholders, either in the beautiful valleys of Mexico or on the banks of the majestic Mississippi.”<sup>26</sup> Douglass, Nell, the Posts, McClintocks, Hallowells, Stebbinses, and Anthonys along with Quakers and free blacks from Buffalo, Auburn, Farmington, and other parts of western and central New York gloried in their collective efforts.

Yet as suggested by the references to Cuba and Mexico, radicals in the United States were not unaware of the threats to democracy, at home or abroad. In the same letter in which Mott laid out the advances in American reform, she also worried about developments in Europe. “Even the non-resistant,” she wrote in September 1848, “indulges the secret wish that, if they will fight, the right may prevail, and larger liberty diffuse itself over the world. There seems now, however, a temporary settling down, with far less change than anticipated—especially in revolutionary France.” As conditions deteriorated in Europe and as slaveholders continued to expand their political reach at

home, the revolutionary dreams of 1848 faded, but the sense of international connections did not. Indeed, U.S. radicals criticized those who refused to see the connections between democratic demands in Europe and racial oppression in the United States. Mary Robbins Post, for example, wrote to her Rochester relatives, lamenting the narrow mindedness of the crowds that cheered Hungarian patriot Louis Kossuth on his visit to New York City—“passing strange they don’t see the inconsistency of their conduct in relation to his

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As revolutionaries across Europe were imprisoned, killed, or exiled, the reform press continued its vigil, and radical activists recast the lessons learned from international affairs. On August 1, 1849, emancipation day celebrations once again compared events in the United States with those in Europe, but with far more dangerous implications.

Commenting on the drive to extend slave territories in the United States, the editor of the *Spirit of the Age* wrote, “The tragedies of 1849 will be consummated in a catastrophe more dark and dreadful even than the triumphs of absolutism in Europe—by spreading over the once free regions of Mexico the black and bloody shroud of slavery.”<sup>28</sup>

In this context, Canada and England remained the safest havens for free blacks, especially former slaves. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, many of the most outspoken spent time there. With Frederick Douglass, William Nell, and Harriet Jacobs all traveling in Great Britain in the early 1850s, the transatlantic network among black and white radicals and British and American activists became more tightly knit than ever before. At the same time, for some European radicals, the United States offered the best refuge. German revolutionaries Mathilda and Fritz Anneke settled in the Midwest after fleeing persecution in their homeland, published a progressive German-language paper,

and advocated the rights of working people and women. Pioneer feminists Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland, imprisoned for their part in the French rebellion, sent a letter to the “Convention of American Women” in 1851, applauding the courage of their sisters in the United States, but reminding them that the chains of the throne *and* the scaffold, the church *and* the patriarch, the slave, the worker, *and* the woman must all be broken if “the kingdom of Equality and Justice shall be realized on Earth.”<sup>29</sup>

Even more than the national and regional woman’s rights conventions, the Yearly Meetings of Congregational Friends kept alive the radical universalist vision of social change forged in the 1840s. Participants in the annual June event included not only the dissenting Quakers who first formed the organization, but also a range of antislavery, non-resistance, and woman’s rights advocates. Frederick Douglass, William C. Nell, Sojourner Truth, Charles Remond, Lucretia and James Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony frequently attended and joined in the debates and discussions. At the 1850 meeting, participants prepared an address to be read at the Peace Congress planned for Frankfurt, Germany that August, noting that “the Creator has established an equality in the human family, perfect and beautiful as it is beneficent, without limitation to sex, or complexion, or national peculiarities.” Indeed, the Congregational Friends invited “the Christian, the Jew, the Mohammeden, or the Hindoo” to share what light they had. They advocated the abolition of slavery in all its forms, the end of sectarianism, war, and capital punishment, and pleaded for peace, land reform and woman’s rights. The last issue garnered special attention at the 1850 meeting, leading to the publication of “An Address to the Women of the State of New York”<sup>30</sup>

The appeal, although addressed to New York women, promoted a universal vision. It defined rights in the broadest terms and drew examples of both degradation and achievement from around the world. The religious, political, economic, social, and psychological limits placed on women were illustrated through examples from the Arabian Kerek, the German bourgeoisie, and the American church. Those who vindicated woman's capabilities included DeStael, Martineau, Somerville, Herschell, and Mitchell. They denied that race or national origin should affect their rights in any way, and demanded that women write, speak, call meetings, and agitate to procure and maintain what was theirs. Ultimately, they declared, "When we speak of the Rights of Woman, we speak of Human Rights."<sup>31</sup>

This mid-nineteenth century equation of woman's rights with human rights captures the global vision of the interracial, mixed sex circle of black and white radicals analyzed here. It demonstrates the critical impact of international developments on activists primed to embrace multiple issues and to view racial, sexual, class, and imperial oppressions as intimately intertwined. The Civil War, the struggle over the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments, and the increasing focus of woman's rights advocates on the single issue of suffrage in the postwar period would circumscribe the influence of radical universalists within social reform circles. Their vision, however, would live on, reinvented by radical activists, including some feminists, at the turn of the twentieth century and in the 1960s, but only now recognized and reclaimed.

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<sup>1</sup> *North Star* (Rochester, New York), July 14, 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Bonnie Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). See also, Kathryn Kish Sklar, "'Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation': American and British Women at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London 1840," in John C. Van Horne and Jean Fagan Yellin, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 301-333.

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<sup>3</sup> On three networks, see Judith Wellman, “The Seneca Falls Woman’s Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks,” *Journal of Women’s History* 3(Spring 1991): 9-37.

<sup>4</sup> On Rochester, see Nancy A. Hewitt, “Feminist Friends: Agrarian Quakers and the Emergence of *Feminist Studies* 12(Spring 1986): 27-49, and “Re-Rooting American Women’s Activism: Global Perspectives on 1848,” in Patricia Grimshaw, Katie Holmes, and Marilyn Lake, eds., *Women’s Rights and Human Rights: International Historical Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2000). On Philadelphia, see Jean R. Soderlund, “Priorities and Power: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society,” Emma Jones Lapansky, “The World the Agitators Made: The Counterculture of Agitation in Urban Philadelphia,” and Julie Winch, “‘You Have Talents Only Cultivate Them’: Philadelphia’s Black Female Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade,” in Van Horne and Yellin, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood*, pp. 67-88, 91-100, 101-118. On African-American feminist-abolitionists, see Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996) and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African-American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> First two quotes from Lucretia Mott, “Letter,” *The Liberator* (Boston), October 6, 1848. Last quote from *Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends, held at Waterloo, New York, 1849* (Auburn, N. Y.: Oliphant’s Press, 1849), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> These events were regularly covered in the anti-slavery press and discussed in the correspondence of abolitionists. See August issues of the *Liberator*, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, the *North Star*, and other abolitionist newspapers.

<sup>7</sup> Lucretia Mott to Richard Allen, June 25, 1842, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio. She had published his previous letter to her in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac Post to Amy Post, May 5, 1844, Isaac and Amy Post Family Papers (hereafter Post Family Papers); Sarah Thayer to Amy Post, February 5, 1843, Post Family Papers; John W. Hurn to Amy Post, October 11, 1846, Post Family Papers. On Frederika Bremer, see for instance, quote by William C. Nell in the “Report on the Western New York-Anti-Slavery Bazaar,” in the *North Star*, January 7, 1848. Similar references to European writers and activists dot the correspondence and reports of this circle.

<sup>9</sup> Frederick Douglass to Amy Post, April 28, 1846, Post Family Papers. At this point in his travels, their letters were sent via Elizabeth Pease in Darlington, England.

<sup>10</sup> On news of Douglass’s British travels, see Joseph and Mary Robbins Post to Edmund and Julia Willis, September 17m, 1845, and Joseph and Mary Robbins Post to Isaac Post, November 22, 1846. On news of Irish famine, Joseph and Mary Robbins Post to Isaac and Amy Post, February 9, 1847. All in Post Family Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Hallowell to Amy Post, September 12, 1846, Post Family Papers; Lucy N. Colman, *Reminiscences* (Buffalo: H. L. Green, 1891), p. 84; and Frederick Douglass to Isaac Post, [July 15] 1849, and Frederick Douglass to Amy Post, July 17, 1849, Post Family Papers.

<sup>12</sup> For an insightful discussion of these concerns among radical abolitionists, see Nancy Isenberg, *Sex & Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), pp. 135-147.

<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, in personal correspondence, Joseph and Mary Robbins Post to Isaac and Amy Post, May 29, 1846; Mary Robbins Post to Post Family, [May \_\_\_] 1847; and Nathaniel Potter to Isaac and Amy Post, September 26, 1847. Post Family Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Isenberg, *Sex & Citizenship*, p. 140, and *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 25, 1846 and September 13, 1847.

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<sup>15</sup> Isenberg, *Sex & Citizenship*, nn. 173 and 175, p. 252; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, July 2, 1846, and September 23, 1847; and *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 17, 1847.

<sup>16</sup> Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, March 16, 1855, Library of Congress. Mott is here responding to a request from Stanton for her memories of the origins of woman's rights to be used in a history of the movement.

<sup>17</sup> Jeremiah B. Sanderson to Amy Post, May 8, 1845, and Rev. Samuel J. May to Isaac and Amy Post, December 20, 1846, Post Family Papers. On general movement toward woman's rights agenda in antislavery and peace societies, see Hewitt, "Re-rooting American Women's Activism."

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, coverage of these events in the *North Star*, January 14, February 18, March 10, and June 30, 1848.

<sup>19</sup> On these developments, see A. Day Bradley, "Progressive Friends in Michigan and New York," *Quaker History* 52 (1963): 95-103; Hewitt, "Feminist Friends"; *Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends, . . . 1849*; and *Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends, held at Waterloo, New York, 1850, with an Appendix* (Auburn, N. Y.: Henry Oliphant, 1850). Quote from "Basis of Religious Association," written in June 1848 and printed as an appendix to the 1850 *Proceedings*.

<sup>20</sup> *North Star*, June 16, 1848.

<sup>21</sup> *North Star*, April 28, 1848.

<sup>22</sup> Mott's report on her travels was published in *The Liberator*, October 6, 1848.

<sup>23</sup> Rochester Woman's Rights Convention, Minutes, August 2, 1848, Phebe Post Willis Papers, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> On Working Women's Protective Union, see *North Star*, September 15, 1848. On Cincinnati Convention, see Benjamin Quarles, "'Frederick Douglass and the Woman's Rights Movement,'" *History 2000 Occasional Papers Series*, No. 1-1993 (Baltimore, Md.: Morgan State University Foundation, 1993). On coverage of international events, see *North Star*, *The Liberator* and other progressive papers from 1848-49. Lucretia Mott to George and Cecilia Combe, September 18, 1848, National Library of Scotland.

<sup>26</sup> *North Star*, September 1 and December 29, 1848.

<sup>27</sup> Mott to Combe, September 18, 1848; Mary Robbins Post to Isaac and Amy Post, May 5, 185?, Post Family Papers.

<sup>28</sup> Reprint from *Spirit of the Age* in *North Star*, August 31, 1849.

<sup>29</sup> On Annekes, see Anderson, *Joyous Greetings*, pp. 25-26, 178, 181; Jeanne Deroin and Pauline Roland "Letter to the Convention of American Women," June 15, 1851, in Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Women Suffrage* (New York: Fowler & Wells, 1881), vol. 1, pp. 234-37.

<sup>30</sup> *Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends, 1850*, esp. pp. 3, 23, and 40.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-18. The quote on Human Rights is on p. 14.