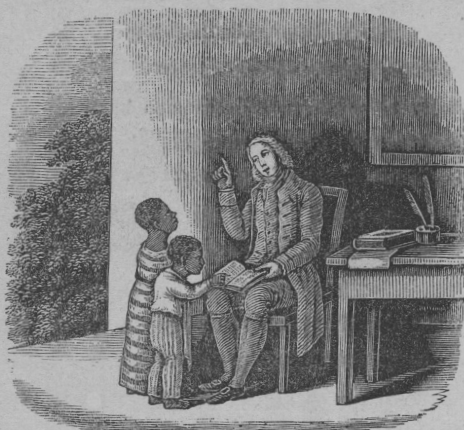


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*Benezet instructing colored children.*

ANTHONY BENEZET.

THIS celebrated philanthropist was a native of France. On account of religious persecution in that country, his parents, in 1731, removed to London. While here, the family adopted the religious opinions of the Society of Friends, and in 1731, emigrated to Philadelphia. In his zeal to do good, he left a profitable mercantile business, and devoted himself to the instruction of youth. He was a friend to the poor and distressed of every description, and labored most earnestly for their relief and welfare. He made great exertions to have the slave trade suppressed. The unfortunate and degraded situation of the African race in this country, deeply moved his sympathy, and he made strong efforts for their elevation and improvement. The loss of this benevolent man was deeply felt, and his funeral was attended by all religious denominations. Many hundred colored persons, with tears, followed his remains to the grave. An American officer of the Revolutionary army, in returning from the funeral, pronounced a striking eulogium upon him. "I would rather," said he, "be Anthony Benezet, in that coffin, than the great Washington with all his honors."

"Anthony Benezet," in John W. Barber, *Historical, Poetical and Pictorial American Scenes* (1850), p. 56.  
 General Research Division, The New York Public Library.



# Preface

Manisha SINHA

For a field that has been ploughed thoroughly—from global syntheses of the transition from slavery to freedom in western history by some of the most eminent historians of slavery and abolition such as Robin Blackburn, Seymour Drescher, and David Brion Davis<sup>1</sup> to numerous finely grained studies of African Americans, women, Garrisonian, political, and evangelical abolitionists in the last few decades—it might seem we have nothing new left to say about abolition. In fact, as this volume, showcasing the work of some of the leading and emerging scholars of abolition in France, reveals, we have just started uncovering both the international social geography of the abolition movement as well its diverse nature. These essays, growing out of a conference on abolition held at Université Paris Diderot in January 2018, not only build on some of the latest work on abolition but also point to new directions when it comes to reimagining the history and memory of the abolition movement. Like some recent books on abolition, including my own, they posit a longer chronology for the movement, looking back not only to the eighteenth century and the Age of Revolutions but also forward to the Reconstruction era, when the abolitionist political project was implemented and contested. I thank the organizers of that conference and editors of this volume, Michaël Roy, Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, and Claire Parfait, for inviting me to keynote the conference and write the preface to this book.

Literary scholars have drawn attention in the last few decades to the vast and rich abolitionist print culture, especially to the “counter public sphere” created by early African American writing.<sup>2</sup> Essays by the editors of this volume

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<sup>1</sup> R. Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (2011); S. Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (2009); D. B. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (2014).

<sup>2</sup> J. Brooks, “The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic” (2005); L. L. Cohen and J. A. Stein, eds., *Early African American Print Culture* (2012); E. Gardner, *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (2009)

flesh out this idea by looking at the iconic place that Anthony Benezet's writings occupied in the history of early abolition among blacks and whites, the international runaway (pun intended) bestseller of the nineteenth century, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which built on generations of slave narratives, and most innovatively, at how abolitionists developed their own alternative publishing and circulation networks when mainstream publishers blackballed and refused to publish antislavery material. Like other Northern capitalist economic institutions such as banking, shipping, insurance, and manufacture, the business of publishing was deeply complicit and connected to the slave economy. In this original and revealing reading, abolitionist print culture was not just a subset of Northern bourgeois culture but an oppositional and radical enterprise. Indeed, as I argue in *The Slave's Cause*, we must reevaluate the relationship between abolition and the emergence of capitalism, a paradigm shift that complements the revived interest in slavery and capitalism.<sup>3</sup> Excellent contemporary work on abolitionist art by Maurie McClinnis, Phillip Troutman, and Martha Cutter<sup>4</sup> parallels these highly persuasive and sophisticated literary interpretations that eschew simplistic generalizations by delving deeply into abolitionist archives.

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Similarly, other essays in this anthology deepen our understanding of the internationalism of the abolition movement and broaden its scope. When we unearth the transnational networks of protest built by black and white abolitionists we should include Europe as well as Haiti and Africa. The Spirit of 1848 fostered a radical republican as well as an abolitionist political project in the Atlantic world. Yohanna Alimi-Levy retraces these transnational abolitionist connections between France, Britain and the United States during the European revolutions of 1848. In fact, abolitionists and free soilers in the United States often viewed themselves as the American counterparts to revolutionary republicans and reformers in Europe and identified the despotic Slave Power of the United States with the *ancien régime* of monarchs and aristocrats. Like Ousmane Power-Greene, Claire Bourhis-Mariotti distinguishes between plans for the colonization of black Americans with independent black emigration efforts supported by abolitionists. African American emigration to Haiti and the dream of an independent black nation in Africa can be viewed through

<sup>3</sup> T. Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (1992); M. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (2016), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> M. D. McClinnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (2011); P. Troutman, "Incendiary Pictures": *The Radical Visual Rhetoric of American Abolition* (in progress); M. J. Cutter, *The Illustrated Slave: Empathy, Graphic Narrative, and the Visual Culture of the Transatlantic Abolition Movement, 1800-1852* (2017).

the lens of black abolitionist internationalism, an incipient precursor to the Pan-Africanism and anticolonialism of the twentieth century rather than simply a part of western notions of imperialism, to propagate Christianity, civilization, and commerce.<sup>5</sup>

African American geographic mobility and the spatial politics of slavery and freedom also undergird our current conceptions of fugitivity and the abolitionist underground. Long the domain of myth and memory, serious scholarly study of the Underground Railroad has finally come into its own. As Sarah Cornell also argues, we need to broaden our geographic conception of the Underground Railroad to include not just the free states of the North and Canada but also Mexico and the Southwest.<sup>6</sup> One could add Indian territory, the Caribbean, and even England to redraw the spatial contours of black escape and fugitive slaves' geographic and political literacy. By looking at slave resistance, rebellions and runaways, we can develop broader historical genealogies of Anglo-American as well as French abolition. Does the memory and conceptualization of certain spaces as sites of freedom obscure their own histories of enslavement and racism as Sandrine Ferré-Rode contends in her essay on contemporary depictions of the Underground Railroad in Canada? Here perhaps lies a new direction in abolition studies, memory studies and representations of abolition and the Underground Railroad in popular culture today. The Underground Railroad, as David Blight argued in his study of Civil War memory, allowed many Northern civilians to claim an "alternative veteranhood." However, studies of abolitionist memory reveal that abolitionists themselves tried to forge new avenues for activism in the post-Civil War era by constructing their own memoirs and histories of the abolition movement.<sup>7</sup>

The future of abolition studies lies in its ongoing reevaluation as a radical, interracial social movement, which the articles in this book and the forthcoming

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<sup>5</sup> F. J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (1975); T. Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalism and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington, Ken., 1998); S. Fanning, *Caribbean Crossing: African Americans and the Haitian Emigration Movement* (2015); O. K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (2014).

<sup>6</sup> M. Sinha, *Slave's Cause*, chap. 12-13, chap. 15; E. Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (2015); S. E. Cornell, "Citizens of Nowhere: Fugitive Slaves and Free African Americans in Mexico, 1833-1857" (2013).

<sup>7</sup> D. W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), p. 234. On abolitionist memory, see J. R. Jeffrey, *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies and the Unfinished Work of Emancipation* (2008); and M. Sinha, "Memory as History, Memory as Activism: The Forgotten Abolitionist Struggle after the Civil War" (2014).

special issue of the *Journal of the Civil War Era* (June 2018) on abolition amply illustrate. It also lies in the progress of what W. E. B. Du Bois called “abolition democracy” during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Hélène Quanquin’s essay on abolition and women’s rights not only illustrates their overlapping radicalisms but also argues that Reconstruction debates over woman suffrage had antebellum roots. Women’s rights activists themselves undertook the task of constructing a history of their movement in the postwar years that purposefully highlighted some facts while eliding others.<sup>8</sup> Exploring more fully what happened to the abolitionist political project with emancipation during the Civil War and Reconstruction when the realm of movement politics intersected with high politics is indeed the next frontier in abolition studies.

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<sup>8</sup> L. Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women’s Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (2014).