

**DOUGLASS**  
**AND** **MELVILLE**



Published by  
**M. & B. BARNARD'S SONS CO.**  
CHICAGO

Copyright © 1884, by M. & B. Barnard's Sons Co.  
CHAS. SHEARD & CO., 102 Fleet Street, London.

**DOUGLASS  
& MELVILLE**

*Anchored Together In Neighborly Style*

**Robert K. Wallace**

***To the Melville Society Cultural Project Team &  
Our New Bedford Friends and Affiliates***

***Front cover photographs:***

*Frederick Douglass, albumen print, 1870s. National Archives.*

*Herman Melville, carte-de-visite, 1861. Rodney Dewey photograph, Berkshire Athenaeum.*

*New Bedford waterfront, 1880s. Spinner Collection.*

***Frontispiece:***

*Frederick Douglass, etching from of My Bondage and My Freedom, 1855. New Bedford Historical Society.*

*Herman Melville, oil on canvas, painted in 1870 by J. O. Eaton. Houghton Library, Harvard University.*

***Cover design: Jay Avila***

Text © 2005 Robert K. Wallace

All rights reserved.

© Spinner Publications, Inc.

New Bedford, Massachusetts 02740

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wallace, Robert K.

Douglass & Melville : anchored together in neighborly style / by Robert K. Wallace.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-932027-91-1 (pbk.)

1. Melville, Herman, 1819-1891--Political and social views.
2. Literature and society--United States--History--19th century.
3. Douglass, Frederick, 1818-1895--Contemporaries.
4. Douglass, Frederick, 1818-1895--Influence.
5. African American abolitionists--Biography.
6. Abolitionists--United States--Biography.
7. Race relations in literature.
8. Race in literature. I. Title.

PS2388.P6W35 2005

813'.3--dc22

2005012300

# CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	vi
A DOUGLASS AND MELVILLE CHRONOLOGY .....	x
INTRODUCTION	
Bringing Douglass and Melville Together .....	3
<i>Converging and Diverging Lives (1818–1895)</i> .....	4
<i>Diverging and Converging Afterlives (1895–2005)</i> .....	8
<i>“Anchored together in neighborly style”</i> .....	11
PART I	
Did Douglass and Melville Meet in Person? .....	12
CHAPTER ONE	
In the Whaling City .....	15
CHAPTER TWO	
In the Hudson River Valley .....	23
CHAPTER THREE	
Up and Down Broadway .....	35
PART II	
Did Douglass and Melville Know Each Other’s Work? .....	52
CHAPTER FOUR	
Melville in the <i>North Star</i> and <i>Frederick Douglass’ Paper</i> .....	55
CHAPTER FIVE	
Traces of Douglass in Melville’s Writing .....	65
<i>Typee</i> .....	66
<i>Omoo</i> .....	69
<i>Mardi</i> .....	73
<i>Redburn</i> .....	78
<i>White-Jacket</i> .....	85
<i>Moby-Dick</i> .....	94
<i>Benito Cereno</i> .....	109
AMERICAN EPILOGUE .....	119
<i>What Is a Representative American?</i> .....	124
<i>How Separate are Black and White America?</i> .....	125
<i>What Are the Boundaries of the Color Line?</i> .....	127
<i>How Should We Classify Douglass and Melville?</i> .....	128
NOTES .....	134
WORKS CITED .....	140
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	142
INDEX .....	144
ABOUT THE AUTHOR .....	148

## PREFACE

I first began to think about bringing Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville together in July 2001. I was a guest professor at an NEH Seminar on “Melville and Multiculturalism” in New Bedford. I greatly enjoyed my interaction with high school teachers from across the nation. I began to think specifically about Douglass and Melville in conversation with Sam Otter, another of the guest professors. Discussing the multicultural insights of these two authors in the city that was so important in the early lives of each made us both begin to think that a conference devoted to their lives and works, located in New Bedford, might be a worthwhile idea. When the Executive Committee of the Melville Society approved my proposal for such a conference later that year, I began to think about Douglass and Melville in a more active way.

The next stage in my own thinking about the two men came in September 2002, when Joan Beaubian of the New Bedford Historical Society organized a panel on “Douglass and Melville: New Bedford and Beyond” as a way of stimulating local interest in the future conference. I prepared a short talk in which I began to plot out for the first time some of the ways in which the two men’s lives diverged and converged during their almost identical lifespans. The quality of the other presentations that evening, and the keen interest of the large crowd that had gathered under a large tent outside the Rotch-Jones-Duff house, helped me to feel that the subject of Douglass and Melville could appeal to a wide and diverse audience.

In March 2003 I attended a conference at the University of Rochester about the public life of Frederick Douglass so that I could begin to learn about his life and legacy in a more comprehensive way. Here I was able to try out an expanded version of my New Bedford presentation, as well as to recruit

Douglass scholars for the conference to be held in New Bedford in 2005. Among the Douglass scholars I met in Rochester was John Stauffer, whose new book, *The Black Hearts of Men* (2002), had turned up absolutely new information about the presence of *Moby-Dick* in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. I was assisted in recruiting Douglass scholars by Robert Levine, who with Sam Otter had recently been named program chair for the New Bedford conference.

In September 2003 I attended a conference on Frederick Douglass at Howard University in Washington, D. C. In addition to hearing a number of papers about his private life, I saw an exhibition of Douglass artifacts organized by Donna Wells of the Moorland-Springarn Research Center. I also visited Douglass’s house at Cedar Hill for the first time. Seeing the books and art that he had collected in the home in which he lived brought me closer to the man than I had previously been. I was beginning to know Douglass in the way that I had come to know Melville at Arrowhead, his home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and in the Melville Memorial Room of the nearby Berkshire Athenaeum.

When my research began to reveal that the two men’s parallel lives may have intersected in Albany, New York, in 1845, I arranged to attend a conference on the Underground Railroad in New York’s Capitol Region in February 2004. In addition to meeting Albany historians who have assisted with my subsequent research, I was able to do archival work at the New York State Library, assisted by Catherine Reynolds from Arrowhead. There I found new information about Melville’s slaveholding ancestors in Albany. I also discovered that Frederick Douglass was a major presence in Thurlow Weed’s Albany *Evening Journal* during the years in which Melville was writing *Typee* and *Omoo* in nearby Lansingburgh.

By the time of the trip to Albany, I knew that I wanted to write a book about the two men—but what kind? The ideal, for me, would be a comprehensive examination of the two men's lives from their births in 1818/1819 to their deaths in 1895/1891 in the context of their fluctuating reputations since. Such a book would obviously have been impossible to write by the time of the 2005 conference, yet I wanted to share what I had been learning in a way that would be useful to everyone attending the conference, to teachers and students who will be studying Douglass and Melville for decades to come, and to general readers interested in Douglass and Melville either separately or together.

I therefore designed this book to focus on the two men's lives and works from 1845 to 1855, the one decade in which they were jointly popular in their lifetime. This is also the decade in which they are likely to have meant the most to each other. From the time of Douglass's visit to Albany while Melville was writing *Typee* in 1845 until the publication of Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* a few months before Melville's *Benito Cereno* in 1855, the worlds of these two major American writers and thinkers turned out to be much closer than I had originally imagined. Like the 2005 conference in New Bedford, this book is a sesquicentennial celebration of the men who created *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Benito Cereno* in 1855.

My work on this book throughout the year 2004 increasingly benefited from my work as a guest curator of the exhibition "Our Bondage/Our Freedom: Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville," scheduled by the New Bedford Whaling Museum for the summer of 2005. As the themes and materials of the exhibition came into focus, I realized that this book could also be a unique supplement to the exhibition itself. Visitors to the exhibition would recognize many of its visual images and paired quotations in these pages. Here they would find the biographical background and literary analysis for interrelations that could only be suggested in brief on the walls of a museum.

Although this book has a special meaning in relation to the 2005 conference and exhibition, its primary goal is to introduce a compelling American story in a way that provides a secure foundation for future research and discussion. In writing it I have kept in mind both the general public in that tent in New Bedford and the diverse community audience at the conference in Albany, as well as the more academic audience for research of this kind. I have structured my scholarly discoveries in response to two questions that people invariably ask me: Did Douglass and Melville meet? Did they know each other's work? The answers to these seemingly simple questions have become increasingly rich and complex in the process of researching and writing this book. My research has turned into a detective story of sorts. Pursuing these primary questions has led to secondary questions of equal interest.

Having taught, researched, and written about Melville for more than thirty years, I have found intense pleasure and inspiration while immersing myself in the life and writings of Frederick Douglass. His brilliance as a thinker and writer, his courage as an orator and editor, and his fearless and cogent way of confronting issue after issue in America's national life without flinching or giving an inch are rare qualities to find united in one person. I am amazed that, during the single decade that is the primary focus of this study, a young man in his mid-twenties to mid-thirties could write two autobiographies and edit two consecutive weekly newspapers while also giving sometimes more than a hundred speeches a year in widely spaced cities in America or Great Britain. The quality of his mind, the forthrightness of his heart, the stamina of his travels, the cogency of his words, and the charm of his person astounded me afresh as I have descended into the minutia of his life during the decade of it that I now know best.

As I came to appreciate the fearless public persona of Douglass, I began to admire him even more than I do Melville. Although

Melville wrote nine amazing volumes of fiction between 1845 and 1855, he was not on the front lines of public conflict as visibly as Douglass was. Yet, slowly, as I began to learn in some depth about Douglass's travels, speeches, and writings, I began to see the ease, depth, and sophistication with which Melville incorporated traces of Douglass, his environs, his language, and his pressing national concerns into one work after another during the entire decade of the two men's joint popularity. The degree to which Melville seamlessly assimilates elements of Douglass and of African American life into his own fiction was itself a remarkable achievement for a young writer who has generally been thought of as writing with a white American consciousness for a white American audience.

I began this book with the intuition that these two men's lives and careers were compatible in significant ways. In the process of researching and writing, that initial intuition has deepened and expanded in multiple directions that I hope will stimulate thought and discussion for some time to come.

### A Note on Sources and Findings

Because this book is the first extended comparison of the lives, writings, and legacies of Douglass and Melville, it depends more on primary than on secondary sources. Primary sources directly relating their lives to each other's have been relatively scarce.

Neither author is known to have kept any personal record of his daily activities or thoughts that would provide direct evidence of their precise degree of physical or mental proximity during the periods of interest. In Melville's case this lack has been to some degree compensated by *The Melville Log* (1969), Jay Leyda's day-by-day compilation of documents relating to Melville's life from 1819 through 1891. No comparable resource exists for Douglass's life; however, beginning in December 1847, Douglass did publish intermittent glimpses into selected areas of his personal activities in the editorial correspondence of his

weekly newspaper, the *North Star*, later known as *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.

No surviving, published letter from either man appears to mention the other's name or show an awareness of the other's work. Douglass and his works are absent from the Northwestern-Newberry edition of Melville's *Correspondence* (1993), which provides complete, annotated transcriptions of every known, extant letter (plus entries for every additional letter not currently extant that Melville is known or thought to have written). Sadly, no such edition of Douglass's correspondence yet exists, although the first volume of the *Correspondence* series of his papers (1841–1852) is currently in development. Herman Melville is not among the correspondents currently listed for inclusion in this volume, but without access to the letters themselves there is no way of knowing whether he or his works may be directly or indirectly included.

No book by Douglass or Melville is listed among the contents of the library of the other as currently known. Douglass's writings do not appear in *Melville's Reading* (1988), Merton Sealts's inventory of nearly 600 books known to have been owned or borrowed by Melville. Nor do Melville's writings appear among the two thousand titles in the *Bibliography of the Frederick Douglass Library at Cedar Hill* compiled by William L. Petrie and Douglass E. Stover in 1995. Still, neither compilation provides a full record of the books that either author owned. Many of the books that Douglass acquired in the 1840s and 1850s, when Melville's novels were published, were destroyed by the fire in his Rochester house in 1872 that also consumed his only complete runs of the *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Sealts estimates that about half of Melville's library was disposed of by his widow Elizabeth in a way that has left those lost contents unknown.

Given these gaps and uncertainties in direct evidence from the documented lives of either figure, the words that they published provide the best current evidence of their

mutual awareness. In the case of Douglass, that evidence is relatively sparse but extremely explicit. In 1848 Douglass published an extract on “Tattooing” from Melville’s *Typee* in the *North Star*. In 1851, 1854, and 1856, he printed references to Melville’s *Moby-Dick* in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, which also contained references to installments of Melville’s “Israel Potter” in 1854 and 1855.

In Melville’s fiction, possible references to Douglass are more numerous but less direct. Potential traces of the man and his works are found all the way from *Typee* in 1846 through *Benito Cereno* in 1855. Some of these suggest that Douglass may have had a profound influence on Melville’s artistry and social vision; others may instead be the product of two writers who addressed similar subjects in “neighborly style” within a single community of discourse. The examination of seven Melville novels in relation to Douglass’s life and writings in Chapter 5 is designed to engage the reader’s own intuition and judgment in such matters.

Given the paucity of direct evidence from either author about the degree to which they may have been in personal contact as their professional awareness of each other increased, I began to explore other kinds of primary sources that turned out to be revealing in ways not anticipated. Consulting daily newspapers from Albany to see if Melville was likely to have been aware of the lectures that Douglass gave in June and July 1845, while Melville was writing *Typee* in nearby Lansingburgh, led to the discovery that Douglass, his writings, and his subsequent travels in England were given celebrity status in Thurlow Weed’s Albany *Evening Journal* from June 1845 until July 1846, when Weed was bestowing comparable status on Melville himself as author of *Typee*.

The reception of these two young, talented Americans by the culture at large has turned out to be as interesting as whether they met in person. Culturally influential Americans who were concerned with both Douglass and Melville during their young professional lives

include figures as diverse as Weed in Albany; Charles Briggs, Isaiah Rynders, and James McCune Smith in New York City; and Edmund Quincy, Elizur Wright, and Richard Henry Dana, Jr., in Boston.

Investigating possible interrelations between Douglass and Melville in New York City from 1847 through 1850 has led to broader insights about life there at a time of intense local—as well as national—conflict. Douglass and Melville were each highly praised and reviewed in some of the same papers for similar reasons; they were each active in the same neighborhoods, and responded to some of the same social issues at the same time; and they were each vilified by some of the same newspapers and some of the same social forces, either for very similar or for very different reasons. Whatever personal involvement, if any, they had in each other’s lives, the degree to which they addressed central issues in American life from separate social positions within the same city is itself revealing.

Because some of the peripheral sources consulted in the hope of answering the book’s two primary questions became more central in its findings, this book is as much about American discourse on race and identity in the mid-nineteenth-century as it is about Douglass and Melville themselves. Plot-level curiosity about when the two men might have met and the degree to which they were aware of each other’s work has resulted in a view of American culture, through two complementary lenses, at a crucial time in the nation’s history. Through those lenses can be seen two remarkable young Americans, each fearless in his own way, responding to enduring conditions in our national life.

One of Douglass’s favorite turns of phrase, which also has a place in Melville’s writing, is “from centre to circumference.” That phrase aptly describes the way in which the search for somewhat scarce primary sources has led to a wealth of circumferential findings that point back to primary questions in intriguing ways.

*Highland Heights, Kentucky, March 1, 2005.*

# A DOUGLASS AND MELVILLE CHRONOLOGY

- 1818 Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey born in Talbot County on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, son of Harriet Bailey, a slave, and unknown white father; raised by grandmother Betsey Bailey on Holme Hill farm owned by master Aaron Anthony
- 1819 Herman Melvill born in New York City, the of son Allan and Maria (Gansevoort) Melvill
- 1824 FD taken to live at the Lloyd plantation on the Wye River
- 1825 Harriet Bailey visits FD, dies  
HM enters New York Male High School
- 1826 FD sent to Baltimore, where he lives with Hugh and Sophia Auld
- 1827 FD is taught to read by Sophia Auld until lessons stopped by husband Hugh; he returns to Baltimore after the “division” of the Anthony slaves
- 1828 Allan Melvill borrows against expected inheritance to sustain business ventures
- 1829 FD works at Auld’s shipyard as errand boy, copies the shapes of letters made by carpenters
- 1830 Allan Melvill moves family to Albany after losing business in New York City
- 1831 FD surreptitiously studies the Bible and *The Columbian Orator*
- 1832 Allan Melvill dies; HM removed from Albany Academy to work as clerk in bank; family name changes to Melville
- 1833 FD returns to his master Thomas Auld on the Eastern Shore; begins to organize and teach reading in a Sunday school for blacks
- 1834 FD is hired out for the year to Edward Covey, resists being ‘broken’
- 1835 FD is hired out to William Freeland, again teaches slaves to read on Sundays  
HM clerks at brother Gansevoort’s store and enters Albany Classical Academy
- 1836 FD makes unsuccessful in attempt to escape slavery; returns to Baltimore to learn the caulking trade
- 1837 FD joins the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society debating club  
HM revives the Philo Logos Society debating club in Albany; takes a teaching job in Pittsfield, Massachusetts
- 1838 FD escapes slavery from Baltimore, dressed as a sailor; marries Anna Murray in New York City; establishes home in New Bedford; takes name of Frederick Douglass  
Maria Melville moves with children to Lansingburgh to escape creditors in Albany
- 1839 FD works as a laborer in New Bedford, licensed to preach at Zion Church on Second Street  
HM sails from New York to Liverpool on merchant ship *St. Lawrence*
- 1840 HM teaches in Greenbush, N. Y. without being paid; after a visit to Illinois, arrives in New Bedford in search of work
- 1841 HM sails for the South Seas on whaleship *Acushnet*  
FD speaks before William Lloyd Garrison at Nantucket, hired by Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society
- 1842 FD supports fugitive slave George Latimer against Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw (Melville’s future father-in-law); moves family to Lynn, Massachusetts  
HM deserts the *Acushnet* at Nukuheva Bay; is imprisoned at Tahiti for refusing duty on whaleship *Lucy Ann*
- 1843 FD lectures throughout western states, is beaten by Indiana mob  
HM completes last whaling cruise; sails from Honolulu on U. S. *United States*
- 1844 FD joins Garrison in condemning Constitution and calling for disunion  
HM discharged from *United States* after landing at Boston, returns to Lansingburgh
- 1845 FD publishes *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*; lectures in Albany and Troy as fugitive slave; sails for England on the *Cambria*  
HM writes *Typee* in Lansingburgh, sends manuscript to brother Gansevoort, who sells it to John Murray in London

- 1846 FD continues successful lecture tour throughout Great Britain, where supporters purchase his freedom  
HM publishes *Typee* in London and New York, writes *Omoo*
- 1847 FD returns from England on the *Cambria*, moves to Rochester as editor of the *North Star*  
HM marries Elizabeth Shaw in Boston, they move to New York City with his extended family  
FD and HM praised highly by “B” in same issue of *National Anti-Slavery Standard*
- 1848 FD establishes family in Rochester, publishes “Tattooing” from *Typee* in *The North Star*  
HM writes *Mardi* in New York
- 1849 FD delivers “Slumbering Volcano” speech at Shiloh Presbyterian Church and publishes “Colorphobia in New York!”  
HM writes *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* and sails for England
- 1850 FD confronts Isaiah Rynders at Broadway Tabernacle, is targeted by mob at New York Society Library, is attacked when walking near the Battery with Julia and Elizabeth Griffiths  
HM returns from England, begins *Moby-Dick*, moves family to Pittsfield, MA
- 1851 FD breaks with Garrison over anti-slavery strategy, begins *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* with support from Gerrit Smith  
HM completes and publishes *Moby-Dick*
- 1852 FD delivers “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” in Rochester  
HM publishes *Pierre*; Austin Bearnse launches yacht *Moby Dick* in Boston harbor
- 1853 FD publishes *The Heroic Slave*  
HM fails to get consular appointment in Pierce administration, publishes “Bartleby, the Scrivener” in *Putnam’s Monthly* magazine
- 1854 FD addresses “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered” in Ohio  
HM begins serial publication of *Israel Potter* in *Putnam’s*; *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* prints story “Moby Dick Captured” and praises installment of “Israel Potter”
- 1855 FD publishes *My Bondage and My Freedom* with introduction by James McCune Smith  
HM publishes *Benito Cereno* in three installments in *Putnam’s*  
November *Putnam’s* includes highly appreciative review of *My Bondage and My Freedom*
- 1856 James McCune Smith cites *Moby-Dick* in discussion of presidential election in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*  
*Benito Cereno* appears in book form in *The Piazza Tales*; HM sails on Mediterranean voyage financed by Chief Justice Shaw
- 1857 FD publishes speeches on the Dred Scott decision and West Indian Emancipation  
HM publishes *The Confidence Man*, returns from Europe, lectures on “The Statues in Rome”
- 1858 FD begins to publish *Douglass’ Monthly* as a supplement to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*  
Melville continues lecturing in northeastern and midwestern states
- 1859 FD begins giving lecture on “Self-Made Men,” advises John Brown against Harper’s Ferry raid, sails to England to avoid arrest after Brown captured  
HM lectures on “The South Seas” and “Traveling” but gets fewer and fewer engagements
- 1860 FD returns from England, supports Lincoln’s nomination by Republican Party, and Gerrit Smith’s by Radical Abolition Party  
HM sails for San Francisco, returns to New York, where publishers have rejected his first book of poetry
- 1861 FD welcomes outbreak of Civil War, calling for the arming of slaves and free blacks  
HM fails in attempt for consular appointment; father-in-law Lemuel Shaw dies in Boston
- 1862 FD alternately praises and condemns policies of Abraham Lincoln  
HM suffers from rheumatism, is seriously injured in road accident
- 1863 FD welcomes Emancipation Proclamation, writes “Men of Color to Arms!”; becomes recruiting agent for 54th Massachusetts Infantry regiment, in which sons Charles and Lewis enlist  
HM moves family from Pittsfield to 104 East 26th Street in New York City
- 1864 FD works for Lincoln’s reelection and meets with the President  
HM visits the camp of the Union army in Vienna, Virginia
- 1865 FD attends President Lincoln’s second inauguration and White House reception  
HM is sworn in as Inspector of Customs at the Port of New York

- 1866 FD attacks Reconstruction policies of President Andrew Johnson and begins career as a lyceum lecturer  
HM publishes *Battle-Pieces*, a book of poems in response to the Civil War
- 1867 FD declines offer from Johnson administration to become commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau  
HM finds son Malcolm dead of self-inflicted gunshot
- 1868 FD is criticized by Women's Rights advocates for giving higher priority to black suffrage  
HM is invited by editor Charles Briggs to contribute to new *Putnam's Magazine*
- 1869 FD is active in meetings of the National Convention of Colored Citizens and the American Equal Rights Association  
HM has a Rembrandt mezzotint framed in New York
- 1870 FD moves to Washington, D. C., to become editor of the *New National Era*  
HM sits for portrait by J. O. Eaton in New York City
- 1871 FD is appointed by President Ulysses Grant to commission considering the annexation of the Dominican Republic  
HM acquires books on poetry, landscape, art, and engraving
- 1872 FD endorses President Grant's reelection and loses important archival materials when house in Rochester burns  
HM's brother Allan dies
- 1874 FD named president of Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company, which fails; loses personal investment when the *New National Era* ceases publication
- 1876 FD delivers address at dedication of Freedman's Monument to Lincoln in Washington, D. C.  
HM publishes *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage of the Holy Land*
- 1877 FD appointed U. S. Marshal for District of Columbia by President Rutherford B. Hayes  
HM sends brother-in-law his poem "The Age of the Antonines"
- 1878 FD moves to Cedar Hill estate in Anacostia, District of Columbia
- 1879 FD criticized for not supporting migration of Exodusters to Kansas from the South  
HM's *Typee* published in Swedish in Stockholm
- 1881 FD appointed Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia by President James A. Garfield, publishes *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*
- 1882 FD's wife Anna Murray Douglass dies  
HM's first grandchild, Eleanor Melville Thomas, is born
- 1884 FD marries Helen Pitts and is criticized for interracial marriage  
Elizabeth Shaw Melville receives legacy from which she gives HM \$25 a month to spend on books and prints
- 1885 HM resigns post as Inspector of Customs in New York
- 1886 FD resigns office of Recorder of Deeds and leaves on tour of Europe with his wife Helen  
HM's son Stanwix dies in San Francisco
- 1887 FD and Helen travel in Europe and Egypt
- 1888 FD campaigns for Republican presidential nominee Benjamin Harrison  
HM sails to Bermuda, publishes *John Marr and Other Sailors*
- 1889 FD is appointed Minister and Consul General to Haiti by President Harrison  
HM acquires new membership in New York Society Library
- 1891 FD resigns as Minister to Haiti  
HM completes work on *Billy Budd*, publishes *Timoleon*, dies in New York City, and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery
- 1892 FD publishes expanded edition of *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*; writes "Lynch Law in the South" for *North American Review*
- 1893 FD writes introduction to *The Reason Why the Colored American is Not in the World Columbian Exposition*
- 1894 FD publishes *The Lesson of the Hour*, a denunciation of lynching; delivers an address in New Bedford, Massachusetts
- 1895 FD dies at Cedar Hill after addressing the National Council of Women and is buried in Rochester's Mount Hope Cemetery

*A whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.*

– Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 1851

*The ship-yard was . . . our school-house.*

– Douglass, *New National Era*, 1871

*The slaveholders are sleeping on slumbering  
volcanoes, if they did but know it.*

– Douglass, “*The Slumbering Volcano*,” 1849

*Might not the San Dominick, like a slumbering  
volcano, suddenly let loose energies now hid?*

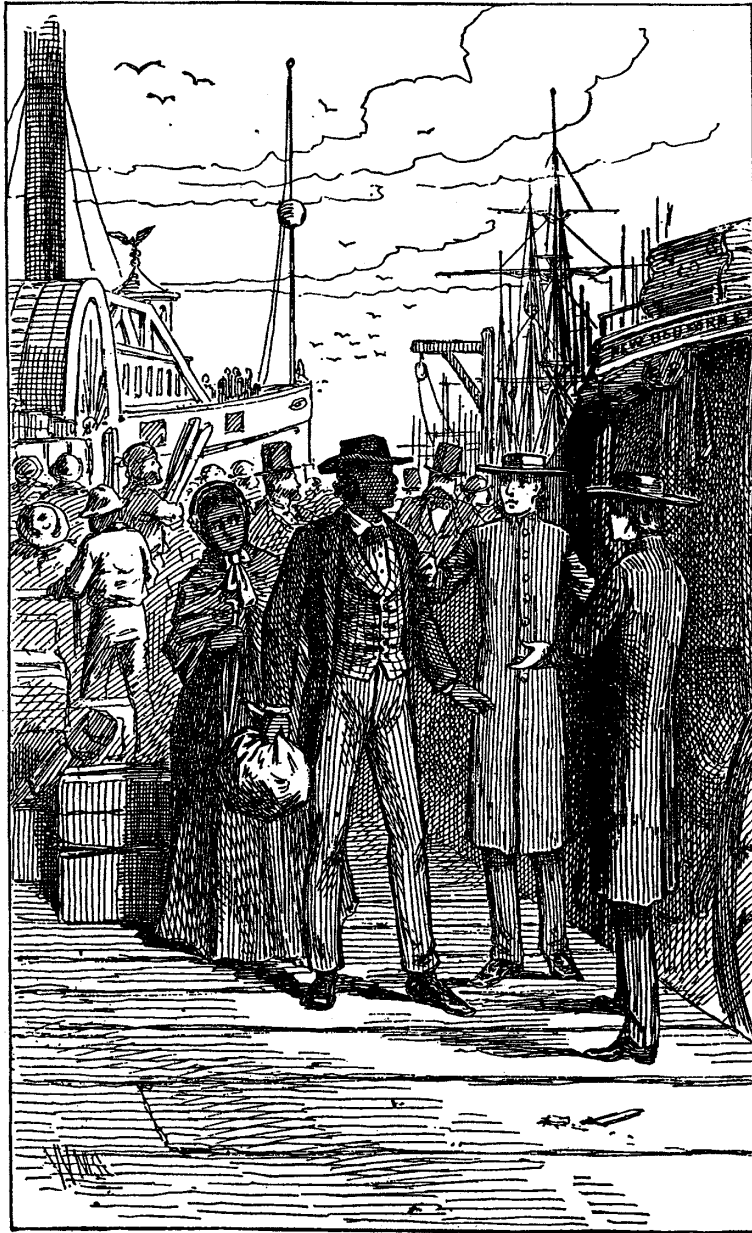
– Melville, *Benito Cereno*, 1855

*The fiend-like skill we display in the invention of all manner of death-  
dealing engines, the vindictiveness with which we carry  
on our wars, and the misery and desolation that follow in their  
train, are enough of themselves to distinguish the white civilized  
man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth.*

– Melville, *Typee*, 1846

*Go where you may, search where you will, roam through all the  
monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South  
America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the  
last, lay your facts by the side of the every day practices of this  
nation, and you will say with me, that, for revolting barbarity and  
shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.*

– Douglass, “*What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*” 1852



AT THE WHARF IN NEWPORT.

*Frederick Douglass and his bride Anna Murray being invited to ride in a New Bedford-bound stagecoach. From Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, 1881. New Bedford Historical Society.*

## BRINGING DOUGLASS AND MELVILLE TOGETHER

**F**rederick Douglass (1818–1895) and Herman Melville (1819–1891) were exact contemporaries. They were great nineteenth-century Americans of equal magnitude who addressed issues of identity, race, freedom, and nationhood in ways that are increasingly compelling in the early twenty-first century. Yet their lives and legacies still tend to be seen separately rather than together. This study shows the value of seeing their lives and achievements in relation to each other—during their own lifetimes as well as our own.

Humans can come together in both body and mind. Douglass and Melville moved in physical proximity between 1840 and 1850 and in mutual awareness between 1847 and 1855. Following these two young Americans during the middle of the nineteenth century provides a better sense of the nation's shared heritage—and squandered legacy—in the early twenty-first century.

The two men first came into physical proximity in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in December 1840. Douglass, twenty-two years old and still a fugitive from slavery, had been working along the wharves of the city for two years. Melville, twenty-one years old and unemployed, came to find a job on a whaleship. From January 3, 1841, when Melville sailed from New Bedford for the South Seas, the two men's lives diverged and converged in significant ways for fifteen years. During the last four decades of each man's life, Melville dropped increasingly into cultural obscurity as Douglass remained a prominent national figure.

The posthumous reputations of Douglass and Melville followed different trajectories during the twentieth century. Melville was the first to emerge from cultural obscurity in the 1920s, but, even after Douglass followed him in the second half of the century, the two men's professional resurrections have tended to be celebrated by separate congregations. During the 1990s Douglass and Melville began to appear together in important critical studies. By 2005 they had become the joint subjects of an international conference.

A quick overview of the two men's lives and afterlives in this introduction will set the stage for a more detailed exploration of their physical proximity and mutual awareness between 1840 and 1855.

## Converging and Diverging Lives (1818–1895)

The young men whose lives converged in New Bedford in 1840 came from worlds apart. Frederick Douglass was a fugitive from slavery in Maryland. He had barely known his mother, Harriet Bailey, he never knew which white man had fathered him, and he never knew the year or day on which he was born. Enslaved to a series of masters who intended to subdue his body and mind to perpetual servitude, he taught himself to read, think, and act in self-defense and self-assertion. On an August day in 1834, inspired by the white sails of ships gliding by on Chesapeake Bay, he defended himself by fighting back against Edward Covey, the farmer to whom he was hired out, in “the turning-point in my career as a slave.”

On September 3, 1838, Douglass committed the ultimate act of self-actualization by escaping to the North. After traveling to New York by train and boat, and by boat to Rhode Island, he rode a stage into New Bedford. He was accompanied by his wife, Anna Murray, whom he had married in New York according to the plan they had devised in Baltimore. Nathan and Polly Johnson invited the newlyweds into their New Bedford home, where Frederick Bailey took on the name Douglass at Nathan Johnson’s suggestion.

Whereas young Douglass came to New Bedford to escape a life of enslavement, young Melville was seeking freedom from economic impoverishment and societal expectations. Herman Melvill (the “e” was added later) was born into a prosperous family in New York City on August 1, 1819. His father, Allan Melvill, was the son of Major Thomas Melvill of Boston, a Revolutionary War hero known for his exploits in the Tea Party of 1773. His mother, Maria Gansevoort, was the daughter of General Peter Gansevoort of Albany, known as a hero for his defense of Fort Stanwix in 1777.

Melville’s prosperous childhood ended with his father’s bankruptcy in 1830 and death in 1832. Pulled out of school to help support the family at the age of twelve, he eventually became a sailor because he had no financial prospects. In 1839 he sailed from New York to Liverpool and back on a merchant ship. By December 1840 he had decided to sail from New Bedford as a whaler. That decision was ultimately as liberating as the one that Douglass made to flee to that city, but Melville could hardly have seen it as such at the time.

For each young man New Bedford offered a window into the future as well as an escape from the past. Each saw a vision of economic opportunity and human community such as he had never known. Douglass had worked as a caulker in Baltimore, but there he was enslaved to Hugh Auld, who received his wages. In New Bedford he was paid for his labor. He lived among free blacks and fugitive slaves in an anti-slavery city in which William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* “took its place with me next to the bible.”

On the whaleship Melville not only got a personal reprieve from the economic despair that had gripped his family since the death of his father in 1832, he shipped out with a multicultural and multinational crew whose human diversity had much to do with his declaration in *Moby-Dick* that “a whale-ship was my Yale College and my Harvard.” Douglass was similarly indebted to the ship-yards of Baltimore in which he had learned the caulking trade. “The ship-yard . . . was our school-house,” he wrote in 1871, after returning to the wharves of his youth.

Douglass lived in New Bedford for four years, from 1838 to 1842, whereas Melville was there for less than two weeks in 1840 and 1841. Yet the city was to remain a touchstone for each man in later life. In July 1851 Douglass reverted to memories of New Bedford when

his Rochester newspaper was under savage attack by his former Garrisonian friends. He reassured his readers that “he who . . . has caulked ships in the shipyards of Baltimore . . . [and] who has rolled oil casks, stowed ships, sawed wood, swept chimneys, and labored at the bellows in New Bedford for a living, until he has hands like horns, has . . . no dread of returning to manual labor” should his newspaper career be destroyed.

Melville in 1851 was recalling the New Bedford waterfront in the manuscript of *Moby-Dick*, published in October of that year. From Ishmael’s arrival in New Bedford in Chapter 2 (“The Carpet-Bag”) until his departure in Chapter 13 (“Wheelbarrow”), Melville brilliantly recreates the city he had visited ten years earlier.

In 1851 each young man was already a figure of national importance. Douglass,

who had been “discovered” by William Lloyd Garrison on Nantucket in 1841, became a national figure with the publication of the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* in May 1845. After two dangerous months in which he lectured in New York and Massachusetts as a self-identified fugitive slave who had named his master in the South, he sailed to Great Britain in August for an extremely successful lecture tour from which he returned in 1847. By the end of that year, he had moved from Lynn, Massachusetts, to Rochester, New York, where he began his *North Star* newspaper in December.

From 1847 until 1851, when he changed the name of his newspaper to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Douglass was an ardent and articulate abolitionist as an orator, author, and editor. Some of his most visible and volatile lectures during this period were at the annual

*New Bedford dock workers maneuver casks of whale oil on the waterfront, circa 1910. SpinnerCollection.*

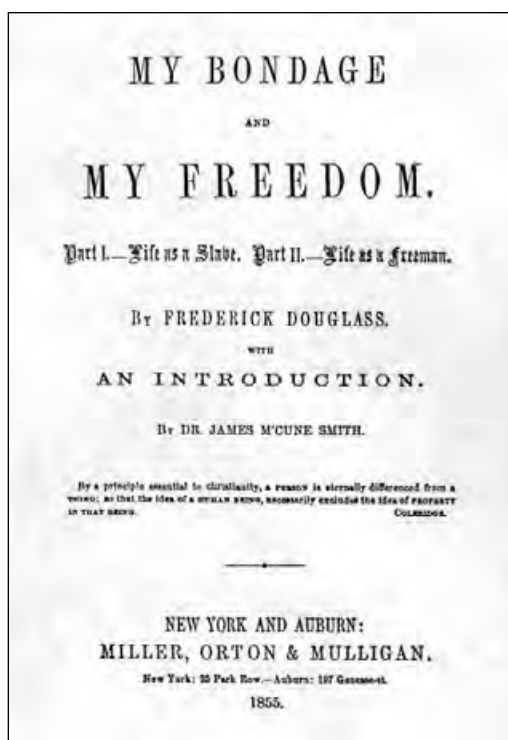


meetings of the American Anti-Slavery Society at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City in May 1847, 1848, 1849, and 1850. He gave each of these talks in close physical and intellectual proximity to Herman Melville.

Melville deserted the whaleship *Acushnet* in Nukuheva Bay in July 1842. After landing in Boston as a sailor on the U. S. frigate *United States* in October 1844, he rejoined his mother and siblings in Lansingburgh, New York. There he was already writing his first novel, *Typee*, when the celebrated fugitive author Frederick Douglass was lecturing in nearby Albany and Troy in June and July 1845. Melville himself became a literary celebrity upon the publication of *Typee* in 1846. This book was followed by *Omoo* in 1847, *Mardi* and *Redburn* in 1849, *White-Jacket* in 1850, and *Moby-Dick* in 1851.

Melville had moved from Lansingburgh to New York City in September 1847 after marrying Elizabeth Shaw of Boston. He was therefore writing *Mardi*, *Redburn*, *White-Jacket*, and *Moby-Dick* in New York during Douglass's increasingly volatile visits there in May 1848, 1849, and 1850. A major surprise in writing this book has been to discover the degree to which Melville and Douglass were aware of each other during this crucial period in their young professional lives. Douglass's highly contested presence in New York City in May 1850 was to leave traces in both *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*.

Douglass was thirty-three years old in 1851 when he broke with Garrison, changed the name of the *North Star* to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and told his readers he would gladly go back to the wharves of New Bedford if his enemies managed to destroy his paper. He remained extremely productive and effective during the next five years. In addition to editing his newspaper, he delivered his lecture "What to the Slave is the Fourth of



Title page, first edition. *New Bedford Historical Society.*

July?" in 1852, published the *The Heroic Slave* in 1853, delivered "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered" in 1854, and published *My Bondage and My Freedom*, his second autobiography, in 1855.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass thoroughly revised the 1845 *Narrative* while also depicting his subsequent ten years in the North. The new autobiography sold more than four thousand copies in its first year, received favorable reviews, and increased Douglass's stature as a leading abolitionist and a representative American. The image of Douglass reproduced as the frontispiece of the book enhanced his status as a commanding public figure.

Melville's productivity remained strong after *Moby-Dick*, but his reputation and visibility fell into sudden decline. The great whaling novel received at least mixed reviews, but *Pierre*, published in 1852, was an out-and-out failure, both critically and financially.

## BENITO CERENO.

IN the year 1799, Captain Amasa Delano, of Duxbury, in Massachusetts, commanding a large sealer and general trader, lay at anchor, with a valuable cargo, in the harbor of St. Maria—a small, desert, uninhabited island toward the southern extremity of the long coast of Chili. There he had touched for water.

On the second day, not long after dawn, while lying in his berth, his mate came below, informing him that a strange sail was coming into the bay. Ships were then not so plenty in those waters as now. He rose, dressed, and went on deck.

loneliness of the spot, and the sort of stories, at that day, associated with those seas, Captain Delano's surprise might have deepened into some uneasiness had he not been a person of a singularly undistrustful good nature, not liable, except on extraordinary and repeated excitement, and hardly then, to indulge in personal alarms, any way involving the imputation of malign evil in man. Whether, in view of what humanity is capable, such a trait implies, along with a benevolent heart, more than ordinary quickness and accuracy of intellectual perception, may be left to the wise to determine.

"Benito Cereno" in Putnam's Monthly magazine, October 1855.

With a growing family to feed, Melville began writing stories for magazines, which paid by the page. This generated a steadier, but much smaller income, than he had once hoped to produce with his novels.

The stories that Melville published in *Harper's* and *Putnam's* between 1853 and 1856 include such now-classic texts as "Bartleby, the Scrivener," "The Tartarus of Maids," and the serialization of *Benito Cereno*. However, some of his readers would not have known he was the author because his contributions to both magazines were published anonymously. Nor would most readers of *Putnam's* have known Melville visually. In May 1854 he refused to submit an image of himself to be engraved for the magazine's "series of portraits." In 1851 he had refused a similar request from *Holden's Magazine*, declaring, "I respectfully decline being *oblivionated* by a Daguerretype (what a delv of an unspellable word!)"

Although the public profiles of Douglass and Melville were diverging sharply in 1855, the insights they were offering to their read-

ers were surprisingly similar. *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Benito Cereno* express each artist's most cogent critique of racism in the North and enslavement in the South. Douglass offers his critique in his own authorial voice—factually precise, imaginatively generous, intellectually fearless, and rhetorically bold. In addition to expanding and deepening the earlier account of his "bondage" in the South, Douglass now provides an ironic and sometimes shocking account of his "freedom" in the North. He reveals the extent to which some of the abolitionists who had seemingly encouraged him were in fact attempting to suppress his thought and speech. Only after being treated with true equality in Great Britain does he now feel the full force of the racism that pervaded Massachusetts, where he was routinely told, "*We don't allow niggers in here!*"

Whereas the bondage and the freedom in Douglass's text are relatively explicit and overt, Melville offers his critique through crafty impersonation and ironic indirection. He adapts the story line and the authorial

voice of an episode in Captain Amasa Delano's 1817 *Narrative of Voyages and Travels* to reveal unconscious racism and moral obtuseness from the inside out. An imaginative and empathetic reader must read against the grain of the story to see Babo, the African slave, as its hero. Babo has led a successful mutiny that he hides from the oblivious Delano by wearing the mask of the humble servant. Through that mask he choreographs the charade by which the ship and its living cargo appear to be under the control of Benito Cereno, the Spanish captain, who himself endures a physical and spiritual torture to which Delano remains oblivious. In Melville's text the deeper realities of bondage and freedom remain implicit and covert until the dramatic moment in which the mask is ripped off, a moment in which "past, present, and future seemed one."

Douglass, after the success of *My Bondage and My Freedom*, continued as a leading abolitionist editor and orator in advance of the Civil War. During the war, he advised President Lincoln on the Emancipation Proclamation and recruited black troops for the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. From the end of the war until his death thirty years later, he remained in the public eye as editor, orator, and author and was appointed by Presidents Grant, Hayes, Garfield, and Harrison to a succession of federal positions. Douglass moved from Rochester to Washington in 1870 and established his home at Cedar Hill in 1878. His death there in 1895 was a national event, as was his subsequent burial at Mount Hope Cemetery in Rochester.

By the time *Benito Cereno* was reprinted as part of his *Piazza Tales* in 1856, Melville had exhausted his audience and himself as a fiction writer. After publishing nine books of fiction in ten years, he took a nine-month voyage to the Mediterranean and the Near East for rest and recuperation. Although he tried for three

years to earn a living as a lecturer after his return to the United States, he was essentially unemployed during the early years of the Civil War. In 1863 he moved his family from Pittsfield, Massachusetts, back to New York City, where he was hired as a customs inspector in 1865. After publishing *Battle-Pieces*, a book of Civil War poetry, in 1866, Melville worked in cultural obscurity in the customs house until his retirement in 1885.

During the six years remaining before his death in 1891, Melville enjoyed the private pleasures of writing poetry, composing the unpublished manuscript of "Billy Budd," and building an art collection of more than four hundred prints and engravings. At his death in 1891, one New York newspaper was surprised he had still been alive. The tombstone he chose for his grave in New York's Woodlawn Cemetery features a scroll whose surface is blank.

### **Diverging and Converging Afterlives (1895–2005)**

The afterlife of a writer, when it occurs, is a somewhat miraculous phenomenon. Words on a page that may have been unread for decades while the author was alive suddenly begin to speak to a new generation or even a new century. Later generations find the words of a writer long dead more valuable than did the living writer's own contemporaries. This has certainly been the case with Melville. A revival of interest in his work in the early twentieth century reached a strong crest in mid-century from which it has only continued to rise at the beginning of the twenty-first.

Douglass was more important to his own contemporaries for a much longer time than was Melville. Even so, the renewed interest in his life and work that has intensified during the last quarter-century is giving him an afterlife that is beginning to rival the life he lived. When my students are reading and discussing Douglass and Melville during an entire semes-



*Ambrotype of Herman Melville, 1860.*  
Berkshire Athenaeum.



*Ambrotype of Frederick Douglass, 1856.*  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

ter at Northern Kentucky University, these two long-dead men are as alive to their hearts and minds as are many of the people they know in their everyday lives. Their separate value to readers today is more than doubled when they are considered in relation to each other.

After being essentially lost to American culture since the mid-1850s, Melville's works enjoyed their first signs of revival in the 1920s when *Billy Budd* was published posthumously, when the Constable edition of his works was published, when Howard Mumford published a popular biography, and when Rockwell Kent drew the illustrations that were published in his celebrated edition of *Moby-Dick* in 1930. By the 1940s F. O. Matthiessen had positioned Melville at the heart of the *American Renaissance* a century earlier, the ambitious Hendricks House edition of Melville's works was under way, and Jackson Pollock was painting such Melville-inspired works as *Pasiphaë* and (*Blue (Moby-Dick)*).

By the time I reached graduate school at Columbia University in 1966, Melville had

become one of *Eight American Authors* in the leading reference book in the field (none of the eight were female or African-American). Unfortunately, Frederick Douglass made no appearance in my graduate studies in American Literature at Columbia University from 1966 to 1972.

Douglass's popularity as an author had begun to decline immediately before his death, as shown by the extremely small sales of the expanded edition of his *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* published in 1892. As the Melville revival was building up steam in the first half of the twentieth century, Douglass's life and writing were slipping into relative obscurity (at least within those academic circles whose pronouncements are often taken as a guide to a writer's worth to the larger culture).

A key development in the rehabilitation of Douglass's academic reputation was the publication of four volumes of Philip S. Foner's *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* between 1950 and 1955. In 1968 *My Bondage*

*and My Freedom* returned to print after being out of circulation for nearly a century. Then, with the publication of the first volume of *The Frederick Douglass Papers* edited by John W. Blassingame (*Speeches, Debates, Interviews, 1841–46*) in 1979, Douglass finally began to be treated as an essential American figure by the academy.

Starting in the mid-1960s, Douglass and Melville have each become increasingly important to America's cultural legacy and national future. As the Civil Rights and Black Power movements moved from public life through the universities and into the schools, Douglass again became a necessary figure in our understanding of African American life, writing, and history. His speeches, essays, and autobiographies are regaining the kind of wide circulation they enjoyed in his lifetime.

Melville's canonical status continued to expand during the same four decades. Not only *Moby-Dick* but many of his novels, short stories, and poems are now appreciated for their multicultural and postcolonial insights. Melville is valued for addressing many of the same contemporary issues that have brought new attention to the writings of Douglass. The evolution in our culture's understanding of each of these authors can be seen in the growing appreciation being shown for both *Benito Cereno* and *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

*Benito Cereno* received very little commentary in Melville's lifetime. Its complex ironies were relatively slow to be appreciated during the Melville revival in the twentieth century. Not until the 1980s did Carolyn Karcher (1980) and Sterling Stuckey (1982) begin to elevate *Benito Cereno* to a major place among Melville's writings. William L. Andrews was the first Douglass scholar to make a similar case for *My Bondage and My Freedom*, arguing in 1987 that this autobiography was fully equal to the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*.

In 1993 Eric J. Sundquist became the first scholar to place both *My Bondage and My Freedom* and *Benito Cereno* at the very center of an understanding of nineteenth-century American literature and culture. In *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*, he argued that these two 1855 books are pivotal in our understanding of race relations in the North as well as the South (and in the late twentieth century as well as the mid-nineteenth).

Although Douglass and Melville have now regained much of the national importance they each had during the one decade of joint popularity in their lifetimes, their comparable achievements still tend to be seen separately rather than together. Melville is often treated as a "white" American figure and Douglass as a "black" African American figure—even though the life and writings of each man take us beyond the color line in ways the culture needs to appreciate and understand. Academic disciplines tend to confine Melville to the literary curriculum, whereas Douglass can be found in history and political science as well as literature. Yet the works of both men cross disciplinary boundaries with a holistic vision now needed in American life more than ever.

The words that Douglass and Melville wrote and spoke still provide powerful insight into the issues of race, slavery, and freedom in the nineteenth century. Sundquist rightly declared, without having space to elaborate, that "Melville, along with Douglass, is probably the foremost analyst of American slavery in the nineteenth century—and not simply from a 'white' perspective." The primary goal of this book is to see what the words of these two men have to say to each other and to society—in their own time as well as the present. To know them both is to know oneself—past, present, and future.

## “Anchored together in neighborly style”

The November 1855 installment of *Benito Cereno* in *Putnam’s Monthly* magazine ends with the “two vessels” of the story “anchored together . . . in neighborly style.” Melville’s phrasing suggests both proximity and a degree of separation. The relative disposition of his two vessels resembles the relation between Douglass and Melville to be revealed in this book.

Active, seaworthy vessels tend to be “anchored together” only occasionally and temporarily. Douglass’s and Melville’s young, buoyant lives brought them into proximity in New Bedford in 1840, in Albany in 1845, and in New York City in 1847, 1848, 1849, and 1850. Although their two lives were closer in these times and places than one might have previously thought, they were also separate enough that no evidence of their having met on any of these occasions has as yet surfaced.

A “neighborly style” between two vessels suggests proximity with a difference. Neighbors are physically close to each other but occupy their own spaces. Neighborly styles are compatible but not identical. So it is with Douglass’s and Melville’s styles during the period examined here. These gifted

young men expressed their shared American experience in compatible verbal styles from neighboring social spaces. They did so in conscious awareness of each other as the one wrote fiction and the other gave speeches, wrote essays, and edited newspapers.

Douglass was a committed abolitionist orator and editor who addressed pressing national concerns week after week in no uncertain terms. Melville was a writer of fiction who addressed similar concerns year after year in novels that were often sympathetic to abolition but seldom explicitly so. Together, their lives and writings express a search for a national consensus about the necessity of human equality.

Part I of this book examines the proximity of Douglass and Melville in New Bedford, Albany, and New York City in the 1840s. Part II explores the “neighborly style” in which the writings of both men addressed similar subjects between 1845 and 1855, sometimes in conscious awareness of each other, sometimes with coincidentally powerful mutual force. The Epilogue looks beyond the lives of Douglass and Melville in the nineteenth century to consider their mutual importance for American life today.

*Wall mural in downtown New Bedford celebrates the city’s labor history. Painted by Dan Devenny and commissioned by the Labor Education Center at UMass Dartmouth in 2001, the full mural measures about 45 feet in length. SpinnerCollection.*



PART I

**DID DOUGLASS AND MELVILLE  
MEET IN PERSON?**



*Winter on Seventh Street in New Bedford, circa 1880, showing the Nathan and Polly Johnson house (far right) in which Frederick and Anna Douglass first found refuge in 1838. Kingman Family Collection.*

The writing of this book began with no expectation that Douglass and Melville had ever met in person or been particularly conscious of each other's work. However, it soon became clear that their individual lives did converge in time and space as well as heart and mind.

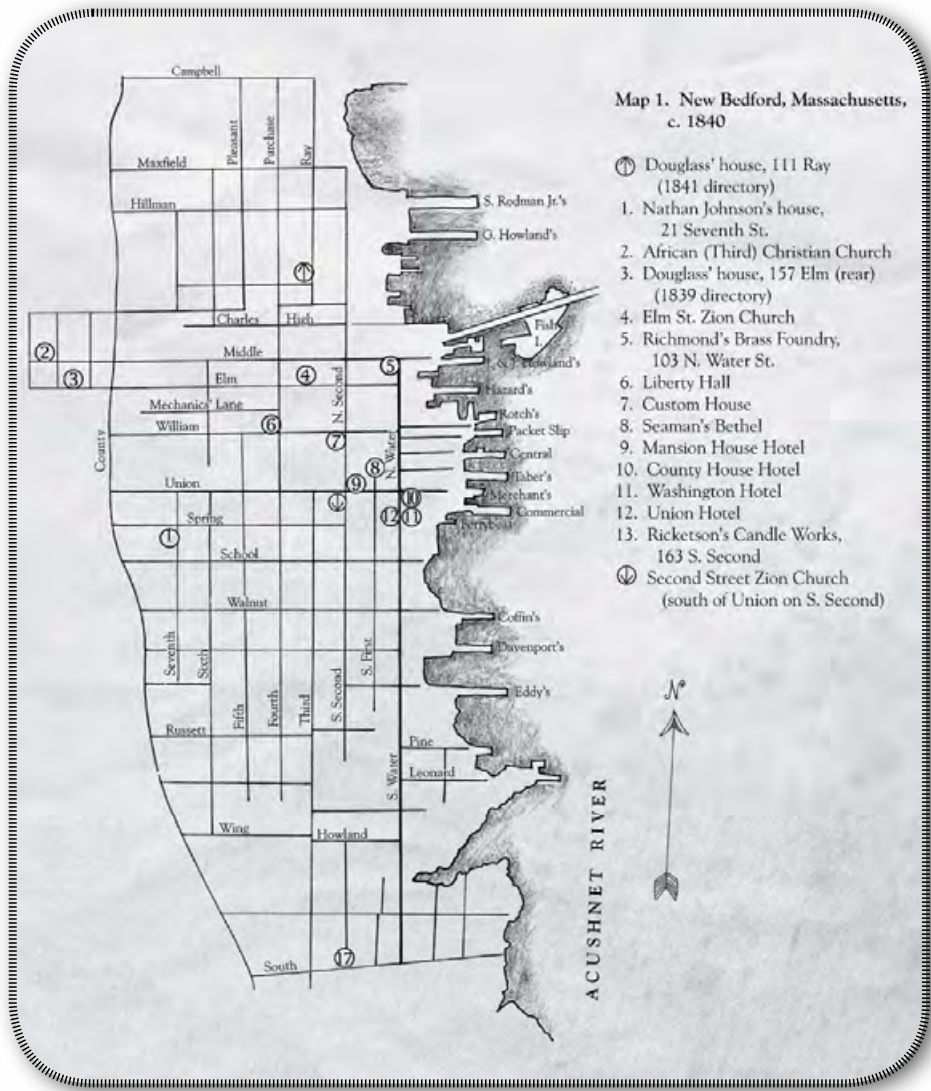
In Part I Douglass and Melville move through three American cities in which they might have met. Although current evidence does not document any actual meeting in New Bedford in 1840, Albany in 1845, or New York in the later 1840s, the possibilities for such a meeting increased as the two men's mutual awareness—and cultural importance—grew.

Part II follows the two men's hearts and minds through their spoken and written words. Successive chapters examine the presence of Melville in Douglass's publications, and traces of Douglass in those of Melville, during a period in which each writer was addressing American issues of race and identity in different genres.

The motions through space and time in Part I are not entirely separable from those of heart and mind in Part II. Such motions were related in Douglass's and Melville's lives, as they are in any life, so the story will unfold in a way that does justice to the interrelatedness of its two-part structure.

Because this study explores a multiplicity of connections of varying degrees of certainty, Melville's discourse on "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish" in *Moby-Dick* offers a helpful point of reference. A "loose fish" in the whaling industry is a whale that is swimming free. A whale is "technically fast...when it is connected with an occupied ship or boat, by any medium at all controllable by the occupant or occupants." As for the kind of medium, "a mast, an oar, a nine-inch cable, a telegraph wire, or a strand of cobweb, it is all the same."

The medium for connections between Douglass and Melville is consciousness. It begins with whatever consciousness either man had of the other, extends to that of contemporaries who were conscious of them both, embraces each man's conscious response to the challenges of American life, and culminates in a contemporary consciousness of their joint value to society today. Connections in each of these categories range from Melville's "strand of cobweb" back to the mast.



Map of New Bedford, Massachusetts, circa 1840. Drawing by Kathleen Piercefield.

## IN THE WHALING CITY

New Bedford, December 1840 – January 1841

Herman Melville had arrived in New Bedford by Christmas Day, 1840. That was the day he signed up for a voyage on the whaleship *Acushnet*, berthed at Old South Wharf across the river in Fairhaven. On December 26 he signed his Seaman's Protection Paper at the Custom House in New Bedford, and four days later his name appeared on the *Acushnet's* multi-ethnic crew list along with twenty-four shipmates. He is one of eleven whose complexion is listed as "dark"; two are "black," one "mulatto," and eleven "light." On January 3 Melville sailed out of New Bedford Harbor and into the Atlantic Ocean.

During the nine days and nights between the signing and the sailing, Melville had plenty of time to explore the city that Ishmael was to depict in *Moby-Dick*. This was the same city in which Frederick Douglass had been living and working since his arrival on September 17, 1838. At first Douglass and his wife Anna lived with Nathan and Polly Johnson at 21 Seventh Street. By the time their daughter Rosetta was born in June 1839, they were living at the rear of 157 Elm Street, west of County Street. In the City Directory for 1841, they are listed at 111 Ray Street.

Much of Douglass's work during these years was along the wharves that lined the Acushnet River. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he recalled that he "rolled oil casks on the wharves—helped to load and unload vessels—worked in Ricketson's candleworks—in Richmond's brass foundry, and elsewhere." During 1839, at George Howland's Wharf at the upper end of North Water Street, Douglass helped prepare two whaling vessels, the *Java* and *Golconda*, for voyages. At Richmond's brass foundry, also on North Water Street, he worked the bellows. Having "little time for mental improvement," he later recalled, "I often nailed a newspaper to the post near my bellows, and read while I was performing the up and down motion of the heavy beam by which the bellows was inflated and discharged." Ricketson's candleworks was at the other end of the waterfront, on the corner of South and South Second, where Douglass's main job was to move large oil casks from one place to another.

William McFeely, in his 1991 biography of Douglass, speculates that Douglass might have met Melville in the week before Melville sailed.

*It is intriguing to imagine the meeting that could so easily have taken place with that other prowler of New Bedford, Herman Melville. The novelist came to know the streets and wharves that he evoked so splendidly in the opening pages of Moby-Dick in the same months that Douglass was walking them. . . . It is pure*

*conjecture, but not implausible, to imagine two of the nineteenth-century's most striking men catching sight of each other one clear day in New Bedford.*

This could have happened anywhere along Water Street, from the wharves that Melville would have been exploring as he waited to sail, to the shops that clustered at the intersection with Union.

Soon after Melville's arrival a dramatic event captured the attention of both towns-

*View of New Bedford from Mill and Summer streets, looking east, circa 1868. Douglass's Ray Street (now Acushnet Avenue) residence in 1841 was near lower Mill Street, just beyond the left edge of this view. The Old South Wharf that Melville sailed from in January 1841 is directly across the harbor in Fairhaven. Spinner Collection.*



people and visitors. On December 26 the whaleship *Charles* arrived in the harbor from a three-year voyage to the South Seas but could not dock, because of heavy cargo, at Rodman's Wharf, immediately north of George Howland's Wharf. Her owner, Samuel Rodman, recorded in his diary that "she lacked one large whale of being full," and therefore had to be lightened of her oil before she could ride high enough to reach the wharf. The ship's navigational problems were further complicated by ice on the river and work on a nearby bridge. On December 28 Rodman was

still "occupied in clearing the dock of ice and the wharf of snow to admit the *Charles* when lightened so she could pass . . . the obstruction made to navigation by the bridge company."

Was Douglass among the local laborers employed to lighten the ship of oil by moving loaded casks out of the hold and conveying them to shore? Did he help in clearing the dock and the wharf of ice and snow? Or was he among the watergazers who from time to time would have been monitoring this nautical drama from the shore—as one can easily imagine Melville doing?



Whether Douglass and Melville saw each other along the streets and wharves of New Bedford in the closing days of 1840, they were to recall those environs in similar ways ten years later. To Douglass's 1851 Rochester recollection of having "rolled oil casks, stowed ships, sawed wood, swept chimneys, and labored at the bellows in New Bedford," compare Ishmael's view of the city as he and Queequeg sail for Nantucket in the "Wheelbarrow" chapter of *Moby-Dick*: "Huge hills and mountains of casks on casks were piled upon her wharves, and side by side the world-wandering whale ships lay silent and safely moored at last; while from others came a sound of carpenters and coopers, with blended noises of fires and forges to melt the pitch, all betokening that new cruises were on the start." Ishmael's "mountains of casks" compare with those that Douglass rolled. His "moored ships" compare with those

that Douglass stowed, and his "fires and forges" compare with Douglass's labor at the bellows. Ishmael's phrase about "the world-wandering whale ships . . . safely moored at last" probably refers to the three-day drama of getting the *Charles* to the wharf. Melville evokes the wharves on which Douglass worked whether or not he saw him working there.

That Douglass and Melville might also have glimpsed each other indoors and at night can be imagined given the scene in which Ishmael arrives in New Bedford and has nowhere to stay. After passing two inns he cannot possibly afford, "I now by instinct followed the streets that took me waterward, for there, doubtless, were the cheapest, if not the cheeriest inns." Walking through "blocks of blackness" on a dark December night,

*presently I came to a smoky light proceeding from a low, wide building, the door of*

*Winter wharf scene in New Bedford, 1890s. William R. Hegarty Collection.*



*which stood invitingly open. . . . Entering, the first thing I did was to stumble over an ash-box in the porch . . . The flying particles almost choked me. . . . However, I picked myself up and hearing a loud voice within, pushed on and opened a second, interior door. It seemed the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness.*

Uncomfortable, Ishmael quickly retreats from the negro church and its “wretched entertainment.” Moving on, he sees the sign of the Spouter-Inn, where he takes a room even though he will have to share it with a harpooner who is out on Saturday night trying to “sell his head.” His roommate, Queequeg, turns out to be a tattooed “savage” whose face

is “dark, purplish, yellow.” When he enters the room—and then the bed—Ishmael’s multi-racial and multi-cultural education begins. The two spend only one more day and night in New Bedford, but they are already “bosom friends” by the time they sail past the wharves to Nantucket. Ishmael notes that certain “green” white sailors stare at him and Queequeg for simply being companionable. This happens first on the streets of New Bedford and then on the boat to Nantucket, where one such taunting greenhorn is swept overboard and saved only by Queequeg’s good grace.

The “negro church” that Ishmael enters is a fictional counterpart to the Zion Methodist church on Second Street, where Douglass was already preaching by the time Melville arrived in the city. Douglass had intended to join the Methodist church on Elm Street but left when its minister served holy communion to white members before allowing colored

*With casks of oil piled upon the wharf, bark Josephine sets her sails to dry, circa 1900. William R. Hegarty Collection.*



members to come forward. After trying “all other churches in New Bedford with the same result, [I] attached myself to a small body of colored Methodists, known as the Zion Methodists. . . . I was soon made a class-leader and a local preacher.” In this capacity, he enjoyed “speaking to my colored friends, in the little school-house on Second street, New Bedford, where we worshipped.”

Douglass’s “colored Methodists” met in the only negro church that Ishmael could have reached by following “the streets . . . waterward.” Second Street runs north and south near the waterfront, and the other negro church in New Bedford at the time, African (Third) Christian, was far from the wharves, on Middle Street west of County. The 1841 City Directory locates Zion Church on South Second but does not provide a number. South Second begins at Union Street in the area of the city that is also the most likely location for a real-life counterpart of the Spouter-Inn. Walking waterward from the more expensive Mansion House at the corner of North Second and Union, a visitor in search of a room would

find only three other options, according to the City Directory for 1839: the County House, the Washington Hotel, and the Union Hotel. All were on South Water Street near its intersection with Union.

When Rev. Thomas James became pastor of Zion Methodist in 1840, Frederick Douglass “had already been given authority to act as an exhorter.” James soon thereafter “licensed him to preach.” In the 1841 City Directory, Douglass is listed not as a laborer but as a preacher: “Douglas, Frederick, Rev. house 111 Ray.” If Melville, like Ishmael, actually entered Douglass’s church in December 1840, and heard a loud voice from a “black Angel of Doom” who was preaching about “the blackness of darkness,” the voice could have been that of Thomas James, Frederick Douglass, or someone else James had licensed. If Douglass was not the preacher in the pulpit, his face may have been among the hundred that turned around to peer at the visitor.

Douglass’s fond memories of “speaking to my colored friends, in the little school-house on Second street,” persisted long after his 1855

*View south on First Street from Union Street, circa 1870, in the old neighborhood where Douglass preached (on South Second Street) and Melville walked in 1840. Kingman Family Collection.*





Zion Methodist Church on Elm Street, circa 1890, the parish to which Douglass belonged in 1840 on Second Street. *New Bedford Historical Society.*

recollection in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. In a letter he wrote to a church historian in 1894, a year before his death, he recalled “the days I spent in little Zion, New Bedford, in the several capacities of sexton, steward, class leader, clerk, and local preacher, as among the happiest days of my life.”

The more famous New Bedford church scene in *Moby-Dick* is Ishmael’s visit to the Seaman’s Bethel to hear Father Mapple’s sermon. Biographers have always assumed that Melville made a real-life visit to the Seaman’s Bethel, near Union and North Water Street, because of Ishmael’s fictional declaration that he did not “fail to make a Sunday visit to the spot.” But Ishmael also makes a Saturday night visit to the negro church. Whether or not Melville himself made such a visit, Ishmael’s inadvertent visit adds a new dimension to the novel. It brings readers of *Moby-Dick* as close to Douglass’s spiritual life as the view of the wharves does to his laboring life.

Unlike Ishmael, who was in New Bedford for only two nights before sailing for Nantucket, Melville was in town for at least

nine nights before the *Acushnet* sailed on January 3. If he did enter Douglass’s church and hear him speak, even by accident, he may have been one of the first white men to do so. Reverend James recalled that when he arrived at Zion Church “Douglass had already begun to talk in public, though not before white people.” By August 1841 one white person who had heard Douglass speak in “the little school-house on Second street” was William C. Coffin, the man who urged him to address the meeting in Nantucket that launched his career as an anti-slavery orator.

If Melville did see Douglass briefly in the Zion Church in December 1840—either in the pulpit or the congregation—then Douglass would have seen him, too. The key to Melville’s fictional scene is its reciprocity. As Ishmael gazes in at the worshippers, they “peer” back at him. What they would have seen is a white man covered with ash from the ash-box he had accidentally stumbled over when entering the outer door on a dark night.

The specificity with which Melville depicts Ishmael’s accidental incursion into the negro church suggests that Melville may well have entered Douglass’s church, but even then he would not necessarily have known who Douglass was. Still, the thought of these two young men meeting in New Bedford is sufficiently tantalizing that biographers and poets will continue to speculate as to what might have happened if they had.

At the time Melville published *Moby-Dick* in 1851, he *did* know who Douglass was. By that time he might also have acquired considerable information about where Douglass had been working, praying, and preaching during Melville’s brief time in the city ten years earlier. We are therefore left with two questions. What, if anything, did Melville know of Douglass? When did he know it—either in 1840 or by 1851?



Albany, New York, circa 1845. Drawn by Kathleen Piercefield.

## CHAPTER TWO

# IN THE HUDSON RIVER VALLEY

Albany and Troy, June and July 1845

In May 1845, less than four years after he was “discovered” by Garrison on Nantucket, Douglass published his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*. It was an immediate sensation, selling out its first printing of five thousand copies in four months. One reason Douglass wrote the book is that many who heard him speak doubted he was ever a slave, so brilliant was his mind and eloquent his diction. Yet in proving that he was, Douglass put his own life in jeopardy. Revealing his former name as Frederick Bailey, and naming the successive men who had owned him in Tuckahoe, Wye, St. Michaels, and Baltimore, Maryland, suddenly made Douglass much more liable to capture under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793.

Douglass was now living in Lynn, Massachusetts, where he had moved from New Bedford in 1842. His associates in the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society would not easily have let him be recaptured, but even so, Wendell Phillips prefaced the 1845 *Narrative* by declaring that if he were in the author’s place, he “should throw the MS. into the fire.” As a fugitive slave, Phillips wrote Douglass, “the whole armory of Northern Law has no shield for you.” This had been made clear in the fugitive slave case of George Latimer in 1842, decided by Massachusetts Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw, Melville’s future father-in-law. Frederick Douglass’s first published piece of writing was a letter to the editor of the *Liberator* on November 18, 1842, supporting George Latimer against Judge Shaw’s decision.

In spite of the heightened danger Douglass faced as a fugitive, he lectured extensively from late May until mid-August 1845. During the month of July alone he gave 23 lectures in 24 days in 19 cities, beginning in Worcester, Massachusetts, and ending in Rochester, New York. His entire July itinerary was announced each week in the *Liberator* beginning in June. Slave catchers as well as well-wishers would have known exactly where to find him. The lectures on July 12 and 13 were in Albany and Troy, New York, only a few miles from the Lansingburgh home in which Herman Melville was then writing the manuscript of his first novel, *Typee*.



Left: *George Latimer, circa 1845. Lithograph by Benjamin Thayer & Co., National Archives.*

Right: *Judge Lemuel Shaw, carte de visite, 1850s. Berkshire Athenaeum.*

*In 1842 Frederick Douglass campaigned passionately for the freedom of George Latimer, a fugitive slave whose habeas corpus petition was denied by Chief Justice Shaw, Melville's future father-in-law.*



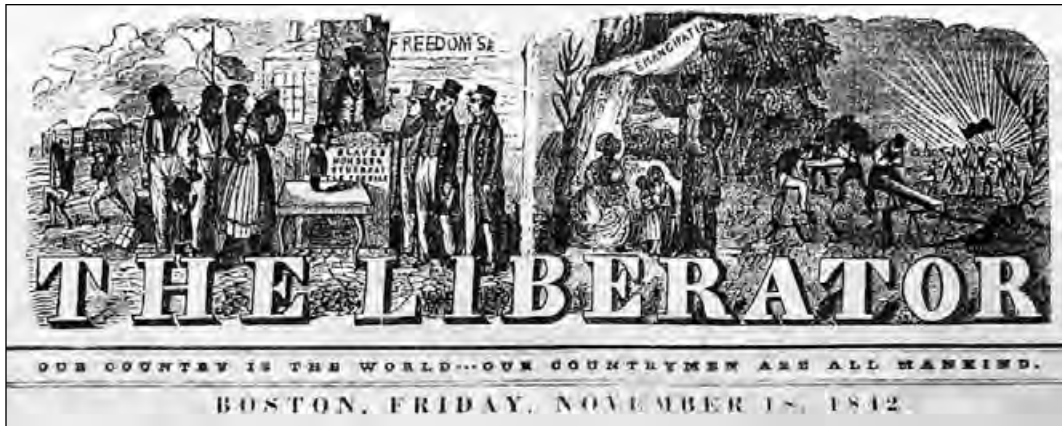
Melville had returned from his voyage to the South Seas in October 1844. He rejoined his mother and siblings in their Lansingburgh house on the Hudson River adjacent to Troy. He found that family and friends were absolutely enchanted by his stories about “life among the cannibals,” depicting his exotic, risky adventures after deserting his whaleship in Nukuheva Bay. When Douglass spoke in Albany and Troy on July 12 and 13, Melville had already written much of *Typee*. By the end of the month he was able to send a substantial manuscript to England with his brother Gansevoort, who had just been appointed Secretary to the American Legation in London. During the fall and winter, as Melville sent him more chapters, Gansevoort was able to negotiate a contract with the John Murray publishing house.

The above chronology raises the possibility that Melville took time from writing *Typee* on July 12 or 13 to hear Douglass lecture in Albany or Troy. He also had an opportunity to hear Douglass speak a month earlier, on June 9, in a public lecture in Albany's City Hall. Two days before the lecture, this notice appeared in the *Albany Evening Atlas*: “A

Discourse on Human Freedom will be delivered at the County Court Room, in the City Hall, on Monday Evening, at 7 ½ o'clock by Frederick Douglass, F. S. of Boston. . . . Seats reserved for the ladies.” The initials “F. S.” presumably stood for Fugitive Slave.

On the evening of the June 9 lecture, a similar notice in the *Albany Evening Journal* was accompanied by “Life of a Fugitive Slave,” an extended, and highly favorable review of Douglass's newly-published *Narrative*. After extracting numerous passages from the book, the Albany reviewer concluded by stressing that “This Frederick Douglass is to speak this evening at the County Court Room, City Hall.” An editorial note in the *Evening Journal* on June 10 reported that “Frederick Douglass, the Fugitive Slave whose Book we noticed yesterday, delivered a Lecture here last evening, which is spoken of as very eloquent and effective. He evinces extraordinary mental powers, the development of which, in defiance of all obstacles, is still more extraordinary. Should he speak here again, we hope our citizens will not fail to hear him.”

Did Melville hear Douglass lecture on June 9, July 12, or July 13? One imagines that



the young American writing about his escape from the “cannibals” of Nukuheva would have been interested in Douglass’s account of his escape from his Maryland enslavers. Melville’s own interest in human rights and cultural difference would have made him curious about the striking author and orator whom Weed was introducing to readers of the *Evening Journal*. At the least, he would have learned a great deal about Douglass simply by reading the local papers.

The highly favorable coverage in the *Evening Journal* in June continued into the next month with an announcement on July 11 of the next day’s lecture: “Frederick Douglass, a Fugitive Slave, who, after obtaining his Liberty, has acquired a good Education and the respect of all who knew him . . . is to speak for the Slaves at the Court Room in the City Hall, tomorrow evening, at 8 o’clock. He is able and eloquent. We hope to see a large audience.” The same issue of the *Evening Journal*

*Albany City Hall, 1832-1880, from the Albany Chronicles, 1906. Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.*



printed two announcements of Gansevoort Melville's appointment as Secretary to the Legation in London. Opinion was sharply divided, as Gansevoort had been a polarizing figure as a Democratic orator in support of President Polk and expansion in Texas. The *Evening Journal* supported the appointment even though it was a Whig paper, defending a local boy who had made good.

Weed's embrace of Frederick Douglass was even more dramatic than his defense of Gansevoort Melville. His lead editorial on June 12 cited commentary from the Livingston *Whig* objecting that the *Evening Journal* had "startled the Whig party" by suddenly supporting emancipation in the way an anti-slavery paper might do. Weed answered by arguing that slavery had gone too far in grasping for Texas, seizing more than its pound of flesh. In the same issue Weed continued his advocacy of Douglass by printing a very favorable review of the *Narrative* from Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune*. He also announced that copies of the *Narrative* "are left for sale with Miss [Abigail] Mott" at "No. 60 Broadway." In addition to supporting Douglass in reviews, news stories, and editorials throughout June and July, Weed also ran numerous stories about the horrors of slavery, both domestic and foreign.

All of this activity and information relating to Frederick Douglass in June and July of 1845 occurred in a part of Albany that was loaded with emotion for Herman Melville, beginning when his family arrived from New York in 1830. The monumental Albany City Hall at which Douglass spoke on June 9 and July 12 was across Eagle Street from the Albany Academy at which eleven-year-old Herman had studied. It had been under construction from 1829 to 1832, so Herman would have seen it being built as a schoolboy. On August 4, 1831, three days after his twelfth



*Albany Academy, from Albany Chronicles, 1906.*  
*Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.*

birthday, Herman and his classmates gathered at the new building as part of a ceremonial day in which Herman received the "first best prize in his class . . . for ciphering books."

After the death of their father in January of the next year, Herman and his older brother Gansevoort were withdrawn from the Academy on Eagle Street in order to support their mother's large family. Gansevoort took over their father's fur and cap shop on South Market Street, while Herman became a clerk at the New York State Bank on State Street. Maria Gansevoort Melville and her seven children had suddenly become the poor relatives of her brother Peter Gansevoort—as well as of her Van Rensselaer relatives in the Mansion House at the north end of the city. As Melville was to write in *Redburn*, "Talk not of the bitterness of middle-age and after life; a boy can feel all that, and much more, when upon his soul the mildew has fallen; and the fruit, which to others is only blasted after ripeness, with him is nipped in the first blossom and bud."

The immediate vicinity of City Hall and the Albany Academy had one very specific historical association for Herman Melville as a direct descendent of his mother's slaveholding Gansevoort ancestors in Albany. Maria

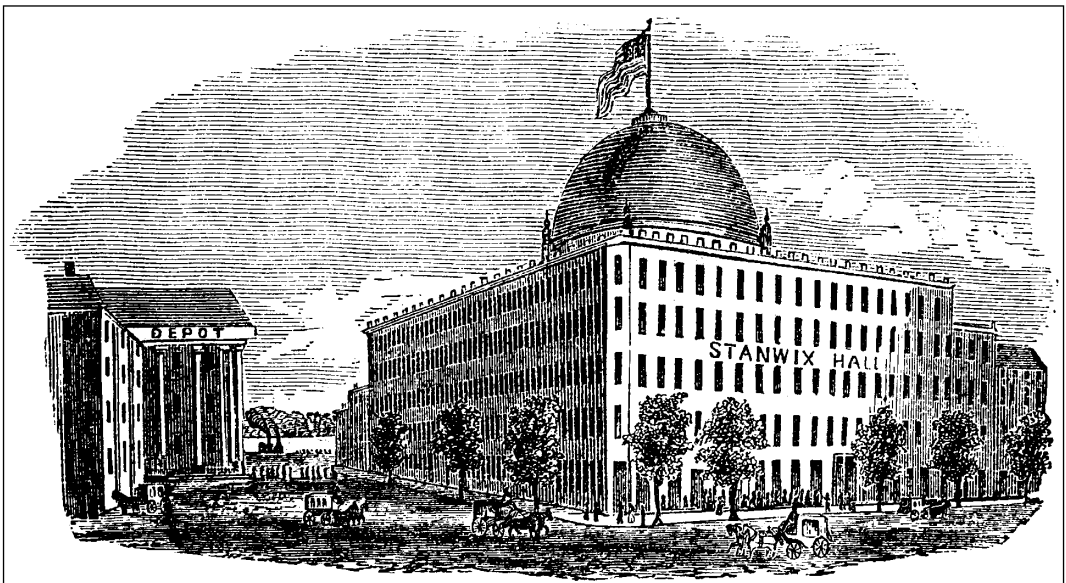
Gansevoort and her brother Peter had both grown up with slaves in the family home until the death of their father, General Peter Gansevoort of Revolutionary War fame, in 1812. In 1794 three slaves of other families in Albany, a man named Pomp and two teenage girls, had been hanged on Pinsker Hill for having set fire to the stable of Leonard Gansevoort, Maria's uncle. Because the stable was between State Street and Maiden Lane in the block immediately above Market Street (later Broadway), the resulting "Conflagration of 1793" destroyed much of the center of the city. Pinsker Hill, where the slaves were executed, "was a few rods west of the Academy, or about on the corner of Fayette and Hawk streets."

Bet, one of the girls who was hanged, was a favored slave of the Van Rensselaer family, to which the Gansevoorts were related. The other young girl, Dinah, was enslaved to Volkert Douw. Melville gives the Douw family name to one the three "stable slaves" in *Pierre*, the 1852 novel in which he addresses his Albany family's slavehold-

ing history. Pierre's grandfather General Pierre Glendinning in the novel is modeled on Melville's grandfather General Peter Gansevoort; each man, like Peter's brother Leonard Gansevoort, owned house slaves as well as stable slaves (whose names in the novel are "Crantz, Kit, and Douw"). All of this local history relating to Melville's ancestors made the Court Room of City Hall, near Pinsker Hill on which Pomp, Bet, and Dinah had been hanged by order of the city fathers, a most appropriate place for Frederick Douglass to be "speaking for the Slaves" in June and July 1845.

For the Melville family in 1845, another important landmark in that immediate neighborhood was the fashionable house of Peter Gansevoort, Herman's uncle, at 115 Washington Street, only steps away from Pinsker Hill, City Hall, and Albany Academy. Gansevoort was now the proprietor of Stanwix Hall, down the hill toward the river at the intersection of Maiden Lane and Broadway, a grand entrepreneurial complex built on land held by the family's Gansevoort

*Stanwix Hall, from Albany Chronicles, 1906. Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.*



ancestors since 1677. “Built of Quincy granite and surmounted by a large dome,” it ranked with City Hall, Albany Academy, and the State House as one of the city’s most distinguished buildings in *Wilson’s Illustrated Guide to the Hudson River* in 1849.

Diagonally across from Stanwix Hall at the intersection of Broadway and Maiden Lane was 60 Broadway, the address of the “Miss Mott” to whom Weed had referred readers for copies of Frederick Douglass’s brand-new *Narrative*. There the abolitionist sisters Lydia and Abigail Mott lived and ran a men’s clothing store. Abigail had already published an appreciation of the *Narrative* in the June 6 issue of the *Liberator* in Boston under the initials “A. M.”

The office of Thurlow Weed at the Albany *Evening Journal* was in easy walking distance of all of these sites. Its address at 67 State Street was immediately adjacent to the New York State Bank at No. 69, where Herman Melville had worked as a clerk after being withdrawn from the Academy in 1832. Back in 1793 this block of State Street had been the site of the Leonard Gansevoort house that was destroyed in the stable fire.

What might Douglass’s visits to Albany—and the conspicuous attention that Weed had given to both his lectures and his *Narrative* in the *Evening Journal*—have meant to Melville as he was writing the manuscript of *Typee* in 1845? Part of the answer can wait until Part II. Here will be addressed the degree to which Melville’s knowledge of Douglass as an orator might have influenced his depiction of Marnoo, the Nukuhevan orator who makes such a striking appearance in Chapter 18 of *Typee*.

At this point in the story, Tommo, Melville’s narrator, is living in the valley of the Typee, separated by a high ridge from the valley of the Happar, the Typee’s

tribal enemies. In addition to his oratorical skills, Marnoo is *taboo*, which means that he is able to travel freely between the feuding Nukuhevan tribes. He is also proficient enough in European languages to bring the latest news from the English, American, and French whalers or frigates that visited the bay. For all of these reasons, in addition to his striking physical beauty, his visits are always highly anticipated.

At the approach of the visitor in Chapter 18, “Marnoo!—Marnoo!” was shouted by every tongue. . . . The stranger could not have been more than twenty-five years of age, and was a little above the ordinary height; had he been a single hair’s breadth taller, the matchless symmetry of his form would have been destroyed. His unclad limbs were beautifully formed; whilst the elegant outline of his figure, together with his beardless cheeks, might have entitled him to the distinction of standing for the statue of the Polynesian Apollo; and indeed the oval of his countenance and the regularity of every feature reminded me of an antique bust. But the marble repose of art was supplied by a warmth and liveliness of expression only to be seen in the South Sea Islander under the most favorable developments of nature.

Like Marnoo, Douglass and Melville were each in their mid-twenties when Melville wrote this passage. Marnoo’s Apollonian beauty combines Grecian and Polynesian attributes much as Douglass’s commanding presence combined African and American attributes. Socially and politically Marnoo’s *taboo* status resembled the role Douglass was increasingly playing in American life by conveying his experiences in the North and the South to both blacks and whites.

Tommo, after describing Marnoo’s tattooing, finally shows him in action as an orator.

*Never, certainly, had I beheld so powerful an exhibition of natural eloquence as Marnoo displayed during the course of his oration. The grace of the attitudes into which he threw his flexible figure . . . and above all, the fire which shot from his brilliant eyes, imparted an effect to the continually changing accents of his voice, of which the most accomplished orator might have been proud. At one moment reclining sideways upon the mat, and leaning calmly upon his bended arm, he related circumstantially the aggressions of the French—their hostile visits to the surrounding bays, enumerating each one in succession.*

After this, “with clenched hands and a countenance distorted with passion, he poured out a tide of invectives. Falling back into an attitude of lofty command, he exhorted the Typees to resist these encroachments.” Then, “with a scornful stance he sketched in ironical terms the wondrous intrepidity of the French, who, with five war-canoes and hundreds of men, had not dared to assail the naked warriors of their valley.”

Marnoo’s oratorical powers have been compared by some to those of Gansevoort Melville, Herman’s brother. But his physical presence, striking gestures, fiery eyes, passionate invective, and ironical scorn—not to mention his *taboo* status and his cross-cultural beauty—resemble contemporary descriptions of Douglass much more closely. Each of these characteristics is vividly conveyed in the contemporary accounts of Douglass’s speaking style in *Blassingame’s introduction to Speeches, Debates, and Interviews, 1841-1846*.

*Throughout Marnoo’s speech, the effect he produced upon his audience was electric; one and all they stood regarding him with sparkling eyes and*



*Daguerreotype of Frederick Douglass, 1847.*  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington.

*trembling limbs, as though they were listening to the inspired voice of a prophet. But it soon appeared that Marnoo’s powers were as versatile as they were extraordinary. As soon as he had finished this vehement harangue, he threw himself again upon the mats, and, singling out individuals in the crowd, addressed them by name, in a sort of bantering style, the humor of which, though hidden from me, filled the whole assembly with uproarious delight. He had a word for everybody; and, turning rapidly from one to another, gave utterance to some hasty witticism, which was sure to be followed by peals of laughter. To the females as well as the men, he addressed his discourse. Heaven only knows what he said to them, but he caused smiles and blushes to mantle their ingenuous faces. I am, indeed, very much inclined to believe that Marnoo, with his handsome person and captivating manners, was a sad deceiver among the simple maidens of the island.*



*Whaleships and French men-of-war at anchor in Nuku Hiva harbor, Typee Bay, Marquesas Islands, 1842. The French were taking possession of the islands when Melville and "Toby" Greene jumped ship in July. The two men may have been on the island when the sketch for this painting was made in 1845. From Russell and Purrington's, "A Whaling Voyage Round the World," New Bedford Whaling Museum.*

This infectious style of bantering humor was also characteristic of Douglass from his earliest days as an orator. So was his incomparable gift of relating to the whole gamut of personalities in a room, females included. As early as 1842 Douglass had displayed the full range of Marnoo's oratorical assets at a "Latimer Meeting" in Salem, Massachusetts. "His remarks and manner created the most indescribable sensations." He was "fluent, graceful, eloquent, shrewd, sarcastic," and yet he also showed "great powers of humor." He "seemed to move the audience at his will, and they at times would hang upon his lips with staring eyes and open mouths."

It may be that at Nukuheva, Melville met a real-life Polynesian who had all of Marnoo's qualities. Even if that were true, Douglass's Albany oratory during the months in which Melville was writing the book is likely to have left its own marks on Marnoo. If Melville attended either of the Albany lectures, or the one in Troy, hearing Douglass speak and seeing him work the crowd (including the ladies for whom seats had been reserved), would have been an unforgettable experience.

If Melville's depiction of Marnoo did incorporate elements of what he had seen, heard, or read about Douglass in Albany, such

elements are likely to have been appreciated by Thurlow Weed and others who had heard Douglass speak. A thorough examination of Weed's career as editor of the *Evening Journal* (1831–1863), and of his letters and other archival materials in various collections, may turn up additional insights about this crucial period in Douglass's and Melville's early careers.

In February 1846 John Murray published *Typee* in London as *Narrative of a Four Months' Residence among the Natives of a Valley of the Marquesas*. A month later Wiley and Putnam published the American edition as *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*. On March 23 Weed embraced Melville's new book as warmly as he had Douglass's *Narrative* a year before, publishing three long extracts from the opening chapters in his welcoming review. One of the extracts, after revealing the charms of the "flotilla of Marquesan mermaids" who greet the whaleship in Nukuheva Bay, includes the passage in which "humanity weeps over the ruin thus remorselessly inflicted" upon them through "contaminating contact with the white man."

Weed's interest in *Typee* became even stronger on July 3, when a headline in



Left: Thurlow Weed, circa 1855, painted by Asa W. Twitchell. Fenimore Art Museum.



Right: Herman Melville, 1846, painted by Asa W. Twitchell. Berkshire Athenaeum.

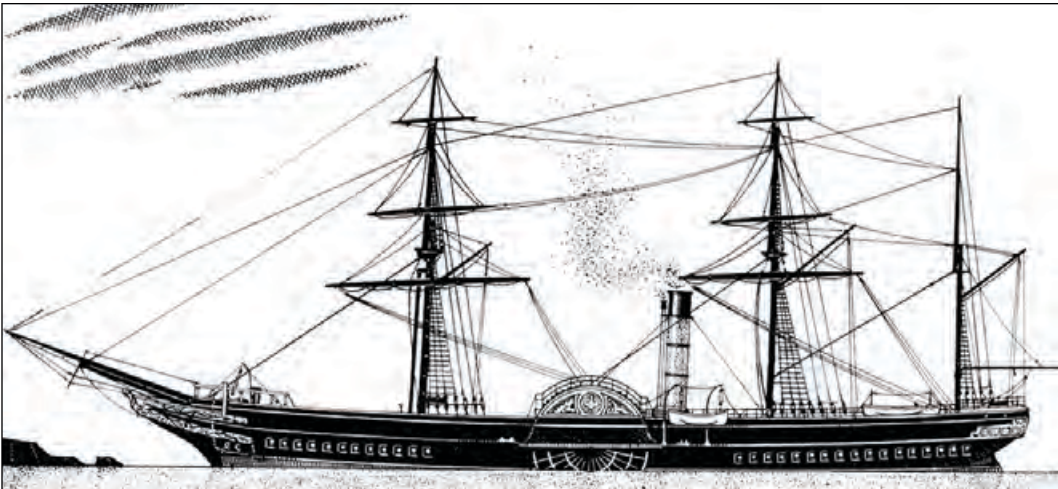
his *Evening Journal* announced “Toby Identified!” According to a story in the *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Toby, the bosom friend of Melville’s Tommo, had turned up in the form of Richard Tobias Greene, “a sign Painter at Buffalo!” Weed had been one of several reviewers to doubt the literal truth of Melville’s fictional adventures, so he was eager to hear about Richard Greene directly from Melville himself. They met in Albany on July 4, and July 6 Weed was able to announce that

*Mr. Melville, the Author of “Typee,” who was in town on Saturday, says that he has no doubt but that the Buffalo Sign Painter is his veritable Ship-Mate and Companion “Toby.” If this be so, it furnishes a strong exemplification of the seeming contradiction that “Truth is Stranger than Fiction.”*

On July 13 Weed reprinted “Toby’s Own Story” from the *Commercial Advertiser*, and August 4 he announced that Melville’s version of Toby’s story would appear as a sequel to *Typee* in a revised edition soon to be published by Wiley and Putnam in New York. On August 15 Melville brought a copy of the new edition to Weed’s office at 67 State Street. As Weed

was not in, he wrote a note indicating that he “takes great pleasure in presenting to Mr. Weed the accompanying copy of *Typee*—and much regrets not seeing him this morning.”

During the time in which Melville was writing additional chapters of *Typee* for Gansevoort in 1845 and enjoying the success of the published book in 1846, he would have been able to stay well informed about Douglass’s travels in Great Britain simply by reading Weed’s *Evening Journal*. On October 17, 1845, Weed reprinted from the *Liberator* the remarkable September 1 letter that Douglass wrote to Garrison as soon as the *Cambria* had landed in Liverpool, describing “AN AMERICAN MOB ON BOARD A BRITISH STEAM PACKET.” The mob was led by three slaveholders who not only tried to prevent Douglass from speaking to his fellow passengers on the ship; they actually threatened to throw him overboard. The scene became so riotous that Captain Judkins of the *Cambria* had to threaten to put the “mobocrats . . . in irons” to get them to desist. Douglass’s letter included this ironic flourish: “it is enough to make a slave ashamed of the country that had enslaved him.”



Wooden paddle-steamer *Hibernia*, sister ship of the *Cambria*, built in 1843 for the Cunard Line by Steele's of Greenock, Scotland. The *Cambria* was built in 1845, so Douglass would have sailed on one of its first voyages. *National Archives*.

Two weeks before reprinting the letter from Douglass to the *Liberator*, Weed had reprinted another account of the same incident from the *Lynn Pioneer*. This account was provided by the Hutchinson Family Singers, young abolitionists who had accompanied their “intimate friend” Douglass on the same voyage to Liverpool (and who later became friends with Melville’s brother Gansevoort in London). Their letter confirmed Douglass’s account of the actions of the slaveholders and the intervention of the captain, but it was not quite so circumspect in style. In their account, “all that the cool heads could do was hardly sufficient to prevent a scene of bloodshed.” Even after Douglass left the upper deck, some of the slaveholders threatened to “Throw the d—d nigger overboard.” Finally the captain issued the order, “*Have the irons ready for them!*”

On December 23 Weed published a long letter in which Douglass thanked him directly for “your noble and timely defense of my conduct on board the British steamer-ship *Cambria*.” In addition to publishing the Hutchinson and Douglass letters on October 2 and 17, Weed had written editorials on October

21 and 29 defending Douglass against editorials in the *Utica Daily Gazette* that had denounced him for having “publicly insulted” the slaveholders on board by speaking against slavery.

This celebrity treatment for Douglass continued throughout the new year as Melville began writing *Omoo*, the sequel to *Typee*, in Lansingburgh. On January 31 the *Albany Evening Journal* printed a long letter that Douglass had written Garrison from Belfast. The February 2 issue announced that the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass* was already entering its fourth edition. A February 21 account of “Frederick Douglass at Belfast” was followed on March 4 by a long letter Douglass had written to the *Liberator* responding to charges made by A. C. C. Thompson in defense of the individuals who had enslaved Douglass in Maryland. On June 1 the *Evening Journal* printed part of a speech Douglass had given in Glasgow. This was followed on June 13 by a letter that Douglass had written to “a Friend” in Albany about his visit to the birthplace of Robert Burns in Scotland.

Douglass’s friend was Abigail Mott, who, with her sister Lydia, was currently educating Frederick’s daughter Rosetta in Albany while

his wife Anna was caring for their young sons in Lynn, Massachusetts. His letter shows keen appreciation for Burns as a poet and a person and includes an interview with three of the poet's living relatives. Weed introduced it with these words: "The writer, be it remembered, is a 'Runaway Slave,' who, during his eight years of stolen Freedom, in defiance of all the disadvantages under which his class labor, has qualified himself to think and write thus."

On June 4, nine days before printing Douglass's letter about Robert Burns, Thurlow Weed had the unhappy task of informing his readers of the death of Gansevoort Melville, who had died in London in May while serving as Secretary to the American Legation. The remains of "this estimable and prominent American citizen" were "now being conveyed to his family by the packet ship Prince Albert." After the body had crossed the Atlantic, Herman accompanied it from New York City to Albany on the *Hendrick Hudson*. On June 27 the *Evening Journal* announced that "the funeral of the deceased" would take place the next day "from the residence of his uncle," General Peter Gansevoort of Washington

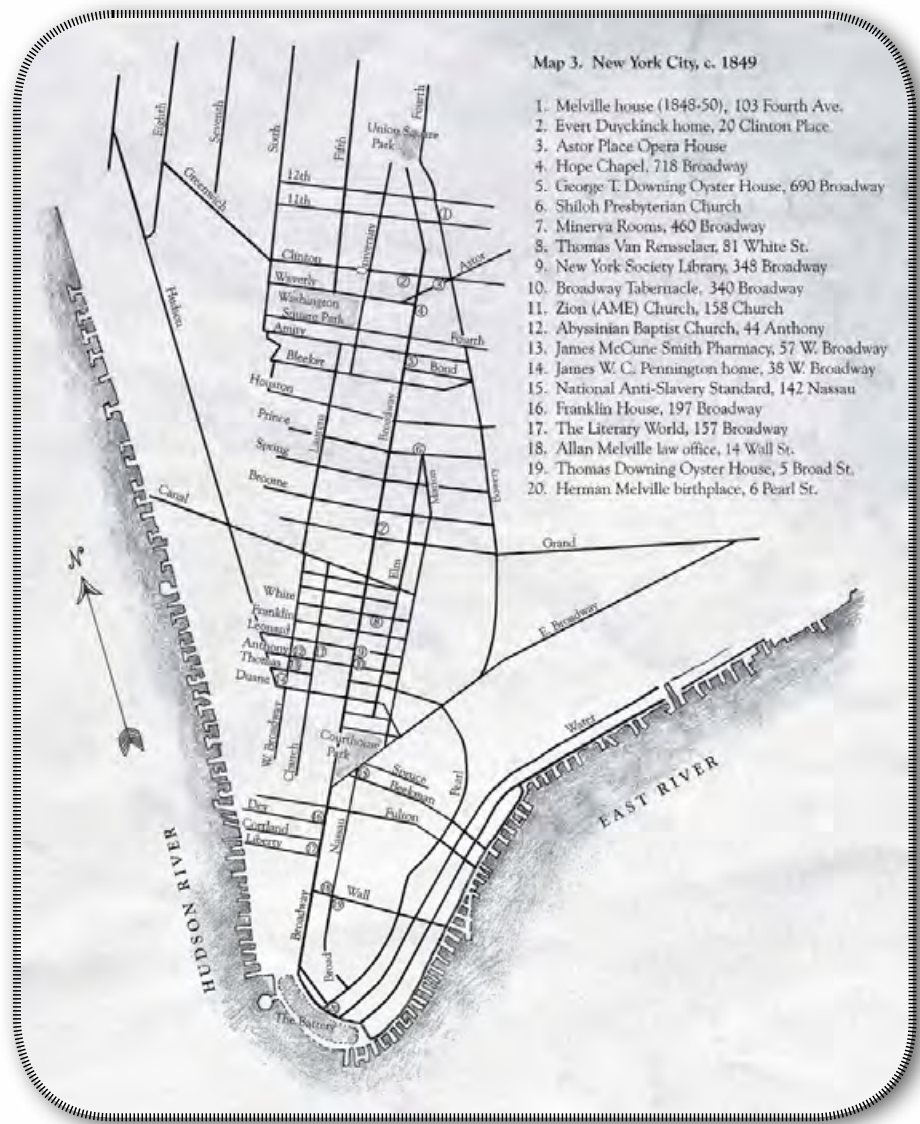
Street. On June 29 Weed's paper declared that "there are few young men whose death could be so emphatically regarded as a public loss." On July 6 Weed reported his meeting with the author of *Typee* two days before.

Gansevoort's younger brother Herman was now suddenly the family's best hope for financial success and public acclaim. On December 18, 1846, he signed a contract with Harper and Brothers of New York for the publication of *Omoo*. At about this time he visited the portrait studio of Asa W. Twitchell at 56 State Street, whom Weed had welcomed a year earlier as "an artist of great merit and promise." Twitchell's portrait of the author of *Typee* near the end of 1846 is the first image of Melville as a public figure and a fine companion to Twitchell's portrait of Weed. Each man's attire resembles that of Douglass in the 1847 daguerreotype by an unknown artist.

One can imagine Weed walking across State Street to chat with Melville while Twitchell was painting his portrait. For Thurlow Weed in Albany in December 1846, Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville were each young celebrities of exceptional ability and promise.

1876 illustrated map offers a bird's eye view of Albany from the Troy side of the Hudson River. National Archives.





Map 3. New York City, c. 1849

1. Melville house (1848-50), 103 Fourth Ave.
2. Evert Duyckinck home, 20 Clinton Place
3. Astor Place Opera House
4. Hope Chapel, 718 Broadway
5. George T. Downing Oyster House, 690 Broadway
6. Shiloh Presbyterian Church
7. Minerva Rooms, 460 Broadway
8. Thomas Van Rensselaer, 81 White St.
9. New York Society Library, 348 Broadway
10. Broadway Tabernacle, 340 Broadway
11. Zion (AME) Church, 158 Church
12. Abyssinian Baptist Church, 44 Anthony
13. James McCune Smith Pharmacy, 57 W. Broadway
14. James W. C. Pennington home, 38 W. Broadway
15. National Anti-Slavery Standard, 142 Nassau
16. Franklin House, 197 Broadway
17. The Literary World, 157 Broadway
18. Allan Melville law office, 14 Wall St.
19. Thomas Downing Oyster House, 5 Broad St.
20. Herman Melville birthplace, 6 Pearl St.

New York City, circa 1849. Drawn by Kathleen Piercefield.

## UP AND DOWN BROADWAY

New York City, May 1847 – May 1850

When Douglass returned from Great Britain in 1847, he quickly became as visible in New York City as he had been in Albany two years earlier. Two weeks after landing in Boston on the *Cambria*, he visited New York to address the opening session of the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, traditionally held in the Broadway Tabernacle, a massive circular hall seating twenty-five hundred persons. The audience that filled the hall on May 11, 1847, was so impatient to hear him that they chanted “Douglass, Douglass” as William Lloyd Garrison tried to introduce him. Garrison, embarrassed, was forced to cut his remarks short.

Douglass began his homecoming address by saying that he was “very glad to be here.” He was “pleased to mingle my voice with the voices of my friends on this platform.” Yet he was not entirely happy to be back in the country from whose shores he had fled in order to “preserve my liberty.” Contrasting conditions in America with those in England, he was compelled to say, “I have no love for America, as such; I have no patriotism. I have no country. What country have I? The institutions of this country do not know me, do not recognize me as a man.”

Douglass drew hisses as well as cheers when he declared his wish to see this slaveholding country “overthrown as speedily as possible, and its Constitution shivered in a thousand fragments, rather than this foul curse should continue to remain as now.” In response to the hisses, he declared that “I am anxious to irritate the American people on this question. I would *blister it all over, from centre to circumference*, until it gives signs of a purer and better life than it is now manifesting to the world.”

According to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, which printed the entire speech on May 20, “Mr. Douglass took his seat in the midst of the most enthusiastic and overwhelming applause” from “the whole of the vast assembly.” However, the response from the daily press was more mixed. A week afterward, the *Standard* reprinted commentaries from eight different New York newspapers. The *Tribune* emphasized that Douglass “held the audience in breathless attention,” and the *Observer*, the *Inquirer*, and the *Evangelist* all acknowledged that he was “the lion of the occasion.” But the *Courier and Enquirer* and the *Sun* both protested harshly “against the unmitigated abuse heaped upon our country by the colored man Douglass.”

Douglass’s criticism of America in his homecoming speech made him both a marked and a celebrated man in New York. When he returned to the Broadway Tabernacle in May 1848, 1849, and 1850, his presence was increasingly visible and volatile until a show-

down in 1850 shut down free speech in New York City. When Douglass had lectured in Albany in 1845, he had had to fear being taken back to the South as a fugitive slave. This was no longer a danger in 1847, as his freedom had been purchased by friends in England while he was overseas. Now in New York, after his blistering remarks at the Tabernacle, he had more to fear from nativist newspaper editors and their northern supporters.

The eight commentaries in the *Standard* on May 27 showed how widely the Tabernacle talk was covered in the daily as well as the anti-slavery press. The *Standard* also printed the *Tribune*’s account of the “Reception of Frederick Douglass by the Coloured People” at the Zion Church on nearby Leonard Street on the same evening. Douglass recounted his experiences in Great Britain to a tumultuous crowd, which also gave a warm greeting to Garrison when he entered the building in the course of Douglass’s speech. “The meeting continued to midnight, and notwithstand-

*Lithographic print of the interior of the Broadway Tabernacle, 1846, by Francis D’Avignon. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*





Left: William Lloyd Garrison of the *Liberator* and president of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

Right: Captain Judkins of the steamship *Cambria* of the Cunard Line.

Two staunch supporters of Frederick Douglass between 1845 and 1847.



ing the lateness of the hour, the audience manifested no wish to retire, such was the absorbing interest taken in the subject, his address, and the power of manly eloquence with which it was presented.” Melville is quite certain to have read these and other comments about Douglass in the May 27 issue of the *Standard* because the same issue contained a remarkable review of *Typee* and *Omoo*.

The reviewer, identified only as “B,” declared that *Typee* had “opened to the reading world views of a new existence, more novel and startling than any of the revelations of Swedenborg,” the transcendental philosopher. *Typee* had resolved “the great problem of the age” by proving that “happiness was not only possible without the aid of pastry cooks, lawyers, tailors, and clergymen, but that men could be happier without these excrescences of civilization than with them.” Furthermore, *Typee* inspired “B” to realize that cannibalism, as feared by sailors in the South Seas, compares favorably to slavery, as actually practiced in the South:

*It is true that the Typees eat their enemies, but then they do not eat them alive; they have the humanity to wait*

*until their victims are dead before they begin to feast upon them. Here, we reverse the rule, and feed on each other while living. One dead enemy was sufficient to feast a whole tribe of Typees; but with us a hundred slaves hardly suffice to furnish food for one Southern family. The Typee craunches the tendons and muscles of his dead enemy between his molars, but inflicts no pain upon him; but with us, the Calhouns, Clays, and Polks feed daily upon the sweat, the tears, the groans, and the anguished hearts and despairing sighs, of living men and women; they do not eat the insensible flesh of their dead slaves, but they lacerate it when alive with whips, and cauterize it with hot branding-irons.*

The May 27 issue of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* is a milestone in the joint reception of Douglass and Melville because the accomplishments of each are such a prominent feature in it. Just as Melville is likely to have read the response of the New York press to the Broadway Tabernacle speech, so is Douglass likely to have seen



Charles F. Briggs, engraved for the Knickerbocker Gallery, 1855. Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

the response of “B” to *Typee* and *Omoo*. This possibility is even more likely because “B” also wrote a striking column in defense of Douglass in the same four-page issue. His occasion for doing so was a new incident involving the *Cambria*. Upon reaching the ship in Liverpool, Douglass was denied access because of his race to the first-class cabin he had purchased in London. Before sailing Douglass wrote a letter of protest to the London *Times* that eventually resulted in an apology from the president of the Cunard line. On the voyage itself Douglass was again befriended by Captain Judkins, who had rescued him from the “mobocrats” in 1845 and now resolved the new crisis in 1847 by installing Douglass in his own stateroom.

The New York *Courier and Enquirer* responded to this episode by printing a letter from a London correspondent who called Douglass a “negro imposter” and accused him of provoking the whole affair by intentionally booking his cabin from a London office boy who was “literally ignorant of the ‘difference between black and white.’” “B” responded in

the *Standard* by attacking the *Courier and Enquirer* for its “base and scurrilous remarks upon the gross injustice done to Frederick Douglass, by the Liverpool agent of the Cunard steamers.” In response to a prediction from the *Courier and Enquirer* that Douglass would quickly pass into “obscurity” after his return to America, “B” grandly declared that “Frederick Douglass has already gained a name by his rare talents and most singular history which will save him from obscurity. When the name of Toussaint L’Overture becomes obscure, and suffering and violence have been banished from the world by universal justice, then the name of Frederick Douglass may subside into obscurity.”

“B” has never been identified by Melville scholars, among whom his fine review of *Typee* became widely available in 1995 and again in 2002. But he *was* identified in an unpublished May 11, 1847, diary entry by Edmund Quincy, Douglass’s long-time colleague in the American (and Massachusetts) Anti-Slavery Society. Quincy wrote that “Mr. Briggs is the ‘B’ of the Standard,” that is, Charles F. Briggs, widely known at the time as a writer for the New York *Daily Mirror*. Later Briggs would be important to both Douglass and Melville as editor of *Holden’s Magazine* (1848–51) and *Putnam’s Monthly* magazine (1853–55). His keen appreciation of both men in May 1847 raises the possibility that he might have met one or both by that time. That he had met Douglass seems quite likely, since Quincy’s diary entry indicates that Briggs had joined Quincy and his companions for lunch on May 11, immediately after Douglass had concluded the opening meeting at the Broadway Tabernacle with his “blistering” speech.

Although Melville’s home was still in Lansingburgh in May 1847, he was in New York City from May 4 to 14 as a frequent

visitor at the home of Evert Duyckinck at 20 Clinton Place. Duyckinck was then Melville's mentor and guide to New York's publishing scene, having edited *Typee* for Wiley and Putnam. As editor of *The Literary World*, he had promoted Melville's books and solicited reviews from him. Duyckinck was very well acquainted with Briggs, who had satirized him in the March 6 issue of *The Trippings of Tom Pepper*, a novel Briggs was serializing in the *New York Weekly Mirror*. The offices of *The Literary World* on lower Broadway were not far from those of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* along publisher's row on Nassau Street.

While Melville was in New York in early May 1847, did he meet Douglass, or Briggs, or both? Did the author who had depicted "Marnoo!—Marnoo!" delivering a "tide of invectives" in *Typee* witness "Douglass, Douglass" delivering his own blistering invectives in the Tabernacle? Whether they met in person or not, the two young men's professional lives were strongly converging within a month of Douglass's return from Great Britain. They had each been given the highest possible praise in the *Standard* in a way almost certain to have been visible to the other. Charles Briggs, "the 'B' of the Standard," had now joined Thurlow Weed in expressing prominent, articulate admiration for both Douglass and Melville. Back in Albany Weed was warmly welcoming *Omoo* in the May 1, 3, and 12 issues of the *Evening Journal*.

With two of Melville's books now in print, his writing had new opportunities to enter Douglass's consciousness. The first undeniable evidence of that phenomenon was to come on June 2, 1848, when Douglass reprinted a passage from *Typee* in his *North Star* newspaper (an event to be addressed in Chapter 4). When "B's" exceptional review of

*Typee* appeared in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* on May 27, 1847, Melville would have become conscious of a specifically anti-slavery component of his reading audience.

The *Standard's* interest in Melville's novels extended to his personal life on August 19, when it announced the marriage in Boston on August 4 of "Mr. Herman Melville (Typee,) of New-York, to Miss Elizabeth Shaw, daughter of Chief Justice Shaw, of Boston." This information was probably provided by Edmund Quincy, who was the Boston correspondent for the *Standard*. Like Charles Briggs, he had both Douglass and Melville on his mind in 1847, as seen in a July 2 letter he wrote to his friend Caroline Weston, then living in New Bedford.

This eight-page handwritten letter, now at the Boston Public Library, contains separate paragraphs on Douglass and Melville. Quincy begins the one about Douglass by calling him an "unconscionable nigger"—a shocking phrase in view of the degree to which they had worked side by side in the anti-slavery cause since 1841, probably written because Quincy was irritated over the fee Douglass had proposed for a series of essays he had been asked to write for the *Standard*.

Quincy's paragraph about the man he calls "'Typee' Melville" was prompted by Herman's upcoming marriage to the daughter of Chief Justice Shaw. He writes Miss Weston quite expansively about Judge Shaw's having himself led "two blushing brides" to the altar—even though he and Shaw had differed bitterly over the issue of fugitive slaves ever since the George Latimer case of 1842. Quincy ends the Melville part of the letter by indicating that the newlyweds "are to live with his mother in Albany or Schenectady" (Lansingburgh). Melville was entering the margins of Quincy's world while Douglass was being estranged within it.

Herman Melville and his wife Elizabeth did return to Lansingburgh after their honeymoon trip from the Saco Valley to Lake Champlain via Montreal, but only for a few weeks. By the end of September 1847, the newlyweds, along with Melville's mother and several of his siblings, had moved downriver to New York City, where they joined Herman's younger brother Allan and his new wife Sophia in a house at 103 Fourth Avenue, largely paid for with a loan from Chief Justice Shaw.

Herman and Elizabeth were to live at this address until September 1850, when they moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, again with financial support from Elizabeth's father. Herman was very prolific at 103 Fourth Avenue, writing *Mardi* in 1848 and *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* in 1849 and beginning *Moby-Dick* in 1850. He was becoming very much a New Yorker during Douglass's increasingly visible visits in 1848, 1849, and 1850.

A glance at a few of the spatial coordinates on the map of New York City will show

how Douglass and Melville were coming into increasing physical, as well as intellectual, proximity. Melville's house at 103 Fourth Avenue was between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets, a block east of Broadway. This location was close to Evert Duyckinck's house at 20 Clinton Place, west of Broadway near Washington Square. On January 17, 1848, upon Duyckinck's recommendation, Melville became a member of the New York Society Library at 348 Broadway, downtown at Leonard Street. This address was nearly adjacent to the Broadway Tabernacle at 340 Broadway. On May 4, five days before the opening of the 1848 Anti-Slavery Society meeting at the Tabernacle, Melville renewed his membership in the library. One of its main attractions for him was the reading room, "a large and well proportioned apartment" whose "four commodious tables" were filled with newspapers from New York and other American cities, along with American and English periodicals.

*The second building of the New York Society Library (1840–1853) was located on Broadway between Leonard Street and Catherine Lane. Courtesy of New York Society Library.*



Second Building of the New York Society Library, 1840–1853

Even before he officially joined the New York Society Library in January, Melville was in the habit of walking downtown to its reading room every evening. We know this from a December 23 letter in which his wife Elizabeth describes their daily routine. “At four we dine, and after dinner is over, Herman and I come up to our room, and enjoy a cosy chat for an hour or so. . . . Then he goes down town for a walk, looks at the papers in the reading room &c, and returns about half past seven or eight.” Conveniently for Herman in the winter months, the reading room was well lit at night.

The New York Society Library owned a large collection of books from which Melville promptly withdrew four volumes on the day he became a member. It also provided two small apartments to be used “as studies for those authors who desire to pursue their investigations with their authorities around them.” One can imagine Melville taking advantage of this latter convenience, as he was a notorious borrower from a multitude of “authorities,” not always acknowledged in his books, and he must have felt crowded at times by the extended family on Fourth Avenue.

His daily walk down Broadway to the New York Society Library brought Melville into the physical environs of Douglass’s annual visit as well as into the reading room whose daily newspapers provided detailed coverage of those visits. Beginning in May 1848, Douglass’s annual speech at the Broadway Tabernacle was virtually next door to Melville’s library. In 1850, as we shall see, the opening session at the Tabernacle was followed by two meetings scheduled for the lecture hall of the library itself.

Melville was writing *Mardi* when Douglass returned to New York in May 1848. Both men were being influenced by the revolutions that were sweeping Europe early that year—Melville in the allegorical chapters in the last

third of this 600-page book, Douglass in the talk he gave at the Broadway Tabernacle on May 9. Douglass had become an editor as well as an orator, having founded the *North Star* in Rochester in December 1847. He was now able to write his own commentary about each year’s meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society. This year’s commentary, beginning in the May 19 issue of the *North Star*, was triumphant, with Douglass writing of the “thrilling grandeur” of the opening session in “the vast hall of the Broadway Tabernacle.” He was honored to be scheduled in the opening ceremonies after three exceptional speakers: Theodore Parker, Lucretia Mott, and Wendell Phillips. Because the hour was late by the time he was to speak, he curtailed his prepared address and spoke in a more improvisational manner, leaving the final word to the Hutchinson Family Singers, “who poured upon the audience from the gallery, one of their soul-stirring songs.”

Judson, John, Asa, and Abby Hutchinson were the young singers who had supported Douglass against the “mobocrats” on the *Cambria* during the voyage to Liverpool in 1845. In the early months of 1846 they had spent considerable time with Gansevoort Melville in London—as had Jesse Hutchinson, their brother and business manager. The

*The Hutchinson Family Singers. National Archives.*



Hutchinsons were among the last people who had known Gansevoort in good health before his sudden death, and one expects that Herman would have been very interested in meeting them after they returned home. After Douglass and the Hutchinsons closed the opening session at the Broadway Tabernacle on May 9, Douglass remained very active in the subsequent meetings of the 1848 Anniversary Week, most of which took place in the Minerva Rooms at 460 Broadway.

Douglass's impromptu comments at the Tabernacle did not polarize the New York press as much as had the "blistering" homecoming speech of the year before, but they did provide both listeners and readers with food for thought. The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* published a transcript of his remarks in its May 18 issue, which Melville is likely to have read when it was reprinted in the June 2 issue of the *North Star*, the issue in which Douglass also reprinted "Tattooing" from *Typee*. Douglass's remarks might have been particularly interesting for Melville because they addressed issues of international affairs and colonial expansion in addition to his customary subject of slavery in the southern states. Douglass also touched on recent events, including the revolution in France, speeches by Calhoun and Clay, and the arrest of fugitive slaves on the schooner *Pearl* in Washington, D. C. Still, the primary purpose of his talk was to make his audience see the United States as the peoples of other nations did. His most striking way of doing this was to offer his commentary on a cartoon about America that appeared in *Punch*, in London, in December 1847.

Douglass began this section of his remarks by citing Robert Burns: "O wad some power the giftie gie us, / To see oursels as others see us." He then described the "excellent pictorial description of America" that appeared in *Punch*. The figure in the foreground was

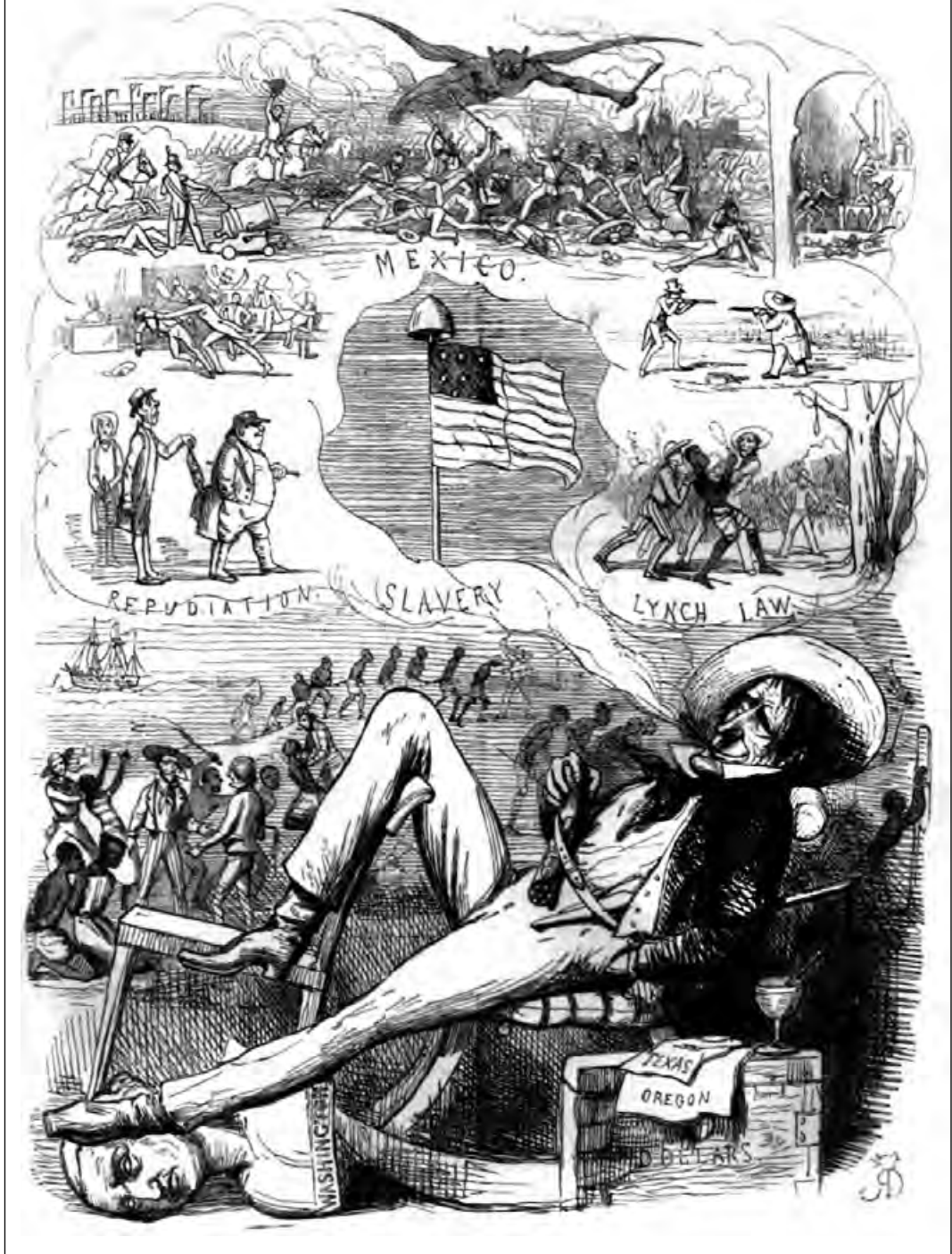
*a long, lean, gaunt, shrivelled looking creature, stretched out on two chairs, and his legs resting on the prostrate bust of Washington; projecting from behind was a cat o'nine tails knotted at the ends; around his person he wore a belt, in which were stuck those truly American implements, a bowie-knife, dirk, and revolving pistol; behind him was a whipping-post, with a naked woman tied to it, and a strong-armed American citizen in the act of scourging her livid flesh with a cowskin.*

Douglass pointed to another group next to this figure:

*a sale going on of human cattle, and around the auctioneer's table were gathered the respectability—the religion represented in the person of the clergy—of America, buying them for export to the goodly city of New Orleans. Little further on, there was a scene of branding—a small group of slaves tied hand and foot, while their patriotic and philanthropic masters were burning their name into their quivering flesh. Further on, there was a drove of slaves, driven before the lash to a ship moored out in the stream, bound for New Orleans. Above these and several other scenes illustrative of the character of our institutions, waved the star-spangled banner.*

Beyond those other scenes, "still further back in the distance," Douglass called attention to *the picture of the achievements of our gallant army in Mexico, shooting, stabbing, hanging, destroying property, and massacring the innocent with the innocent, not with the guilty. . . . Over all this was a picture of the devil himself, looking down with satanic satisfaction on passing events. Here I conceive to be a true picture of America, and I hesitate not to say*

This illustration of "The Land of Liberty" in Punch (London) on December 4, 1847, was the subject of Douglass's commentary at the Broadway Tabernacle on May 9, 1848. Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.





*The drawing that accompanied Melville's critique of the Mexican War, printed in Yankee Doodle (New York), July 31, 1847. Houghton Library, Harvard University.*

*that this description falls far short of the real facts, and of the aspect we bear to the world around us.*

Douglass's critique of the Mexican War resembles that of Melville in the nine "Authentic Anecdotes of 'Old Zack'" published in *Yankee Doodle*, an American imitation of *Punch*, between July 24 and September 11, 1847. Melville's "Anecdote no. III," about a tack in Old Zack's saddle, was accompanied by a drawing of "Old Zack" that mirrored his own satirical tone.

In May of both 1847 and 1848, Douglass came to New York City primarily for the meetings of the American Anti-Slavery Society at the Broadway Tabernacle and related venues, but in 1849 he arrived in town much earlier and cast his net much wider. As he explained in the *North Star* on April 27, he arrived early in order to "promote the Anti-

Slavery cause and the circulation of the *North Star* among the colored people of this city and vicinity."

Douglass was disappointed that the Zion Church, which had given him such a heartwarming reception on the evening of his homecoming speech at the Broadway Tabernacle two years before, was not more welcoming. The trustees of the "Colored Methodist Congregation" that owned the church insisted that he pay a thirteen-dollar fee to give an anti-slavery lecture even though they would "throw open their church doors, free of cost, to a white minister who might come among them to plead the cause of the heathen in the Isles of the Pacific."

Fortunately, the Shiloh Presbyterian Church (whose current minister, James W. C. Pennington, had married Frederick and Anna Douglass when they stopped in New York on their way to New Bedford in September 1838) was more accommodating. Douglass spoke at Shiloh Presbyterian at least three times in April 1849, one of these being his celebrated "Slumbering Volcano" speech on April 23. He returned on the evening of May 8, after speaking at another black church, Abyssinian Baptist, the night before.

During the 1849 Anniversary Week of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass's opening address at the Broadway Tabernacle on the morning of May 8 was followed by an evening address on May 9 at Hope Chapel at 718 Broadway. On May 11 Douglass concluded the Anniversary Week by debating Samuel Ringgold Ward on "The Constitutionality of American Slavery" in a combined afternoon and evening session in the Minerva Rooms at 460 Broadway. All five New York venues at which Douglass spoke during the week of May 7 were in the neighborhood of Melville's daily walk between his Fourth Avenue home and the New York Society Library. Abyssinian Baptist

and the Broadway Tabernacle were in the immediate vicinity of the library itself, whereas Hope Chapel was on upper Broadway near Herman's Fourth Avenue home. The Minerva Rooms and Shiloh Presbyterian were midway between the two poles of his daily walk.

While Douglass was speaking in New York from April 20 to May 11 in Melville's near environs, Melville was writing *Redburn*, his fourth novel. He had spent January, February, and March with his Shaw in-laws in Boston, where his wife Elizabeth gave birth to their first child, Malcolm, on February 16. After returning to New York on April 11, Herman wrote *Redburn* in April, May, and June (to be followed by *White-Jacket* in July, August, and September). He was also attending to reviews of *Mardi*, his third and most ambitious book. Richard Bentley had published *Mardi* in London on March 15; the New York edition by Harper and Brothers followed on April 13.

By April 23, the day of Douglass's "Slumbering Volcano" speech at Shiloh Presbyterian, Melville had seen enough reviews to be able to send this interim report to Lemuel Shaw:

*I see that Mardi has been cut into by the London Athenaeum, and also burnt by the common hangman in the Boston Post. However the London Examiner & Literary Gazette; & other papers on this side of the water have done differently. These attacks are a matter of course, and are essential to the building up of any permanent reputation—if such should ever prove to be mine.*

Anxiety over the reception of *Mardi* would have given an extra edge to his daily visit to the commodious tables of the reading room of the New York Society Library. Several of the New York newspapers in which he was searching for reviews of his work were covering Douglass's extended visit to the city

in April and May. Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune* had been attentive to the careers of both young men. On May 10 the *Tribune* reported on the talk that Douglass had given two days earlier at Shiloh Presbyterian. The same issue contained a devastating review of *Mardi*.

The reviewer, George Ripley, has high praise for *Typee* and *Omoo*, each "written under the immediate inspiration of personal experience," but "the present work aims at a much higher mark and fails to reach it." Once the mariners arrive at the fanciful locale of *Mardi*, the reader "is presented with a tissue of conceits, fancifully strung about the personages of the tale, expressed in language that is equally intolerable for its affectation and its obscurity." Ripley echoes other reviewers in declaring that Melville "has failed by leaving his sphere, which is that of graphic, poetical narration, and launching out into the dim, shadowy, spectral, Mardian region of mystic speculation and wizard fancies."

Adding to the personal and professional challenges that Douglass and Melville each faced during the Anniversary Week of the Anti-Slavery Society in May 1849 was the sudden, public trauma of the Astor Place riots during the same week. These occurred only a few short blocks from Melville's house at 103 Fourth Avenue and just around the corner from the Hope Chapel, where Douglass spoke on May 9. Both Melville and Douglass were involved in the drama.

On May 7 a crowd of nativist New Yorkers led by "Captain" Isaiah Rynders disrupted a performance of *Macbeth* by the British actor William Macready at the Astor Place Opera House. On May 10 an even more riotous scene at the same venue resulted in the death of twenty-two persons in a crowd of twenty thousand who had converged upon the Opera House to protest another Macready perfor-

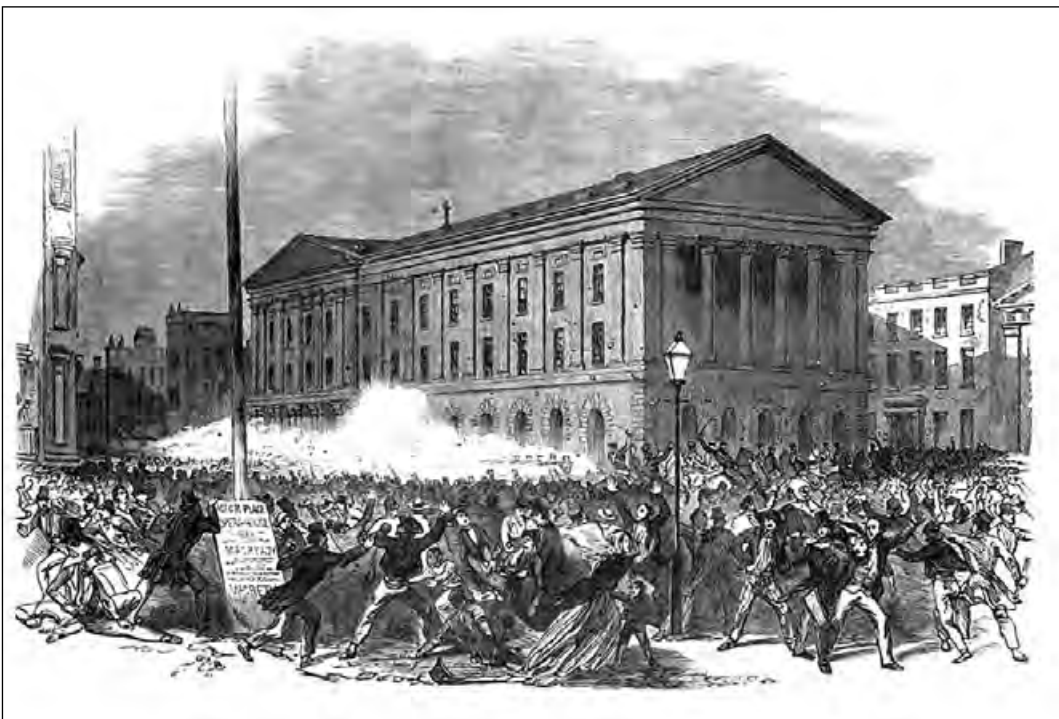
mance. Melville and Douglass each helped to provoke the rioters, though at different stages in the drama and in entirely different ways. Melville did so by signing a petition; Douglass, by taking a stroll.

At the performance of *Macbeth* on May 7, Rynders and his followers, in “a well-orchestrated attack,[drove] Macready from the stage with catcalls, rotten eggs, and the vile-smelling drug asafoetida.” In response to Macready’s announcement that he would cancel the rest of his New York engagement, Herman Meville, Evert Duyckinck, Washington Irving, and more than forty other New Yorkers signed a letter, published in the New York *Herald* on May 9, protesting the “outrage at the Astor Place Opera House” on May 7 and encouraging Macready to continue his performances as planned. When Macready agreed to perform again on May 10, Rynders brought his rioters back

in force. This time they were supplemented by thousands of New Yorkers who had been encouraged by handbills to show up in force “this night, at the English ARISTOCRATIC Opera House!”

The original protest on May 7 had been fueled by Macready’s feud with the American Shakespearean actor Edwin Forrest, who was playing *Macbeth* concurrently at the Broadway Theater. Its sequel on May 10 became a class war as well as a theatrical one, in part because of the conspicuous aristocratic standing of many of Melville’s fellow petitioners. Inside the theater Rynders and his working-class recruits so thoroughly disrupted the performance that Macready was forced to flee the building (and the city). Outside, the gathering crowd, which had thrown paving stones and brickbats through the window of the opera house during the performance, was estimated at twenty thou-

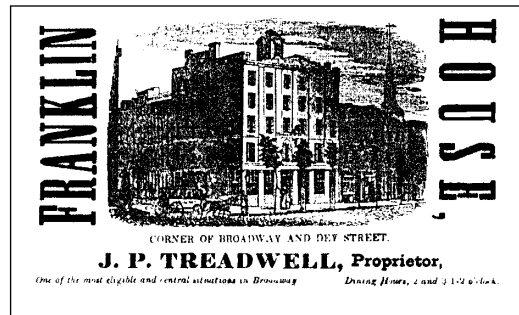
“The Riot at the Astor Place Opera House, New York,” from the *Illustrated London News*, June 2, 1849. *National Archives*.



sand by the time the militia tried to disperse it, resulting in the twenty-two deaths that shocked New Yorkers and people throughout the nation.

Douglass's role in the Astor Place agitation showed how volatile his presence had become in New York by May 1849. As Dennis Berthold pointed out, "the nativist Democrats who hated Macready also hated blacks, abolitionists, and foreigners, making Macready into a complex political symbol of Whig elitism and comparative racial tolerance." This explains one of the ironic cries with which Rynders and his supporters disrupted the May 7 performance: "Three cheers for Macready, Nigger Douglass, and Pete Williams." The rioters included "Nigger Douglass" because he had "scandalized New Yorkers on May 5 by walking down Broadway arm-in-arm with two white women." Douglass gave his own account of the bi-racial stroll in the essay "Colorphobia in New York!" published in the *North Star* on May 25, 1849.

Defining colorphobia as a strange plague that had broken out on May 5, Douglass explained that it was caused simply by the fact that "two *English Ladies*" who had "taken apartments at the Franklin House were not only called upon at that Hotel by Mr. Douglass, but really allowed themselves to take his arm, and to walk many times up and down Broadway, in broad day-light, when that great thoroughfare was crowded with pure American ladies and gentlemen." How did Americans respond to seeing "two ladies, elegantly attired, . . . actually walking, and leaning upon the arm of a person, with a skin not colored like their own?" With a kind of "delirium tremens" of the mind, in which its victims would "point with outstretched arms towards us, uttering strange exclamations as if startled by some terrible sight."



Merchant card for the Franklin House, 1849. National Archives.

In spite of this shocking behavior by his fellow pedestrians (not to mention those who were shouting "Nigger Douglass" two days later at the opera house) Douglass did not despair. He concluded the essay by declaring that increasing numbers of New Yorkers were willing to associate "irrespective of all complexional differences." This was emphatically true of audiences who had been attending his speeches during the previous three weeks. A "mixed audience of white and colored persons" had gathered at Shiloh Presbyterian on April 20 to hear him deliver an address "distinguished by unusual force and beauty," as James McCune Smith reported in the *North Star* on May 4. The *New York Tribune* reported that Douglass's speech to the New York State Vigilance Committee at Shiloh Presbyterian on May 8 was "well-attended by white and colored people." W. C. Nell reported that the debate between Douglass and Samuel Ringgold Ward on May 11 included many of the city's most "intelligent, refined, and reformatory" citizens, "both white and colored."

According to Nell, that spirited debate provided a "brilliant finale" to the Anniversary Week in New York. It featured Ward's proposition that "the Constitution of the United States, in Letter, Spirit, and Design, is Essentially Anti-Slavery." Although no transcript survives, the *Tribune* reported

that Ward defended his own proposition and that Douglass contested it. At this point Douglass still agreed with Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Quincy (and, technically, with Chief Justice Shaw) that the founding fathers had supported slavery and that the Constitution itself offered no way around it.

Did the son-in-law of Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw hear this unique Constitutional debate on May 11? Was Melville among the racially integrated audiences who heard Douglass speak at the Hope Chapel on May 9, at the Broadway Tabernacle on May 8, or at Shiloh Presbyterian on April 20, April 23, or May 8?

Each speech was delivered by the man who had published "Tattooing" from *Typee* in the *North Star* eleven months earlier. Each was delivered in the immediate vicinity of Melville's daily walk between his house and his library. Again, whether Melville attended any of these talks (he was extremely busy writing *Redburn* and attending to Macready), he would certainly have seen many references to them in the New York newspapers he was scanning for reviews of *Mardi*.

The Franklin House, where Douglass began his walk with the "two English ladies" in the "Colorphobia" essay, was on Broadway at Dey Street, downtown from the New York Society Library and the Broadway Tabernacle. The two ladies, not identified in the essay, were Julia and Elizabeth Griffiths, newly landed from England and soon to be working for the *North Star* in Rochester. The uptown part of their conspicuous stroll with Douglass would have taken them into the environs of Melville's daily walk; its downtown part would have taken them past the office of *The Literary World* toward the Battery. Melville probably heard of their promenade up and down Broadway as early as May 8, when the *Herald* discussed it as the cause of the "Nigger Douglass" cheer at the Astor House the night before. His awareness of both the

walk and the immediate, vociferous, nativist response to it appears to have influenced a passage in *Redburn*.

Redburn is a fictional account of Melville's own first voyage from New York to Liverpool in 1839. His characterization of Lavender, the steward on Redburn's ship, would have a contemporary resonance for any reader aware of Douglass's bi-racial Broadway stroll. Lavender is a "handsome, dandy mulatto" who had at one time been a barber on West Broadway in New York. After his ship lands in Liverpool, young Redburn is surprised at the manner in which

*negro-sailors are regarded when they walk the Liverpool streets. . . . In Liverpool indeed the negro steps with a prouder pace, and lifts his head like a man; for here, no such exaggerated feeling exists in respect of him, as in America. Three or four times, I encountered our black steward, dressed very handsomely, and walking arm in arm with a good-looking English woman. In New York, such a couple would have been mobbed in three minutes; and the steward would have been lucky to escape with his whole limbs.*

The reference to "such a couple" in New York would certainly seem to reflect Melville's awareness of the colorphobia that Douglass had so conspicuously endured and defined as Melville was writing *Redburn* in May 1849.

In 1850 Douglass and his same two English ladies were actually attacked, not just harassed, as they walked together near the Battery. This brutal event followed a violent week in which Rynders and his fellow rioters had disrupted an anti-slavery meeting at Shiloh Presbyterian, personally confronted Douglass at the Broadway Tabernacle, and shut down two successive meetings in the lecture hall of the New York Society Library.



*A pleasant afternoon on Broadway, circa 1890. National Archives.*

Douglass's personal confrontation with Rynders on May 7, 1850, was one of the finest and most memorable events in his public life. It was remembered as remarkable a half-century later in memoirs by Thomas Wentworth Higginson and John Hutchinson (of the Hutchinson Family Singers). For people living in New York at the time, it was one of those larger-than-life moments that brought deep social forces into absolute clarity—challenging a society and its ruling powers to choose between two conflicting visions. At the Tabernacle in 1850, Douglass won the day, but Rynders won the week.

It was clear in advance that serious violence was possible at the opening meeting of the Anniversary Week on May 7. Both the *New York Globe* and the *New York Herald* had called on rioters to “attend and attempt to break up the Abolitionist meeting at the Tabernacle.” The *Globe* had even accused

Douglass of treason and invited its readers to “STRIKE THE VILLAIN DEAD.” Several days before the May 7 meeting at the Broadway Tabernacle, Rynders and his followers had disrupted a meeting of the New York Vigilance Committee at Shiloh Presbyterian. During the morning meeting at the Tabernacle, they made “loud and repeated calls for Frederick Douglass, and were evidently anxious to wreak their violence upon him.” Douglass's own account of the confrontation in the densely packed hall emphasizes the courage displayed by William Lloyd Garrison, the Hutchinson Family Singers, and Samuel Ringgold Ward, all of whom refused to be intimidated by the “hisses, groans, and other hideous noises” from Rynders and his men.

Readers of the *North Star* had to turn to the reprint from the *New York Evangelist* to appreciate the remarkable self-possession

that Douglass showed when called upon to speak. As he

*advanced to the front of the stage [it] was now completely covered with the mob. We shall give no sketch of this speech, which considering the occasion and circumstances, was one of the most masterly which we ever heard. To every interruption from the mob he replied with a keenness of wit which drew down repeated bursts of applause from the mob.*

Douglass did this with Rynders himself delivering constant abuse from “within a yard of the speaker.” When Rynders shouted that Douglass was “only half a nigger,” Douglass immediately replied, “And so half-brother to yourselves.” When Rynders complained that slaves wanted to “cut their master’s throats,” Douglass declared that the “worst they had done was to cut hair.” The next day the *New York Tribune* declared that “Frederick Douglass took them in hand and skinned them.”

Douglass’s quick wit, presence of mind, and physical courage helped preserve enough order to allow the morning meeting in the Broadway Tabernacle to be duly adjourned after Ward’s speech. In Douglass’s words, “the rude disturbers” had “annoyed and hindered, but had not defeated the celebration.” In the afternoon meeting “at the New York Society Library Rooms,” the rioters did succeed in “breaking up the meeting . . . by a wild chaotic tumult and other rowdy demonstrations.”

Although the meeting reconvened the next morning in the hall of the library, the result was the same. “All sense of decency and propriety seemed to have forsaken the poor and despicable creatures, and their behavior even proved them destitute of all respect for women.” Garrison, Phillips, and others “essayed to speak, but in vain. The mob triumphed again, and that, too, in the presence of the police.”

The *Tribune* estimated that some 200 to 250 persons had assembled for the morning meeting on May 8 in the New York Society Library. Of these, “some 50 or more were ladies, and about the same number of colored persons.” As soon as Garrison entered, “close at his heels came the ‘Law and Order’ party, headed by Rynders.” Before long, the police had no option but to “clear the place. Thus closed Anti-Slavery free discussion in New York for 1850.”

After returning home to Rochester, Douglass informed his readers about the attack by “five or six men” who had assaulted him and the two English women while they were walking together near the Battery. Their physical blows had been preceded by “all sorts of coarse and filthy language” directed at both him and his female companions. After two of the attackers “struck the ladies on the head,” another struck Douglass “in the face” before “[I could] put myself in a position to ward off the assassin’s blow.”

Melville was still a member of the New York Society Library when Rynders and his fellow rioters shut down the two successive meetings in its lecture hall on May 7 and 8. On April 17 he had renewed his library membership. On May 1 he wrote Richard Henry Dana, Jr., in Boston that he was about “half way” in writing the “whaling voyage” that was to become *Moby-Dick*. As Melville worked on his new novel in New York for the rest of the spring and summer, he would have been keenly aware of the riotous activity that had disrupted the year’s anti-slavery meetings at Shiloh Presbyterian and the Broadway Tabernacle as well as in the lecture hall of the library.

Whether or not he had witnessed Douglass face down Rynders or had been one of the 150 white men in the library who witnessed the bedlam in which the rioters had “triumphed,”

Melville would have learned a great deal about them in newspapers as well as by word of mouth. Some of what he learned influenced what he wrote in *Moby-Dick* and *Benito Cereno*, as will be seen in Chapter 5.

The way in which “Captain” Isaiah Rynders entered Melville’s world in May 1849 and 1850 must have sparked sharp memories of his first encounter with the man. On November 1, 1844, soon after returning to Lansingburgh from the South Seas, Melville had come down to New York City to hear his brother Gansevoort speak at a massive City Hall rally for the Democratic presidential candidate James Polk. The rally was followed by a “torchlight procession of twenty thousand New York Democrats” led by “Captain Rynders, mounted on a white charger” and followed by his newly formed “Empire Club, one thousand strong.” Although Rynders was a fellow Democrat, Gansevoort Melville took exception to the tactics he and his followers had used in harassing their Whig opponents during the campaign, and on October 26, he had complained in a letter to Polk that the “Empire Club [is] one of those fighting and bullying political clubs which disgrace our city politics.”

The disgrace that Rynders had brought to Melville’s Astor Place neighborhood in May 1849 he had now brought to his New York Society Library in May 1850. A native of Waterford, a small town directly across the Hudson River from Lansingburgh, Rynders, like Melville, “attended school until about the age of twelve”—when he became a deckhand on a riverboat operating between Troy and New York City. Later he “either owned or commanded a small Hudson River sloop,” thereby acquiring the title of Captain that he retained in his subsequent pursuits as a “New York City gang leader and Tammany Hall boss of the sixth ward.”

The fact that the police had let Rynders and his mob shut down free speech within the walls of the New York Society Library delivered some harsh truths about the city in which Melville and his family had made their home. One wonders if the anti-abolitionist riots in his library in May 1850, following directly upon the Astor Place riots in his neighborhood in May 1849, contributed to his seemingly sudden decision to move his family from New York to Pittsfield in September 1850. For both Douglass and Melville the volatile events of May 1850 were a sudden, undeniable rupture in the Anniversary Weeks of the three previous years. They deepened each man’s understanding of the intensity of racism in the North.

Unless specific biographical evidence becomes available, it may never be known whether Douglass and Melville met for the first time in New York in 1847, 1848, 1849, or 1850; whether they resumed an earlier acquaintance from Albany or even New Bedford; or whether they still had not met in person but simply would have noticed each other intermittently in the newspapers. A better idea of some of the possibilities and probabilities will come in Part II, which examines what each knew of the other’s work. One thing is certain, however: They did *not* meet each other in New York City in May 1851.

Melville was then living in Pittsfield, finishing *Moby-Dick* in the house he called Arrowhead. Douglass went to Syracuse, not New York City, for the fifteenth annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May 1851, as no venue in either New York City or Brooklyn was willing to host that year’s gathering. By June, Douglass had broken with Garrison on anti-slavery policy and changed the name of *the North Star* to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

PART II

DID DOUGLASS AND MELVILLE  
KNOW EACH OTHER'S WORK?



Herman Melville, *carte-de-visite*, 1861.  
*Rodney Dewey photograph, Berkshire Athenaeum.*

Frederick Douglass, *ambrotype*, 1856.  
*National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.*