

To Reforge the Nation: Emancipatory Politics and Antebellum Black Abolitionism

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Abstract

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One aim of emancipatory social movements is to make political communities more inclusive. The way in which a movement pursues transformative political change depends on its account of how political actors understand one another as members of a shared community. Drawing on the antebellum political thought of Black abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany, I argue that acknowledgement is a mode of practical understanding that effectively combats exclusionary ideas of political community. I acknowledge you as a fellow member of my political community because you enact a commitment to the community's fundamental principles; enacting such a commitment is what makes you a member of the community. My acknowledgement itself consists in a responsiveness to the fact—independent of my own judgment—that you are a member of the community. This responsiveness manifests in how we comport ourselves in relation to one another in daily political life, which is the primary locus of intervention for effective efforts at making political communities more inclusive.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. DELIBERATION AND EMANCIPATION: SOME CRITICAL REMARKS.....	51
2. ON PLANTATION POLITICS: CITIZENSHIP AND ANTISLAVERY RESISTANCE IN DOUGLASS'S <i>MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM</i>	53
3. DECLARATION IN DOUGLASS'S <i>MY BONDAGE AND MY FREEDOM</i>	85
4. HUMILITY AND EMPATHY IN EMANCIPATORY POLITICS.....	120
CONCLUSION.....	165
REFERENCES.....	172

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Introduction

Throughout our lives, we find ourselves embedded in a complex, interlocking array of communities: families, workplaces, social clubs, religious organizations, municipalities, and nations among them. Many of these communities are political, in the sense that they are organized for the pursuit of shared interests in ways that reflect their members' standing as free, equal, but mutually dependent beings.¹ Many (perhaps most) communities that are political in this sense are imperfectly so; frequently, the interests the community pursues are not shared by all who are subject to the community, or the community is not organized in ways that reflect all members' standing as free, equal, but mutually dependent.

But we do not find ourselves merely cast into (largely imperfect) political communities. Rather, an important feature of human life is that we engage in efforts to forge and reforge such communities. Workers organize unions to improve their working conditions and have a say in how their workplaces are run. Social clubs retool themselves for mutual aid in the face of crisis. Politics reorganize the way in which their members are represented in decision-making bodies. Many such efforts are emancipatory, in that they seek to make or remake more inclusive, democratic communities, which act in pursuit of genuinely shared interests and are organized in ways that reflect members' standing.

In this dissertation, I explore how efforts to confront oppression and make political communities more inclusive— what I call emancipatory politics— provide philosophical insights into the nature of political community. In reforging political communities more inclusively, those engaged in emancipatory politics address the questions:

1. What is it to be a member of a political community?

¹ To say that we are, qua political agents, free, equal, but mutually dependent beings is roughly to say that we each exercise judgment and act in pursuit of values, that each of us is a source of value to whom others ought to be responsive in judgment and action, but that our capacities to exercise judgment, act, and serve as such sources are constituted through the ways in which we relate to one another.

2. How do persons understand one another as members of a shared political community?

The first is a metaphysical question that concerns the nature of a status persons possess in the world. The second is an epistemic question that concerns how we understand one another as possessing this status. In expanding the boundaries of political communities, emancipatory political movements develop accounts of what membership in such communities consists in. These efforts at expanding the boundaries of political communities are directed in part at changing who members of a polity take to be their fellow members, and, indeed, what such understanding consists in.

I focus on Black abolitionist thought in the antebellum United States. Confronted with a polity decidedly not organized in pursuit of their interests or in recognition of their standing as free, equal, but mutually dependent persons, enslaved and free Black people in the US engaged in resistance against slavery and white supremacy and developed strategies for reorganizing the polity around genuinely shared interests and in recognition of their standing. In so doing, Black political actors in this period developed rich theoretical frameworks concerning the nature of political membership— especially the viability of different metaphysics and epistemologies of membership in emancipatory struggle.

In particular, I contend that throughout the early 1850s Frederick Douglass develops a republican account of citizenship which bears distinctive emancipatory potential.² For Douglass, what it is to be a citizen is to contribute to a polity by enacting its fundamental values in ways that forge social bonds with others. In some polities, enacting their fundamental values forges bonds of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism among precisely those people who are subject to marginalization and oppression by the polity itself. Such polities, Douglass thinks, bear emancipatory potential, because they can be reorganized in more inclusive ways through

² I treat citizenship as a paradigmatic variety of membership in a political community.

revolutionary enactments of their fundamental values.³

Douglass deploys this radical republican conception of citizenship in the antebellum American context to argue that enslaved and free Black people in the US are already American citizens, because they ubiquitously enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. Douglass contends that the commitment to resist tyranny and oppression is a fundamental value of the American polity, and that it is preserved as such through the struggle of enslaved and free Black Americans, and others engaged in resisting slavery and white supremacy. The political task of the antislavery movement in the US, on this framing, is to bring the wider polity to acknowledge that enslaved and free Black Americans are already citizens who must be treated as such, in large part through the extension of a full schedule of political, legal, and civil rights.

The emancipatory potential of Douglass's radical republican conception of citizenship is largely grounded in its political epistemology— its account of how we understand one another as members of a shared political community. For Douglass, such understanding consists in the first place in *acknowledgment*: a practical mode of understanding embodied in the ways in which we comport ourselves in relation to one another in daily social life. Understanding someone as a fellow citizen consists, in the first place, in treating her as a fellow citizen, on this picture. The primary task of emancipatory politics is a matter of intervening in daily patterns of social life in ways that induce acknowledgment of one another as members of a shared community.

Douglass's account of the metaphysics and epistemology of citizenship (and political membership more broadly) contrasts with an account endorsed by his contemporary Martin Delany. For Delany, citizenship is a status that a polity confers upon a person because the polity has inferred that the person satisfies criteria requisite for membership. Delany is pessimistic about the potential for reforging a more inclusive American polity, because white supremacist

³ As I will argue, however, Douglass's picture is not one on which the fundamental values of a polity are fixed and static. Rather, political activity itself constantly reshapes the fundamental values of a polity— but always by reference to an (inevitably contested) understanding of what the polity already values.

ideology consistently undermines efforts to persuade the polity to confer citizenship on Black Americans.

Douglass's relative optimism about the potential to reforge the American polity more inclusively is driven in part by his contrasting political epistemology of acknowledgment, which figures membership in a polity as a fact constituted independent of a polity's formal judgment and to which an inclusive polity is responsive. The emancipatory potential of Douglass's picture rests on its claim that it is in the power of persons, acting in concert with one another, to make themselves members of political communities they themselves forge and reforge. Membership in a political community is a fact woven into the fabric of daily social life, which we relate to epistemically via acknowledgment, rather than inference and conferral.

Why focus on antebellum Black abolitionist thought? One reason is that Black abolitionists are embedded in a tradition of struggle that is still urgent and salient today. Prison and police abolitionists characterize themselves as such because they are combating forms of oppression continuous with slavery and white supremacy.⁴ We enrich our theorizing towards emancipatory aims by recovering perspectives in historically continuous but distinct moments of antiracist resistance.

A second reason is that Douglass's focus on enslaved Black people's everyday resistance against slavery and white supremacy helps illuminate the role of daily social interactions in generating the bonds of political community. Douglass's plantation politics occurs in a context where social bonds are fragile and constantly need to be (re)generated, and traditional political institutions are largely absent. Enslaved people forge bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism through quotidian acts of resistance and mutual support, and in so doing

⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow : Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (Jackson, Tenn.: Distributed by Perseus Distribution, 2010); Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne) Davis, *Abolition Democracy : Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture* (New York: Seven Stories Press, c2005); Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne) Davis, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle : Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016).

constitute themselves as members of political communities. Douglass's account of plantation politics offers a lucid illustration of the role of quotidian social activity in generating political community.

Finally, my analysis shows that Douglass and Delany's contrasting antislavery strategies in the early 1850s— Douglass's commitment to integration, Delany's commitment to separatism—are driven in part by their contrasting political epistemologies. Delany thinks that our understanding of persons as members of a community is grounded in evidence-based acts of conferral. Douglass thinks that our understanding of persons as members of a community is grounded in responsiveness to the fact that someone is a member constituted independently of our judgment. Antebellum Black abolitionist thought offers a compelling example of how these epistemic commitments shape the praxis of emancipatory politics.

In chapter 1, "Deliberation and Emancipation: Some Critical Remarks," I draw on the antebellum political thought of Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany to argue that attempts to combat oppressive ideology with reasonableness are counterproductive. Oppressive ideology seeks, among other things, to convince members of a community that they are justified in excluding marginalized groups from full standing in their community. Reasonable efforts at combating such ideology attempt to show that such exclusion is unjustified; but these efforts at reasonable argument attempt to do so by treating the standing of marginalized persons as an open question to be adjudicated on the basis of inquiry and deliberation. Oppressive institutions and ideology are well-equipped to manipulate such inquiry and deliberation in their interests. Ultimately, the argument in this chapter establishes that efforts to make communities more inclusive are not viable when they cast their task in terms of persuading an oppressive polity to extend membership to marginalized groups.⁵ This implies that viable efforts to make

⁵ This chapter focuses on the wider category of 'moral community,' rather than political community. I understand moral communities as communities shaped by normative commitments concerning our standing as free, equal, but mutually dependent beings, but which are not necessarily organized for the sake of mutual interests. The

communities more inclusive must invoke a different conception of membership, and a different account of how we understand one another as fellow members of a community.

In chapter 2, “On Plantation Politics: Citizenship and Antislavery Resistance in Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*,” I develop Douglass’s radical republican conception of citizenship. For Douglass, persons constitute themselves as citizens of a polity by enacting commitments to the fundamental principles of that polity. Douglass holds that one of the fundamental principles of the American polity is the commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. American citizenship, on this view, consists in the enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, through acts of resistance that cultivate bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism. Douglass’s account bears emancipatory potential because it grounds citizenship not in facts about one’s place of birth or in a state’s power of conferral, but rather in the political agency of persons. Citizenship, for Douglass, is not in the first place something given to us by a polity, but something that we seize for ourselves through action in concert with others.

In chapter 3, “Declaration in Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*,” I develop an interpretation of Douglass’s use of declaration as an emancipatory mode of political action. An act of declaration compels an audience to acknowledge the declarer as possessing a type of normative standing (e.g., personhood or citizenship). Douglass, through acts of declaration like his Fifth of July speech and fight with the ‘slavebreaker’ Covey, compels American audiences to acknowledge him as a fellow citizen by forcefully enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. The distinctive emancipatory potential of declaration is grounded in its political epistemology of acknowledgement, on which political actors understand others as members of a shared community through the ways in which they comport themselves in relation to one

argument in this chapter addresses membership in political community, the topic of the remaining chapters, because political community is a species of moral community in this sense.

another. Declaration makes political communities more inclusive not only by changing who we understand as fellow members, but how we understand them as such.

Whereas chapter 3 focuses on what marginalized political actors can do to induce acknowledgment (and thereby reforge more inclusive political communities), chapter 4, “Humility and Empathy in Emancipatory Politics,” focuses on the epistemic and affective orientation of those in whom acknowledgment is induced. I argue that humility plays an integral role in acknowledgment, because humility orients us towards other persons as free, equal, but mutually dependent agents. Empathy, by contrast, orients us towards the interests and capacities of other persons; empathetic understanding of other persons’ perspectives does not suffice to acknowledge them as free, equal, but mutually dependent political actors. The role of humility in acknowledging the political agency of other persons is illustrated by the way in which Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs confront their white readers with the limits of their understanding of enslaved people’s perspectives and positions. The emancipatory potential of quotidian social life is not grounded solely in the empathetic understanding that it fosters, but also in humble appreciation of alterity and agency that it inculcates.

Chapter 1: Deliberation and Emancipation: Some Critical Remarks

[I]f [political] participation means voting, and it means compromise, and organizing and advocacy, it also means listening to those who don't agree with you.... If you disagree with somebody, bring them in and ask them tough questions. Hold their feet to the fire. Make them defend their positions. If somebody has got a bad or offensive idea, prove it wrong. Engage it. Debate it.... Go at them if they're not making any sense. Use your logic and reason and words.

Barack Obama, Rutgers Commencement Address¹

Fear of Muslims is RATIONAL... the truth fears no questions.

Michael Flynn, 2/26/16 Tweet²

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to articulate some lines of argument, present in the antebellum political writings of Frederick Douglass and his fellow Black abolitionist Martin Delany, for the claim that participation in reasonable political deliberation can be *counterproductive* for those seeking to advance the aims of emancipatory politics (i.e., politics that seeks to erode or eliminate various forms of oppression). I take the target of this claim to be exemplified in President Obama's exhortation to use our 'logic, reason, and words' in attempting to advance our political aims through *reasonable* political discourse.

¹ Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at Commencement Address at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey," May 15, 2016, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/05/15/remarks-president-commencement-address-rutgers-state-university-new>.

² Michael Flynn, "Fear of Muslims Is RATIONAL: Please Forward This to Others: The Truth Fears No Questions...<http://youtu.be/tJnW8HRHLLw>," microblog, @genflynn, (February 26, 2016), <https://twitter.com/genflynn/status/703387702998278144>.

The norm of reasonableness in political discourse seeks to secure the provision of equal respect to the perspectives of relevant parties in deliberation.³ Reasonable political agents provide justifications for their stances which they can expect their interlocutors to endorse, and they address their interlocutors' stances by critically engaging the justifications which their interlocutors put forth. Thus, for instance, a reasonable interlocutor might address Flynn with evidence (statistical or anecdotal) and arguments to demonstrate the falsity (and indeed absurdity) of his claim.⁴ Emancipation is, in part, a matter of enlightenment.

Douglass, I claim, in his July 5th, 1852 speech, “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” (often referred to as ‘The Fifth of July’ speech), rejects this sort of strategy for emancipatory politics in political discourse. Before a predominately white Republican audience, Douglass declares “where all is plain there is nothing to be argued.... The manhood of the slave is conceded.”⁵ Throughout the speech, Douglass insists that he will not argue that slavery is wrong:

Would you have me argue that man is entitled to liberty? That he is the rightful owner of his own body? You have already declared it. Must I argue the wrongfulness of slavery? Is that a question for Republicans? Is it to be settled by the rules of logic and argument, as a matter beset with great difficulty, involving a doubtful application of the principle of justice, hard to be understood? How should I look to-day, in the presence of

³ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 49; Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 24-25; Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 94.

⁴ The aim of a reasonable political agent need not be to persuade her immediate interlocutor--this, for instance, seems to be neither a prudent nor plausible aim in holding Flynn's feet to the fire. Rather, in many instances, we can understand a reasonable political agent as seeking to persuade a wider public audience by critically engaging with the justifications her interlocutors offer for their views.

⁵ "The Meaning of the July Fourth for the Negro," *Frederick Douglass : Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 195.

Americans, dividing, subdividing a discourse, to show that men have a natural right to freedom? Speaking of it relatively and positively, negatively and affirmatively. To do so, would be to make myself ridiculous, and to offer an insult to your understanding.— There is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven that does not know that slavery is wrong *for him*.⁶

I think that we should take Douglass's refusal to argue as a major strand of his antebellum political thought.⁷ Appeals to reasonableness in antebellum US political discourse, Douglass and Delany think, enable political actors invested in the maintenance of a white supremacist system of racialized slavery to manipulate deliberation in their interests. Such political actors do this in two ways. First, they frame claims about the boundaries of moral community as 'open questions' in need of determination by inquiry, and fix the outcomes of such inquiry through the exercise of domination over those they aim to exclude. Second, these political actors undermine the standing of Black political actors by maintaining that the latter's standing is dependent on the boundaries of the moral community, so that granting a Black political actor standing in deliberation over these boundaries would amount to begging the question-- a result that contributes to the reproduction of racist hierarchies even in antebellum abolitionist organizations. Participation in reasonable deliberation can be counterproductive for

⁶ Douglass, "The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro," *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 196. Emphasis his.

⁷ Ultimately, for reasons of space and interpretive commitment, I don't wish to claim that this is the only position on deliberation that Douglass endorses in the decade leading up to the Civil War. My more limited claim is that this is one strategy that Douglass experiments with during this period, and, more importantly, that it is one plausible (perhaps compelling) option for emancipatory politics today.

emancipatory politics, because the norm of reasonableness is implicated in the maintenance and reproduction of social hierarchies and patterns of oppression.⁸

Contemporary western political theory is not unacquainted with projects of this form.⁹ For example, Lynn Sanders, in “Against Deliberation,” suggests that “deliberation should not necessarily and automatically appeal to democratic theorists” because “appealing to deliberation, or taking it for granted as an appropriate democratic standard, may have a destructive effect.”¹⁰ According to Sanders, the appearance of genuine deliberation can deceive us into “mistakenly decid[ing] that conditions of mutual respect have been achieved by deliberators.”¹¹ Genuine instances of deliberation (under which conditions of mutual respect have been achieved) abide by the norm of reasonableness, so when we encounter an apparent instance of deliberation, we’re

⁸ The critique of reasonableness presented here is one synthesized from certain moments in the antebellum political writings of Douglass and Delany. To do this properly, we have to get the details right—we have to get at what Douglass and Delany said in the pages cited below. But the unity of these details is not the result of an intention by Douglass and Delany to offer ‘The Douglass-Delany Critique of Reasonableness.’ Rather, the unity is generated ultimately by interests animating the emancipatory politics of our own moment. It is important to recognize that these interests are distant from, but by no means alien to, those animating the emancipatory politics of Black antebellum abolitionists. The critique reconstructed here is for us, but if successfully so, it is one that Douglass and Delany could by and large endorse as their own. Ultimately, the aim of this chapter is to help loosen the grip that certain political commitments have on us by showing that some people engaged in politics distant, but not alien, to ours have had reason to reject them, and that such commitments are thus options among others. See Robert Gooding-Williams, “History of African American Political Thought and Antiracist Critical Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*, ed. Naomi Zack, 2017, 235-45 and *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009); Paul C. Taylor, “Bare Ontology and Social Death,” *Philosophical Papers* 42, no. 3 (2013): 369–89.

⁹ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, esp. 36-50; Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, “Power and Reason,” in *Deepening Democracy: Institutional Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance*, ed. Archon Fung (New York: Verso, 2003), 237–58; James Johnson, “Arguing for Deliberation: Some Skeptical Considerations,” in *Deliberative Democracy*, ed. Elster, Cambridge Studies in the Theory of Democracy (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161–84.

¹⁰ Lynn Sanders, “Against Deliberation,” *Political Theory* 25, no. 3 (1997), 348.

¹¹ “Against Deliberation,” 349

inclined to think that the parties to deliberation treat one another as reasonable, affording equal respect to the each other's perspective. But the *appearance* of reasonable deliberation is compatible with unreasonableness—with the failure by one party to accord equal respect to the perspective of another. The norm of reasonableness can give cover to forces of marginalization in a polity.

My aim in this chapter, however, is to present a critique which implicates reasonableness directly in the maintenance of marginalization. Sanders approaches this critique when she observes that, when confronted with prejudice in the political sphere, “sometimes, giving reasons isn't anything like the right project and suggesting that the disregarded argue against prejudice or discrimination is offensive in and of itself.”¹² Indeed, Sanders cites Douglass' Fifth of July speech in this connection. But Douglass and Delany, I claim, think that the imperative to give reasons is not only offensive, but also can compromise the aims of emancipatory politics in circumstances of oppression.

In section 1.2, I situate the relevant conception of reasonableness in the context of liberal political theory. In section 1.3, I draw on Douglass and Delany's antebellum political writings in order to identify a critique of this conception of reasonableness and its role in political deliberation. In section 1.4, I show how Douglass and Delany diverge in their responses to their shared critique: while Douglass thinks that one can advance antislavery politics in antebellum US political discourse by *declaring* one's membership in the moral community, Delany thinks that, in a system of deliberation directed toward the maintenance of racialized slavery and white supremacy, such declarations cannot be heard but as premises respectful of the norm of reasonableness.

¹² “Against Deliberation,” 354

1.2 Reasonableness and the Aims of Emancipatory Politics¹³

The conception of reasonableness at issue in this chapter takes reasonableness as a virtue of political discourse not only in substantially just societies, but also in substantially unjust societies. On this conception of reasonableness, where we encounter, for instance, an assertion of white supremacist ideology, "that this government was... made by white men, for the benefit of white men and their posterity forever, and never should be administered by any except white men" and that thus "a negro ought not to be a citizen," we ought to take the stage in opposition and marshal arguments in response-- as, for instance, Lincoln does in response to Stephen Douglas.¹⁴

Yet we should note that contemporary liberal political theorists do not generally hold that we have a *duty* to respond to the white supremacist in a reasonable manner. Gutmann and Thompson state clearly that "citizens do not have any obligations of mutual respect toward their opponents" who advocate for (e.g.) policies of racial or gender discrimination, because such policies violate considerations of basic liberty and opportunity, which constrain reasonableness.¹⁵ In particular, opportunity to participate in the deliberative process is typically taken to impose a substantial constraint on reasonableness. For instance, Rawls holds that reasonableness is constrained by the criterion of reciprocity, which "requires that when... terms are proposed as the most reasonable terms of fair cooperation, those proposing them must also think it at least reasonable for others to accept them, as free and equal citizens, and not as dominated or

¹³ I would especially like to thank two anonymous reviewers for comments that greatly helped to clarify this section, and the conception of reasonableness at issue in this chapter.

¹⁴ Abraham Lincoln, "Fourth Debate with Stephen A. Douglas at Charleston, Illinois. September 18, 1858," in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy Basler, Marion Pratt, and Dunlap, vol. 3 (New Brunswick: New Jersey, 1953), 145–201.

¹⁵ Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1996), 3, 17-18.

manipulated, or under the pressure of an inferior political or social position."¹⁶ Where persons are compelled to accept terms under conditions of substantial oppression, they are deprived of the opportunity to participate in deliberation as free and equal citizens. Moreover, where the criterion of reciprocity is breached, basic liberties are typically violated directly: "For what reasons can both satisfy the criterion of reciprocity and justify denying to some persons religious liberty, holding others as slaves, imposing a property qualification on the right to vote, or denying the right of suffrage to women?"¹⁷ If, with many contemporary liberal theorists, we take basic liberties and opportunities to constrain the situations in which a duty to reasonableness in political discourse obtains, then we can plausibly deny that such a duty obtains in situations in which we are confronted with white supremacist views.

But the absence of a duty to engage reasonably with white supremacist ideology under conditions of substantial oppression does not itself indicate what we *should* do when confronted with such views under such conditions. One answer to this further question is that we in fact have a duty *not to be reasonable* when confronting white supremacist views under conditions of substantial oppression, because engaging in reasonable deliberation in such conditions inflicts substantial moral harm on those subjected to white supremacist ideology. Entertaining claims of inferiority with rigorous argument, even with an eye to refuting them, demeans and disrespects members of the community who are targeted by such claims. In part, this is because an implicit expression of inferiority is built into the very act of selectively entertaining claims of inferiority: members of targeted groups are implied to be inferior insofar as their claim to equality is taken as something in need of 'verification,' where the default assumption is that such verification is

¹⁶ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 446.

¹⁷ *Political Liberalism*, 447.

unnecessary.¹⁸ The disrespect expressed in such cases is akin to the disrespect expressed in (e.g.) discriminatory stop-and-frisk or airport security policies (de jure or de facto)-- an expression of inferiority is built into the very act of discriminatory examination, even if one is subsequently 'cleared' by the examination.¹⁹

But if the duty not to be reasonable in the face of white supremacist ideology is grounded in the disrespect constituted by expressions of inferiority, it is plausibly only pro tanto. If engaging in reasonable deliberation in the face of white supremacist ideology can plausibly erode or eliminate the conditions under which such ideology flourishes, and thus the conditions under which such disrespect arises ubiquitously, the duty not to be reasonable may be overridden. One may, for instance, seek to counteract discriminatory immigration policies directed (implicitly or explicitly) against Muslims by pointing to data which demonstrates that Muslims are no more likely to commit acts of violence than members of other religious groups, with an eye towards rendering the Islamophobic arguments advanced by the likes of Flynn unpersuasive to other members of the community. Insofar as 'going to the data' in such circumstances qualifies as entertaining claims of inferiority-- because in so doing we (perhaps implicitly) endorse a conditional like 'If members of a religious group are more likely to commit acts of violence than members of other religious groups, then discriminatory security policies directed toward members of that religious group are justifiable'-- it is an expression of disrespect. But such arguments might seem decisive in deliberation: we *know* that the data will not justify such discriminatory policies, thus that it will undermine Flynn's Islamophobic claims.

¹⁸ We can focus on cases of selectively entertaining claims of inferiority because, in a political culture which is minimally democratic, equality is the default assumption. Any context in which a question of inferiority is posed is a deviation from this default. This does not imply that deviation in a minimally democratic political culture is infrequent.

¹⁹ This is not to say that the wrong in the latter cases is exhausted by the disrespect it expresses.

By advancing such arguments, it appears plausible that we will erode the conditions under which such disrespect, and connected harms, arise.²⁰

The matter at issue in this chapter concerns the conditions under which we should, in the absence of a duty of reasonableness, nevertheless comport ourselves reasonably in political discourse for the sake of advancing emancipatory political aims. The target claim is that *we should comport ourselves reasonably when engaging with oppressive ideology under conditions of substantial oppression, because comporting ourselves reasonably will effectively advance emancipatory political aims*. The target claim, in essence, takes a stance on the conditions in which emancipatory political actors should deem it prudent to act in accord with the norm of reasonableness.

I take the target claim to be a common (although by no means universal) feature of progressive political culture in the US. Obama's remarks quoted above in his Rutgers' Commencement Address are directed at student antiracist activists who adopt a 'no platform' strategy in response to expressions of white supremacist ideology on campuses. In exhorting such activists to use their reason, logic, and words, Obama implies that engaging in reasonable deliberation is a productive means for advancing antiracist political aims. Obama's remarks, moreover, exemplify a more general attitude toward antiracist and antifascist activists-- on and off university campuses-- which urges that those who in engage in such forms of resistance must comport themselves in accordance with values of free speech and expression.

²⁰ This is not a case of flatfooted greater good reasoning: the claim is not that, by performing acts which constitute one sort of harm, we contribute to a distinct, greater good (or avoid a distinct, greater harm). Rather, the claim is that, by performing acts which constitute a particular sort of harm, we contribute to the erosion or elimination of the same, or closely connected, sorts of harm.

A commitment to the target claim is not new in progressive political culture in the US. It is reflected, for instance, in the American Civil Liberties Union's defenses of permits for rallies and demonstrations held by Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan in the 1930s, which were motivated by not only an abstract commitment to the intrinsic value of free speech, but by a concrete political strategy for advancing social justice aims: "The best way to combat their propaganda is in the open where it can be fought by counter-propaganda, protest, demonstrations, picketing-- and all the devices of attack which do not involve denying their rights to meet and speak."²¹ If we adopt an expansive conception of modes of participating in deliberation-- inclusive of protest and propaganda-- then the ACLU's defense of white supremacists' permits exemplifies a commitment to reasonableness, because it is supposed that this commitment will advance emancipatory political aims.

And, indeed, while the Rawlsian per se is not committed to the target claim, Rawls himself does seem to express sympathy for the view that reasonableness is effective in advancing emancipatory aims-- in particular, in the context of Lincoln's debates over the legitimacy of slavery with Stephen Douglas: "Since the rejection of slavery is a clear case of securing the constitutional essential of the equal basic liberties, surely Lincoln's view was reasonable (even if not the most reasonable), while Douglas's was not.... What could be a better example to illustrate the force of public reason in political life?"²²

To the contrary, however, Frederick Douglass and Martin Delany give us strong reasons to think that comporting ourselves reasonably in the face of white supremacy cannot contribute

²¹ Harry Ward et al., "Shall We Defend Free Speech for Nazis in America?" (American Civil Liberties Union, October 1934), 3. <http://documents.latimes.com/aclu-asks-1934-shall-we-defend-free-speech-nazis-america/>; Laura Weinrib "The ACLU's Free Speech Stance Should Be about Social Justice, Not 'Timeless' Principles," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-weinrib-aclu-speech-history-20170830-story.html>.

²² Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 484.

productively to emancipatory political aims: reasonable political conduct under conditions of substantial oppression can be *counterproductive*. In their antebellum political writings, Douglass and Delany demonstrate that engaging in reasonable deliberation under conditions of substantive oppression cannot reliably render white supremacist claims unpersuasive to other members of the polity, and more generally cannot contribute to the erosion of conditions of oppression. In fact, Douglass and Delany suggest, engaging in reasonable deliberation under conditions of substantive oppression is liable to reinforce such conditions.

It should be clear, at this stage, that Douglass and Delany do not provide a critique of the role of reasonable deliberation in substantially just societies; their arguments are compatible with the contemporary liberal theorist's commitment to reasonable deliberation in such circumstances. At issue for Douglass and Delany is the role of reasonableness in advancing from conditions of substantial oppression toward a substantially just society; in Charles Mills' sense of the term, the question is the extent to which the norm of reasonableness figures into a program of *corrective justice*, particularly where the aim is to erode or eliminate white supremacist ideology and institutions.²³

It is also important to note that the model of deliberation which Douglass and Delany target does not assume that one's direct interlocutors must be sincere in order for the deliberation to qualify as reasonable. Sincere participants in deliberation exhibit the virtue of open-mindedness: they are open to revision of their stances as dictated by the reasons and evidence advanced in a particular deliberative context. But in order for deliberation to qualify as reasonable, we needn't assume that the immediate advocates of systems of oppression are sincere, open-minded interlocutors. Rather, we must assume that the *audience*-- the wider public-

²³ Charles W. (Charles Wade) Mills, *Black Rights/White Wrongs : The Critique of Racial Liberalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), esp. chs. 8 & 9.

- is generally composed of sincere, open-minded interlocutors. Thus, we needn't imagine that those striving to advance emancipatory aims by means of reasonable deliberation sought to persuade Stephen Douglas (or seek to persuade Michael Flynn). We should rather understand the goal for proponents of the target claim as persuading members of the wider public to endorse and advance emancipatory aims.²⁴ Douglass and Delany give us strong reasons to think that not only the former sort of project is futile (with which many proponents of the target claim would agree), but that the latter sort of project, directed at persuading the public, is also untenable.

1.3 A Critique of Reasonableness in Emancipatory Politics

In the letter prefacing his 1855 autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Frederick Douglass invokes the image of a court of law to characterize the political situation around American slavery:

[T]his system [i.e., chattel slavery] is now at the bar of public opinion—not only of this country, but of the whole civilized world—for judgment. Its friends have made for it the usual plea—‘not guilty;’ the case must, therefore, proceed. Any facts, either from slaves, slaveholders, or by-standers, calculated to enlighten the public mind, by revealing the true nature, character, and tendency of the slave system, are in order, and can scarcely be innocently withheld.²⁵

Douglass's invocation of a court of law suggests that the norm of reasonableness is operative in this political discourse. The legitimacy of slavery is an open question before ‘the bar of public opinion,’ awaiting judgment; those seeking to establish its ‘guilt,’ or ‘innocence,’ must ‘enlighten the public mind’ by demonstrating the ‘true nature... of the slave system.’

²⁴ I do assume, then, that we can attribute some degree of sincerity (i.e., some degree of open-minded responsiveness to reasons) to the wider public in the relevant deliberative contexts.

²⁵ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 4.

Yet Douglass goes on to observe that the institution of slavery is not the only matter up for deliberation: “Not only is slavery on trial, but unfortunately, the enslaved people are also on trial.”²⁶ The human dignity of Black people appears as a matter for deliberative inquiry because it is implicated in the justifications slavery’s advocates advance in defense of the institution: “It is alleged, that they are, naturally, inferior; that they are so low in the scale of humanity, and so utterly stupid, that they are unconscious of their wrongs, and do not apprehend their rights.”²⁷ In order to qualify as reasonable, those who invoke white supremacist ideology in defense of chattel slavery must concede such claims as open questions to be resolved through deliberation. To understand a claim as an open question is to recognize that deliberation might confirm or refute the claim. In turn, antislavery’s advocate, if they are to comport themselves reasonably, must critically engage white supremacist justifications of slavery on terms that she can plausibly expect the wider public—if not slavery’s advocate herself—to endorse.

It is precisely this sort of emancipatory political strategy that Douglass takes aim at in his Fifth of July speech:

But I fancy I hear some one of my audience say, it is just in this circumstance that you and your brother abolitionists fail to make a favorable impression on the public mind.

Would you argue more, and denounce less, would you persuade more and rebuke less, your cause would be much more likely to succeed.²⁸

Douglass, in this speech, maintains that “where all is plain there is nothing to be argued.” “That point is conceded already. Nobody doubts it.... The manhood of the slave is conceded.” He denies that reasonableness (‘argue more, denounce less’) is of use to antislavery politics when

²⁶ *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 4.

²⁷ *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 4.

²⁸ “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” 195

confronting putative justifications for the legitimacy of slavery. It is not the ‘light’ of “convincing argument” that is needed, but the “fire” of “scorching irony.”²⁹ The humanity of the enslaved, and the wrongness of slavery, are matters to be insisted, not deliberated, upon; open questions about the human dignity of Black people ought to be *refused*.

In Douglass’ position that, on the issues of slavery and white supremacy, all is plain and there is nothing to be argued, we can distinguish two elements: (1) a refusal to respect the norm of reasonableness in political discourse about the (il)legitimacy of slavery and white supremacy and (2) a declaration that Black people are members of the moral community of the US polity. In this section, we will focus on the grounds for (1), drawing in complementary fashion on the antebellum political writings of Douglass’s fellow Black abolitionist, Martin Delany. In the antebellum writings of Douglass and Delany, we can identify two reasons for the refusal to engage in reasonable deliberation. First, by appeal to the norm of reasonableness, defenders of slavery and white supremacy are able to fix deliberative outcomes in their favor: where a stance on the boundaries of moral community is understood as a claim in need of justification, those invested in systems of slavery and white supremacy can exercise their power to reliably produce justifications for exclusionary boundaries of moral community—conditions of domination produce justifications for claims of inferiority. Second, where the boundaries of moral community are an open question, advocates of slavery and white supremacy can compromise the standing of those whose claim to membership is under interrogation (i.e., Black political actors) by insisting that granting Black political actors standing in such deliberations would amount to begging the question in favor of more expansive boundaries of moral community. As we will see, this is a ‘worry’ to which even white abolitionists were responsive.

²⁹ “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” 195-96

A. Fixing Deliberative Outcomes

Given the picture of antebellum political discourse that Douglass sketches in the letter prefacing *My Bondage and My Freedom*, we can take Douglass's refusal to engage in reasonable deliberation in the Fifth of July speech to center appeals to white supremacist ideology: Douglass refuses to refute the claim that Black people are inferior, and thus not members of the moral community, by addressing the justifications that slavery's advocate advances in defense of the claim. Douglass refuses to do so (in part) because he thinks that once the dispute is framed as a matter of competing justifications, slavery's advocates will be able to exercise the power they wield under conditions of substantial oppression to fix deliberative outcomes in their favor. As an initial motivation for Douglass's refusal, we might observe that comporting ourselves reasonably in the face of white supremacist ideology “risk[s] conferring unmerited dignity” upon the “transparently bad reasons [whites] had for the way they treated blacks,” by “tacitly characterizing the conflict as one in which reasonable people could disagree.”³⁰

Yet, one may insist, if the reasons marshaled in defense of white supremacist ideology by slavery's advocate are really ‘transparently bad,’ the danger that reasonableness presents to antislavery politics must surely be minimal. Premises in general may lead any which way, but here the proper premises will surely vindicate abolition. With some patience and persistence, the right arguments will carry the day for antislavery's advocate in the deliberative sphere. (Our objector would hasten to add: this is not to say that the aims of antislavery politics are achieved once the arguments succeed—slavery's advocate would still have brute force and power to protect the institution.)

³⁰ Myers, *Frederick Douglass*, 50; Bernard Boxill, “Douglass Against the Emigrationists,” in *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bill Lawson and Frank Kirkland (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 42.

A substantial portion of Martin Delany's *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* is devoted to undermining just this thought. Delany maintains that African Americans³¹ have a "natural claim upon the country—claims common to all others of our fellow citizens—natural rights, which may, by virtue of unjust laws, be obstructed, but never can be annulled."³² Delany's contrast between obstruction and annulment might seem to suggest our objector's view: once the obstructions of transparently bad reasons are cleared away, African Americans' claim to citizenship will be vindicated—indeed, there is nothing that could be offered as an adequate justification for annulling this claim.

Yet Delany goes on to contrast this natural claim with the procedure of political deliberation: "But according to the economy that regulates the policy of nations, upon which rests the basis of justifiable claims to all freemen's rights, it may be necessary to take another view of, and enquire into the political claims of colored men."³³ Rights presented as political claims must, on the view with which Delany engages, must be 'justifiable'—they must be presented in terms that one might reasonably expect one's interlocutors to endorse.

The justification for African Americans' political claim to citizenship that Delany considers is "that each person so endowed, shall have made contributions and investments in the country."³⁴ Since "where there is no investment there can be but little interest" in the welfare of the state, the question of "what claims then have colored men, based upon the principles set forth, as fundamentally entitled to citizenship"³⁵ is to be settled by a demonstration of the

³¹ I switch to the term "African American" here to reflect the fact that Delany's natural claim argument concerns specifically those born or otherwise naturalized into the US.

³² Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Bensenville: Lushena Books, 2014 (1852)), 48. Hereafter "*Condition*."

³³ *Condition*, 48

³⁴ *Condition*, 48

³⁵ *Condition* 48-50

contributions made by African Americans to the United States, as soldiers, businesspeople, mechanics, authors, artists, professionals, scholars, and farmers. By enumerating dozens of examples of these contributions, Delany means “to refute the objections urged against us, that we are not useful members of society.”³⁶ In these hundred-some pages of *Condition* (nearly half the text!), then, we can understand Delany as rehearsing a justification for African Americans’ claim to citizenship. These pages exemplify the deliberative norm of reasonableness, as Delany seeks to refute the objections of those who deny this claim by appeal to a principle (‘contribution to the nation’) that he expects his interlocutors would endorse, and which he establishes by appeal to ‘marks and features’—historical evidence of Black people’s ‘investment’ in the US.³⁷ Indeed, Delany suggests that the argument he presents here must, if any argument will, vindicate African Americans’ claim to citizenship:

If such evidence of industry and interest, as has been exhibited in the various chapters on the different pursuits and engagements of colored Americans, do not entitle them to equal rights and privileges in our common country, then indeed, is there nothing to justify the claims of any portion of the American people to the common inheritance of Liberty.³⁸

But, Delany thinks, this in fact amounts to a demonstration that there is no viable possibility of furthering antislavery’s political aims through reasonable deliberation. At the conclusion of his defense of African Americans’ political claim to citizenship, Delany signals a shift in gears:

³⁶ *Condition*, 92

³⁷ Cora Diamond, in her reading of J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals*, encourages us to "look with some serious puzzlement at attempts to establish moral community, or to show it to be absent, through attention to ‘marks and features.’" *The Difficulty of Reality and the Difficulty of Philosophy*,” in *Philosophy and Animal Life*, ed. Stanley Cavell (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 86 endnote 21

³⁸ *Condition*, 145

“We proceed to another view of our condition in the United States.”³⁹ That view takes as its point of departure the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which Delany reproduces in full. The Act, in Delany’s analysis, reduces “every colored person in the United States—save those who carry free papers of emancipation, or bills of sale from former claimants or owners—to a state of relative *slavery*; placing each and every one of us at the *disposal of any and every white* who might choose to *claim* us, and the caprice of any and every upstart knave bearing the title of ‘Commissioner.’”⁴⁰ By legally codifying relations of domination between whites and Blacks that are fundamentally incompatible with Black people’s claim to citizenship, the Act reveals that Black people’s claim to citizenship has not been vindicated at the bar of public opinion. Since the facts that Delany has laid out in the prior hundred pages of *Condition* should, if any facts could, justify such a claim to citizenship, the implication is that no justification which appeals to facts in this way—as ‘marks and features’ that satisfy some criterion for the boundaries of moral community—could vindicate the claim to citizenship of Black people in antebellum political discourse.⁴¹

³⁹ *Condition*, 145. This second reference to “another view” should recall Delany’s initial shift, in Chapter VI, to consideration of “another view”—the political claim defended in the intervening pages. With these parallel references to alternative views, we can understand Delany as stepping in to and out of the position of the antislavery advocate who attempts to pursue her politics by comporting herself reasonably in the deliberative sphere.

⁴⁰ “Political Destiny of the Colored Race” in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 272. Emphasis his. See also *Condition*, 154: “We are slaves in the midst of freedom waiting... for masters to come and lay claim to us, trusting to their generosity, whether or not they will own us and carry us into endless bondage.”

⁴¹ This, surely, is not the *only* purpose of the detailed descriptions of African Americans’ various contributions to the US polity in the first hundred pages of *Condition*. It seems plausible that one other purpose is to demonstrate the viability of Delany’s emigrationist program: that Black people in the US are already perfectly positioned to create their own polity, or contribute to another, elsewhere.

This echoes Douglass's thought when he asks of his audience in the Fifth of July speech: "Is it not astonishing that," given the types of contributions Delany enumerates in *Condition*, "we are called upon to prove that we are men?"⁴² From Douglass's explicit refusal to deliberate over the boundaries of moral community, and from Delany's demonstration of the inadequacy of 'marks and features' justifications for the claim to citizenship, it is apparent that Douglass does not mean that such a proof is so obvious that it should be tedious to spell out. Rather, Douglass suggests that, where the claim in question should be so clearly and plainly settled, we should be suspicious of a demand for 'proof.'

Delany reinforces this suspicion by identifying the role that reasonableness itself plays in compromising antislavery politics responsive to the norm. At the outset of *Condition*, he asserts that "there have in all ages, in almost every nation, existed a nation within a nation... deprived of equal privileges by their rulers."⁴³ In order for such domination to be effective, the "inferiority by nature as distinct races" of the dominated must be "actually asserted" in order "to appease the opposition that might be interposed on their behalf."⁴⁴ That is, natural inferiority is offered as a justification for domination in the face of objections to the legitimacy of that domination. On this picture, the dominating class is responsive to the norm of reasonableness, because it is providing a justification for its stance in the face of a counterclaim.

One would think, then, that the justificatory priority between cases of arbitrary rule and assertions of natural inferiority works in this way: claims of natural inferiority, 'established' (in whatever tenuous fashion) on independent grounds, are put forward to legitimate instances of arbitrary rule. Yet, Delany's analysis of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 suggests that the

⁴² "The Meaning of the Fourth of July for the Negro," 195-96.

⁴³ *Condition*, 11

⁴⁴ *Condition*, 11-12

relationship between arbitrary rule and assertions of natural inferiority is more sinister.

According to Delany, the law enacts a “corruption of blood... by which a person is degraded and deprived of rights common to the enfranchised citizen.”⁴⁵ In particular, the law renders “the colored people of the United States... liable at any time, in any place, and under all circumstances, to be arrested—and upon the claim of any white person, without the privilege, even of making a defense, sent into endless bondage.”⁴⁶ The specific policy laid out in the law reinforces conditions of domination under which any Black person is subject to the arbitrary power of any white person. But in so doing, Delany maintains, the law “stamps us with inferiority—upon us has this law worked *corruption of blood*.”⁴⁷ The political condition of domination produces relations of superiority/inferiority between racialized classes of persons—the appearance of natural inferiority depends upon the political domination it is supposed to justify.

But this circular relation between political domination and natural inferiority does not, in Delany’s eyes, provide antislavery’s advocate with a decisive point in deliberation. Rather, the interlocking character of conditions of political domination and claims of natural inferiority renders both impervious to the modes of intervention offered by reasonable deliberative politics: political domination is justified by claims of natural inferiority which are in turn justified by appeal to conditions that are themselves the product of racist political domination. Elizabeth Anderson captures this interlocking character in a postbellum context when she writes: “Segregation causes patterns of racial inequality that influence the ways racial groups represent one another. These representations, in turn, reinforce practices of segregation and reproduce

⁴⁵ *Condition*, 153, emphasis his.

⁴⁶ *Condition*, 153

⁴⁷ *Condition*, 157

categorical inequality.⁴⁸ The deck is stacked against antislavery's advocate because an attempt to delegitimize racist political domination runs up against the justification of inferiority, while an attempt to refute a claim of inferiority runs up against the reality of racist political domination.

Thus, in laying out his general theory of racist political domination, Delany remarks with poignant ambiguity, "Wherever there is arbitrary rule, there must be, on the part of the dominant classes, superiority be assumed."⁴⁹ The line suggests two readings. First, where a dominant class wields arbitrary power over another class, and takes themselves to do so legitimately, they must suppose that they are superior—assertions of inferiority justify domination. Second, where a dominant class wields arbitrary rule, its members seize a position of superiority over the dominated classes—domination yields the appearance of inferiority. I think that Delany's ambiguity here is intentional: the ambiguity captures the interlocking character of domination and claims of inferiority. The preceding lines of Chapter I capture the domination justified by inferiority direction; Delany's analysis of the Fugitive Slave Act in Chapter XVI as enacting a 'corruption of blood' captures the inferiority justified by domination direction. It thus seems that the interests of white supremacy and slavery will carry the day, because they will exercise domination to produce the appearance of inferiority, which will justify their narrowed boundaries of moral community before the court of public opinion.

One might object to the inevitability of this picture. After all, can't advocates of emancipatory politics point out that *appearances* of inferiority are just so—and often pretty flimsy ones at that? And if the appearances of inferiority are the products of domination, can't we point to this fact to undermine claims of inferiority? There are still plenty of deliberative avenues available to antislavery's advocate.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Anderson, *The Imperative of Integration* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 44.

⁴⁹ *Condition*, 12

Such avenues are certainly available, but this picture is a far cry from the decisive argument that unequivocally demonstrates Black people's claim to moral community. We now have to unveil particular claims of inferiority as products of particular conditions of domination. While some piecemeal engagements will be won, others will be lost. Moreover, even the victories of antislavery's advocate are rendered precarious by reasonableness' command to follow the premises where(ever) they take us. This command forces us to countenance the idea that the right premises might take us elsewhere. An audience which allows that an argument for the rightness of slavery and white supremacy might be just offstage is not an audience that can be relied upon in the face of fire. Sophistry is the cheapest weapon in the arsenal of oppressive institutions.

B. Undermining Standing

It is apparent, then, that adhering to norm of reasonableness can compromise emancipatory politics by enabling oppressive institutions to fix deliberative outcomes through domination which produces the appearance of inferiority, and which is then appealed to in order to justify those very conditions of domination. But Douglass and Delany also maintain that reasonableness can compromise antislavery and antiracist politics by undermining the standing of Black political actors in political deliberation. In particular, they emphasize how the standing of Black political actors is undermined even in abolitionist organizations.

Of the abolitionists' creed, Delany remarks: "It was urged, and it was true, that the colored people were susceptible of all that the whites were, and all that was required was to give them a fair opportunity, and they would prove their capacity... that public opinion could and should be corrected upon this subject."⁵⁰ But Delany observes that the result of this project of

⁵⁰ *Condition*, 26

correcting public opinion through ‘proof’ of capacity (i.e., of establishing membership in the moral community through the demonstration of the proper marks and features) is that:

[W]e find ourselves occupying the very same position in relation to our Anti-Slavery friends, as we do in relation to the pro-slavery part of the community—a mere secondary, underling position, in all our relations to them, and any thing more than this, is not a matter of course affair—it comes not by established anti-slavery custom or right, but like that which emanates from the proslavery portion of the community, by mere sufferance.⁵¹

Unsurprisingly, such organizations fail to achieve the emancipatory ends that they pursue: “We are...still occupying a miserable position in the community, wherever we live.”⁵² Here Delany links the persistence of social relations of racist domination, even in organizations dedicated to their eradication, to a conception of politics centered on proof and demonstration—a politics that is thereby responsive to the norm of reasonableness.

Douglass offers insight into the mechanics of this recapitulation of racist hierarchies in Chapter 23 of *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Joining the ranks of William Lloyd Garrison’s antislavery lecturers, Douglass finds that his audiences view him as “*brand new fact*,” “generally introduced as a ‘*chattel*,’—a ‘*thing*’—a piece of southern ‘*property*’—the chairman assuring the audience that *it* could speak.”⁵³ One might expect that Douglass’s fellow white abolitionists would affirm Douglass’s standing as a participant in public discourse on slavery. Instead, the white abolitionists opt to make use of audiences’ objectification of Douglass, and deploy him as a mere body of testimony, instructing Douglass to “[g]ive us the facts, [for] we will take care of

⁵¹ *Condition*, 26

⁵² *Condition*, 28

⁵³ *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 220. Emphasis his.

the philosophy.”⁵⁴ Where antislavery politics respects the norm of reasonableness by seeking to correct public opinion through demonstrations of equality, Douglass’s role is circumscribed to narrative.

Douglass is, for a time, reduced to a body of testimony on the antislavery lecture circuit because he is positioned to fulfill a particular role in a deliberative context in which the matter is an open question. This particular role, the furnishing of marks and features to which the arguments of antislavery’s white advocates will appeal,⁵⁵ compromises Douglass’ capacity to participate in deliberative politics, insofar as his white interlocutors treat the categories of offering narrative and doing philosophy as mutually exclusive in this context. The acceptance of one’s narrative as legitimate depends on one’s incapacity to philosophize: one can be either the body of testimony or the eloquent advocate, but not both.

But why would one treat narrative and argument as exclusive categories here? Arguments before the court of public opinion must be made by those who have appropriate standing to make them; in this case, those who have appropriate standing are those who are situated within the boundaries of moral community. But Douglass’s claim to moral community is precisely what is being contested in deliberation over slavery, which means that his standing to advance arguments in the antebellum deliberative sphere appears, to much of his audience, uncertain. In the eyes of the white abolitionists who instruct Douglass to leave the philosophy to them, for Douglass to advance arguments against slavery would render the abolitionists vulnerable to accusations of begging the question: Douglass’s arguments should be countenanced only if he has the standing

⁵⁴ *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 220

⁵⁵ “Intended to reorient white readers’ moral compasses, the slave narrative’s political effectiveness hinged on its status as empirical proof.” Nolan Bennett, “To Narrate and Denounce: Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Personal Narrative,” *Political Theory* 44, no. 2 (2016), 245.

to make them, but his standing is precisely the matter at issue, so his audience can't countenance Douglass's arguments until the issue has been resolved. Narrative and argument thus become exclusive categories because it is the narrative of those subjected to slavery and white supremacy that is needed to advance antislavery and antiracism in the deliberative sphere, but, if the abolitionists are going to be 'reasonable' deliberators, it is only those who cannot supply the narrative (whites) who can advance the argument without being accused of begging the question.⁵⁶

Narrative and argument are not only treated by the white abolitionists Douglass works with as exclusive categories, but narrative is understood to be *subordinate* to argument. Douglass's narrative provides the raw materials which the white abolitionists' arguments organize. This hierarchical division of discursive labor lays the groundwork for a broader hierarchical division of labor in predominately white abolitionist organizations, as the white abolitionists, whose recognized standing in the community is secure, take on overarching organizational roles in these organizations. Because such organizations incorporate the same racialized hierarchies they are supposed to resist, their capacity to erode (much less eliminate!) white supremacist ideology and institutions is severely circumscribed.

Douglass and Delany thus argue that reasonable deliberation is counterproductive for the aims of emancipatory politics because: (1) slavery's advocate is able to exploit a connection between claims of inferiority and conditions of domination in order to systematically manipulate the judgments of the court of public opinion in her favor; (2) worries about whether their audience will recognize the standing of Black political actors moves white abolitionists to

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that the assumed opposition between narrative and argument is a point that contemporary critical race theorists have also had to resist. See, for example, Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights* (Harvard University Press, 1992), 47-51.

structure their discursive strategies, and organizations, in ways reflective of white supremacist ideology, severely circumscribing their efficacy. The urgent question, if comporting oneself reasonably under conditions of substantive oppression is counterproductive in this way, is how, if at all, the aims of emancipatory politics can be advanced in political discourse.

1.4 Douglass and Delany: Two Responses to the Critique

In response to their shared critique of reasonable deliberation as a means for combating racist ideology and institutions, Douglass and Delany offer radically different prescriptions. For Douglass, because the norm of reasonableness is a condition of demanding change in antebellum political deliberation, the key is to short-circuit the norm where it compromises antislavery politics. Douglass presents the demand at the core of antislavery—recognition of Black people’s membership in the moral community—through *declaration*, impervious to demands for further justification, without abdicating a general responsibility to reasonableness in deliberation.⁵⁷ For Delany, because the norm of reasonableness is a condition of demanding change in antebellum political deliberation, antislavery cannot advance its aims in this sphere. Douglass’s declarations, Delany thinks, will inevitably be heard by his audience as justifications open to further assessment and dispute. Delany maintains that the norm of reasonableness is so entrenched in the institution of antebellum political deliberation, especially as expressed in white Americans’ esteem for law, that declaration cannot be understood by Douglass’s audience as reflecting the logic of the institution—a viable antislavery politics thus must pursue strategies in other spheres.

a. Douglass’s Declarations

⁵⁷ In connection with declaration, see Bennett’s discussion of denunciation and the recollection of communal attachments in “To Narrate and Denounce: Frederick Douglass and the Politics of the Personal Narrative.” I am indebted to Kimberlé Crenshaw for emphasizing the role of declaration in this connection.

Douglass's strategy in the Fifth of July speech is to seize upon the mechanisms that tilt deliberation in favor of slavery's advocate, and show that recognition of the slave's membership in moral community is conceded in the very exercise of these mechanisms:

Must I undertake to prove that the slave is a man? That point is conceded already.

Nobody doubts it. The slaveholders themselves acknowledge it in the enactments of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the state of Virginia, which, if committed by a black man, (no matter how ignorant he be), subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of these same crimes will subject a white man to the like punishment. What is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual, and responsible being? The manhood of the slave is conceded. It is admitted in the fact that southern statute books are covered with enactments forbidding, under severe fines and penalties, the teaching of the slave to read or write.⁵⁸

The laws that Douglass refers to in this passage are part of the system of racist domination that, in Delany's words, debases Black people "beneath the level of the recognised basis of American citizenship."⁵⁹ Take, for instance, anti-literacy laws: the domination exercised in inhibiting the literacy of slaves enables slavery's advocate to appeal to the apparent intellectual inferiority of the slave ('They aren't our equals; they can't read.'). Indeed, such laws can distract from the plain fact that slaves can read and write—the issue can easily become that such skills were gained 'illegally,' rather than the plain fact to which their skills testify (as if these abilities were witnesses in a trial that had to conform to rules of evidence). Similarly, a regime of racist criminal laws and the severe punishments that accompany it can give the appearance, to a white

⁵⁸ "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," 195

⁵⁹ *Condition*, 153.

audience with the right interests, that there is something from which they need protecting. Blackness is asserted as inferior because it bears the marks of criminality, through laws which are in fact constitutive of the system of domination to which Black people are subjected—what Delany calls ‘corruption of blood.’⁶⁰

Douglass, in the passage above, turns all this on its head. Contrary to the reasonable antislavery advocate, who will insist that Black people meet the criterion of moral community in spite of the apparent marks and features produced by corruption of blood, Douglass maintains that antislavery’s point is conceded in the laws themselves, and that there is thus no need to argue that “the slave is a man” through any appeal to ‘true’ marks and features. In preventing people from learning to read and write, one necessarily acknowledges their capacity to read and write; in subjecting people to punishment for the violation of laws, one necessarily acknowledges their capacity to bear moral responsibility. The aim of these practices may be dehumanization, but one can only attempt to dehumanize one’s fellow human beings. Such laws, implicated in the corruption of blood that undermines the standard ‘reasonable’ antislavery strategy, thus themselves concede antislavery’s stance on the boundaries of moral community.

Slavery’s advocate, of course, can object to the characterization of anti-literacy laws as ‘preventing’ the exercise of a capacity in this way, or reject a conception of punishment that implicates moral agency in this way. That is to say, she can object to the *justification* that Douglass supplies for his claim that “the manhood of the slave is conceded.” It then seems that, in order to conform to the norm of reasonableness, Douglass must supply further argument to defend his characterization of antebellum law as inhibiting and punishing slaves in a way that concedes their membership in moral community. Such a defense would involve asserting that

⁶⁰ Robert Gooding-Williams, “Ideology, Social Practices, Anti-Black Concepts,” (unpublished manuscript)

slaves have capacities which are being inhibited and agency which warrants punishment—but then the whole thing seems to come down marks and features again.

Instead, Douglass plainly declares that “it is enough to affirm the equal manhood of the Negro race.”⁶¹ While he gestures to an appeal to marks and features relevant to moral community by enumerating a list of practices, from planting to writing to thinking to worshiping, in which Black people undeniably engage, he maintains that “[t]he time for such argument has passed.”⁶² Instead, in the realm of political discourse, antislavery advocates should rely on the fact that “[t]here is not a man beneath the canopy of heaven that does not know that slavery is wrong *for him*.”⁶³

That every person sees that slavery is wrong for her, and that every person thus sees that she is a member of the moral community, suggests to Douglass that those in the court of public opinion “have a sense of justice, though they may not consult it often and appropriately.”⁶⁴ This grounds, for Douglass, a discursive strategy which aims at the recovery of moral common sense. Douglass often appeals to common sense in order to ground his political critiques, particularly in the context of law. Of *Scott v. Sanford*, he remarks: “We can appeal from this hell-black judgment of the Supreme Court, to the court of common sense and common humanity.”⁶⁵ And in advocating for an antislavery reading of the US Constitution, Douglass maintains that “the constitutionality of slavery can be made out only by disregarding the plain and common-sense

⁶¹ “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” 195-96.

⁶² “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” 196.

⁶³ “The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro,” 196

⁶⁴ Boxill, “Douglass Against the Emigrationists,” 41-42

⁶⁵ Frederick Douglass, “The Dred Scott Decision,” in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Taylor, vol. 2 (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 411-12.

reading of the Constitution.”⁶⁶ These appeals to common sense are meant to combat what Douglass calls the “moral blindness of the American people.”⁶⁷ Douglass’s reference to ‘moral blindness’ suggests that what it is at issue is a matter of insensitivity on the part of his audience; the shape of the intervention involves making his audience sensitive to something already present to them.⁶⁸ Two characteristics of common sense make it a strong candidate for grounding a transition from insensitivity to sensitivity. First, we can understand common sense as “insurgent,” persisting in the absence of recognition by Douglass’s audience.⁶⁹ Second, we can understand common sense as “the domain of simple, quotidian determinations and basic moral precepts, of truths that should be self-evident to all,” and thus plainly accessible to Douglass’s audience.⁷⁰

As a matter of common sense, one is brought to “see the plain moral truth” that anti-literacy laws inhibit the capacities of slaves and that laws with severe punishments ascribe moral agency to those subjected to them.⁷¹ This contrasts with the mode of deliberative inquiry, on which Douglass would inquire after what the law says and its empirical effects, determine through this inquiry that the law inhibits capacities, and then infer that those who are being inhibited by the law are members of the moral community because the capacities which the law inhibits fall under the criterion of membership in moral community. Instead, if acknowledging that anti-literacy laws inhibit capacities and that Black people are members of the moral community are matters of moral common sense, one comes to such acknowledgement all at

⁶⁶ Frederick Douglass, “The Constitution of the United States: Is It Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?,” in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor, vol. 2 (New York: International Publishers, 1950), 477.

⁶⁷ “The Dred Scott Decision,” 416

⁶⁸ José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁶⁹ David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (AK Press, 2009), 213.

⁷⁰ Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 3.

⁷¹ Boxill, “Douglass Against the Emigrationists,” 42.

once. In order to understand anti-literacy laws as inhibiting the capacities of slaves one must already recognize slaves as members of the moral community, and the recognition of slaves as members of the moral community is itself achieved through recognizing, for instance, anti-literacy laws as inhibiting the capacities of slaves. The idiom of ‘coming to see’ (or ‘cultivating sensitivity’) contrasts with a process of piecewise inference. Whereas the latter is a matter of coming to discover further things, the former is a matter of coming to acknowledge something already present. Acknowledgement here involves a shift in attitude in which one becomes sensitive to anti-literacy laws *as* inhibiting, rather than a shift in which one discovers that anti-literacy laws *turn out to be* the sort of thing that inhibit capacities of those subject to them, as if this were some further fact about anti-literacy laws which one could intelligibly deny while still having a grip on what anti-literacy laws are and how one goes about enforcing them. The failure here is not rectified by supplying further facts; it is rectified by bringing one to see things as they already are.⁷²

According to Boxill, Douglass catalyzes this recovery of moral common sense through a project of moral suasion:

Sometimes, with our connivance, our feelings enable us to ignore that we are acting for transparently bad reasons. Moral suasion involves techniques for manipulating these feelings and consequently for redirecting our attention to the obvious errors that we contrive not to see. Such techniques include eloquence, sarcasm, wit, mockery, and

⁷² Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen, “Soul-Blindness, Police Orders and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Rancière,” *Political Theory* 44, no. 6 (2016), 741-45. The distinction between knowing and acknowledging made here draws on Cavell: see “Knowing and Acknowledging” in *Must We Mean What We Say* and “Acknowledgment and Avoidance,” in *The Claim of Reason*. See also the discussion of “innate democratic dignity” as a “right to be seen,” in Nick Bromell, “Democratic Indignation: Black American Thought and the Politics of Dignity,” *Political Theory* 41, no. 2 (2013), 302.

mimicry, and in the pacific part of his career as orator and abolitionist Douglass used them all to try to embarrass and shame his audiences and to manipulate their feelings to make them see the plain moral truths that their pride and greed and vanity had enabled them to ignore.⁷³

I would add that, in light of Douglass's critique of reasonableness, it is not just matters of 'feeling' that are understood to interfere in recognition of plain moral truths, but also matters of reason. ('We need to figure out if *those* people satisfy *these* criteria.') Moral suasion is thus not an intervention against irrational ('emotional') interference with rational processes by arational means (eloquence, sarcasm, wit, etc.), but rather a project of clearing away everything—be it a matter of feeling or reason—that prevents one from acknowledging plain moral truth.

The mechanism of moral suasion is especially vivid when we consider the Fifth of July as Douglass's declaration of his own membership in moral community before his predominately white (and predominately antislavery) audience. At the podium Douglass enacts eloquence, sarcasm, wit, mockery, mimicry, and, indeed at times, reasonableness; he brings his audience to feel (one must imagine) embarrassment and shame; he stands before his audience as a member of the moral community-- a fact that could only be denied through the most radical moral insensitivity. But it would be perverse to characterize what Douglass is doing as exhibiting marks and features and inviting his audience to infer that he is a member of the moral community, as if there were some gap between what he is doing at the podium and what constitutes membership in the moral community. Douglass is, rather, *declaring* himself a member of the moral community. Douglass is, at the podium, exercising his membership in such a way as to bring his audience to see what he is doing as such exercise. To stand before Douglass

⁷³ "Douglass Against the Emigrationists," 42

in this way is to already concede his membership in the moral community. Douglass short-circuits the question of his standing by seizing the podium—to question whether Douglass has the standing to do so amounts to a failure to recognize what Douglass is doing as the exercise of his membership in moral community. What remains is to bring his audience to see that what he is doing is such exercise—it is not a matter of justifying such exercise by appeal to something beyond the exercise itself. In declaration, Douglass thus takes a stance of *insistence* upon his membership in the moral community, rather than of *inquiry*.

One might still ask, at this stage, whether Douglass is in fact refusing to be reasonable when he declares his membership in the moral community. After all, the claim that Black people are members of the moral community is a (decisive!) reason to abolish slavery and other institutions of white supremacy.

But what is at issue in antebellum political discourse, Douglass thinks, is the claim that Black people are members of the moral community. According to Douglass (as noted above), not only slavery, but also the enslaved, are on trial before the court of public opinion. And slavery's advocate alleges that Black people are not members of the moral community because they lack the marks and features requisite for such membership. According to view on the role of reasonableness in emancipatory politics which Douglass targets, when faced with a challenge to his membership in the moral community, Douglass ought to 'argue and persuade more' with his 'logic, reason, and words,' because, if he does so, he is likely to sway public opinion in his favor. But Douglass, for the reasons presented above, thinks that such a political strategy will not achieve its desired aims. Instead, in the face of denials of his membership in the moral community grounded in justificatory appeals to requisite marks and features, Douglass declares his membership without seeking to reasonably address the arguments the white supremacist

advances in opposition. The central characteristic of declaration here is that it advances a stance while refusing to engage in a further procedure of justification-- through declaration Douglass marks where he will reason with slavery's advocate no further. This refusal, in turn, asks of his audience to understand why Douglass will reason with slavery's advocate no further: this is because there is no further *fact* which justifies Douglass's membership in the moral community, which he would have to evince in order to continue to reason with his interlocutor. In recognizing that there is no such further fact, Douglass's audience comes to recognize him as a member of the moral community-- to take Douglass's declaration as such is thus to take him as a member of the moral community.

It is worth noting that Douglass's audience in the Fifth of July speech is generally composed of supporters of the antislavery cause. We can thus take Douglass as modelling for his audience what he thinks is a more effective discursive strategy for antislavery organizations. This strategy, moreover, plainly has implications for the structure of antislavery organizations. Douglass seizes the podium for himself; no white abolitionist can do this for him. A declaratory discursive strategy against white supremacy, then, depends centrally on capacities which only Black political actors can exercise-- white political actors cannot enact the membership in the moral community of Black political actors for them. Insofar as Douglass's audience incorporates the declaratory model he puts on offer, then, their organizations will be fundamentally structured around Black political agents, and thus Black political agency.

Douglass thus sees common sense moral truths articulated by declarations as the ground for the discursive arm of a viable antislavery politics, because it offers an alternative to reasonable political deliberation on the fundamental matter of membership in moral community. In declaring his membership, and that of Black people, in the moral community, Douglass

signals a refusal to subject the boundaries of moral community to the norm of reasonableness, motivating this refusal by pointing to the way in which the justifications for claims that he is excluded from moral community in fact presuppose his membership in the community. This suggests that the shape of the problem is a matter of recovery of common sense moral truth, rather than discovery of moral truths in need of determination by inquiry. Where the latter is epitomized in Taney's question, "[W]hether the class of persons described in the plea in abatement compose a portion of this people, and are constituent members of this sovereignty?", the former is epitomized in Douglass's declaration, "The manhood of the slave is conceded."

b. Delany's Objection

Douglass's discursive strategy depends upon a notion of moral common sense accessible through moral clarity, rather than deliberative inquiry. The resolution of certain questions, such as the boundaries of moral community, is a matter of leading others to a recovery of an insurgent common sense—i.e., of coming to see plain moral truths aright. Delany, at times, seems to share Douglass's endorsement of antislavery politics grounded in common sense. In leveling his criticism of McLean's jury instructions in *Giltner v. Gorham*,⁷⁴ Delany appeals to what "moral philosophy teaches, as common sense dictates...." for "in the position assumed by Judge McLean, common sense is set at naught, and philosophy at defiance."⁷⁵ The wrongness of McLean's jury instructions is clear, according to Delany, from common sense reflection on plain

⁷⁴ Giltner, a slave catcher, filed suit against Gorham and 6 other defendants after a crowd in Marshall, Michigan prevented Giltner from arresting the Crosswhite family, who had previously escaped from slavery in Kentucky. Members of the town also subsequently helped the Crosswhites escape to Canada. The jury found in favor of Giltner and awarded him substantial damages. According Delany's remarks in his July 14 letter to Douglass, McLean appears to have instructed the jury not to allow any opinions about the moral status of slavery to inform their deliberations in the case.

⁷⁵ "Letter to Douglass, July 14, 1848," in Delany, *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, 114.

moral truths. And, Delany thinks, McLean arrives at his morally noxious conclusion because he holds that plain moral truths cannot impinge upon the procedures of legal deliberation:

“[McLean] did not once express his abhorrence of slavery, but modestly evaded commitment on that point, by simply saying, ‘Whatever may be our feelings,’ and so forth, ‘the law’ is thus and so.”⁷⁶ Moreover, in his discussion of a natural claim to citizenship in *Condition*, Delany seems to have the makings of a declaratory strategy similar to the one Douglass models in his Fifth of July speech: as noted above, he describes such claims as ‘invulnerable to annulment,’ which suggests that such claims cannot be overturned through deliberative inquiry.

But, for Delany, the lesson drawn from the critique of reasonableness is not that antislavery needs an alternative discursive strategy for short-circuiting the norm of reasonableness. Rather, the lesson is that the most viable antislavery strategy is emigration: Black people should leave the United States and form their own polity elsewhere.⁷⁷ This lesson implies that a viable antislavery politics must, Delany thinks, ultimately withdraw from the sphere of antebellum US political discourse.

While Delany does not offer an explicit rejection of Douglass’s alternative discursive strategy, we can piece together a criticism of Douglass’s strategy from Delany’s antebellum writings. Appeals to moral common sense cannot short-circuit the norm of reasonableness in antebellum political discourse because the norm of reasonableness constrains the shape of intelligible political discourse. Douglass’s declaration thus cannot be heard by his audience but as a claim responsible to the norm of reasonableness. For Delany, this constraint on antebellum political discourse emerges most clearly in legal decisions such as *Giltner v. Gorham*. While what is wrong with McLean’s decision in this case is just that he refuses to address moral

⁷⁶ “Letter to Douglass, July 14, 1848,” 113

⁷⁷ *Condition*, 158-59

considerations external to the law, this same fact renders antebellum political discourse impervious to Douglass's attempt at common sense intervention.

We can bring Delany's worry into view by considering a presupposition built into Douglass's declarative strategy for establishing his standing in antebellum political discourse. In seizing the podium, Douglass exercises the capacities of a member of the moral community in order to compel his audience to recognize him as a member. This strategy crucially assumes that exercise of the capacities relevant to membership in the moral community does not depend on recognition of an agent's standing to exercise those capacities, which itself turns on recognition of membership in the moral community.

But, in some contexts, the exercise of capacities does seem to depend on recognition of an agent's standing to exercise them. For example, in at least some legal contexts, one has the capacity to sue in virtue of having her standing to sue recognized by the relevant authority.⁷⁸ This is a point especially salient in legal discourse at the time Douglass and Delany are writing. In *Scott v. Sanford*, Scott is deprived of the capacity to sue because he lacks the standing to do so. Scott lacks the standing to sue because the Court determines that he is not a citizen of the United States. It would not have been intelligible to the Court for Scott to maintain that he is a citizen of the United States *because* he has the capacity to sue. Scott's assertion that he is able to sue would be understood as a claim in need of justification by appeal to his standing to do so—insisting before the Court that he has the capacity to sue when his standing is challenged would beg the question.

The Delany-inspired worry here is that the court of public opinion will understand whatever capacity Douglass invokes to establish his membership in the moral community as

⁷⁸ Mark V. Tushnet, "New Law of Standing a Plea for Abandonment," *Cornell Law Review* 62 (1977), 665.

dependent on standing in this second way. If so, then Douglass's audience will think that Douglass has the capacity to make moral demands on members of the moral community only if he has the standing to make such demands. Because the capacities in question are those exercised by members of the moral community, whether one has the standing to exercise them depends on whether one is a member of the moral community. But then it will appear to Douglass's audience that he claims to be a member of the moral community because he is exercising capacities that only those who are members of the moral community are capable of exercising. His audience will then insist that he is begging the question.

The crucial moment here is that in which Douglass's *declaration* that he is a member of the moral community becomes a *claim*, in need of justification, that he is a member. This transformation occurs because Douglass's audience understands the capacities which Douglass purports (in their eyes) to exercise in making his declaration as capacities that depend on standing in the way that the capacity to sue depends on having the standing to sue: if one lacks standing, one lacks the capacity. Because some do deny that Douglass is a member of the moral community, and thus deny that Douglass has the standing to make moral demands on its members, the court of public opinion must determine whether Douglass has the capacity to make such demands by assessing the justification for this denial of standing. For Douglass to insist that he is a member of the moral community, and thus has standing, *because* he has the capacity to make moral demands on members of the community is, in the eyes of the court, to beg the question. This amounts to a reinsertion of the norm of reasonableness at the crucial moment: the exercise of the capacity must be justified by an appeal to standing, and the appeal to standing must be justified by further considerations that establish one as a member of the moral

community. The problems of corruption of blood and undermined standing seep back in because Douglass's audience can only understand what Douglass is doing in this way.

For Delany, antebellum legal discourse in particular seems impervious to appeals to plain moral common sense. Delany denounces "litigation for protection a sham, and all judicial proceedings a farce, that should immediately be abolished," since this imperviousness ensures that legal "combat between Liberty and Slavery in this country must always terminate in favor of the latter."⁷⁹

One might respond on Douglass's behalf that, while Delany's argument might call for pessimism in the sphere of legal deliberation, this does not entail that Douglass's strategy is compromised in the wider sphere of political deliberation—the 'court of public opinion' to which Douglass refers to is merely a metaphor.

But Delany would insist that the metaphor of the 'court of public opinion' points precisely to the way in which the shape of antebellum political deliberation recapitulates the assumptions of antebellum legal deliberation:

[T]here are no people who ever lived, love [sic] their country and obey their laws as the Americans. Their country is their Heaven—their Laws their Scriptures—and the decrees of their magistrates obeyed as the fiat of God.⁸⁰

Delany's observation is driven by remarks like McLean's in *Giltner v. Gorham*, that "[i]n the law is found the only safe rule by which controversies between man and man can be decided."⁸¹

⁷⁹ "Letter to Douglass, July 14, 1848," 113-15.

⁸⁰ *Condition*, 155. Douglass makes a similar observation in his Fifth of July speech, decrying church leaders who "deliberately taught us, against the example of the Hebrews, and against the remonstrance of the Apostles, *that we ought to obey man's law before the law of God*" (201-202). Yet for Douglass, the aim here is pressure church leaders to advance the moral clarity of antislavery and antiracism, since (here Douglass quotes Albert Barnes): "There is no power out of the church that could sustain slavery an hour, if it were not sustained in it" (201).

⁸¹ 4 McLean 402

But if antebellum legal deliberation transforms declarations of moral common sense into claims in need of justification, then we should expect that a culture of political deliberation fundamentally informed by the shape of legal deliberation will also engage in such alchemy. If so, then attempts at the recovery of moral common sense by appeal to moral clarity will not be intelligible as such to most participants in antebellum political discourse. The environment of antebellum political discourse is inhospitable, on Delany's view, to the recovery of moral common sense.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown why Douglass and Delany think that the norm of reasonableness can actively undermine the aims of emancipatory politics, through the fixing of deliberative outcomes and the undermining of standing. I have shown that Douglass and Delany draw different conclusions for the viability of alternative discursive strategies for emancipatory politics, which turn on their differing perspectives on the legibility of appeals to moral clarity and common sense in antebellum US legal and political discourse.

As the epigraphs to this chapter should suggest, I think that Douglass's and Delany's critique of reasonableness presents a problem of urgency for us. The norm of reasonableness exerts great influence in our political culture (as Obama's remarks illustrate), and we are confronted with attempts to narrow the boundaries of moral community that clothe themselves in appeals to this norm (as Flynn's tweet reveals). But one might insist that white supremacy and chattel slavery in the antebellum US is far too 'special' and 'distant' of a case from which to draw any conclusion about what the norm of reasonableness can, or cannot, do for emancipatory politics animating our own moment.

Even if we were to concede this point, one scholarly upshot of this chapter is that we can partially explain Douglass and Delany's divergent strategies for emancipatory politics in the 1850s. As Gooding-Williams has observed, ever since Du Bois penned "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,"⁸² the typology of assimilationism (Douglass) and separatism (Delany) has served as the dominant framework in the history of African American political thought.⁸³ The dominance of this distinction can instill these categories with an aura which suggests that they are fundamental, as if one is first an assimilationist or a separatist, and that it is this commitment which informs the rest of one's antiracist politics.

The analysis of Douglass and Delany's divergent responses to the critique of reasonableness above helps to puncture this aura, and contributes to the "healthy skepticism" Gooding-Williams advocates in response to attempts to schematize the history of African American political thought.⁸⁴ In their political thought, Douglass and Delany's shared point of departure is the question, "What kind of politics should African Americans conduct to counter white supremacy?"⁸⁵ The degree to which their emancipatory politics approximate the Du Boisian ideal types of assimilationism and separatism follows from their assessments of the viability of particular political strategies. Douglass, for example, sees a strategy for pursuing emancipatory politics before the antebellum court of public opinion, while Delany denies that any such strategy is viable.⁸⁶ Both see this domain of political discourse as one potential avenue

⁸² *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Chapter 3.

⁸³ *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, esp. 5-9.

⁸⁴ *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 7

⁸⁵ *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 1

⁸⁶ The point here is not that the assimilationist stance is the default, and that one is a separatist insofar as one thinks 'assimilationist' strategies are not viable. This objection smuggles the categories back into the ground floor of the analysis. The point is that Douglass and Delany are both in the business of resisting white supremacy and slavery by whatever means they can make use of, and their assessments of the means that they can make use of differ.

for resistance, and both think that the norm of reasonableness which governs it presents a problem for resistance. But this then suggests that the point of emphasis should be on the assessments—for example, of the viability of pursuing antislavery politics in a sphere of discourse dominated by the norm of reasonableness—which will be just as dynamic as the political situation to which they correspond, rather than the static ideal types to which the assessments will correspond with varying degrees of ‘faithfulness.’⁸⁷

Framing Douglass and Delany’s critique of reasonableness in this way, moreover, makes clear how to respond to our objector. The question of how to resist white supremacy is still an especially urgent question for us, deliberation before our own court of public opinion is still an especially salient avenue for us, and the norm of reasonableness still governs conduct in the court of public opinion. In the face of calls for dialogue with those who advocate fear of members of our moral community as ‘rational,’ it is urgent for us to examine the extent to which the norm of reasonableness contributes productively to emancipatory political aims.

In this connection, the interpretation of Douglass and Delany’s antebellum political thought that I have provided here offers three central claims which should inform the emancipatory politics of our moment:⁸⁸

1. Comporting oneself reasonably when engaging in political discourse with oppressive ideology can be counterproductive under conditions of substantial oppression. Reasonable engagement with oppressive ideology opens the way for proponents of such ideology to (a) manipulate

⁸⁷ Take the trajectory of Delany’s political career: from antebellum separatist to major in the Union army to candidate for Lieutenant Governor in South Carolina to judge and back again to advocate for separatism. It is unclear why we should think that the categories of separatist and assimilationist render this trajectory particularly lucid.

⁸⁸ I do not mean to suggest that these three claims exhaustively characterize the interpretation above.

deliberative inquiry into the ideology's claims and (b) undermine the standing of political actors targeted by the ideology.

2. To the extent that a viable emancipatory politics must engage in the political discourse of its community, we should consider strategies which short-circuit the problems posed by comporting oneself reasonably in the face of oppressive ideology. Douglass's (relative) optimism on the possibility of advancing antislavery in the US is grounded, in part, in the alternative discursive strategy of declaration: the insistence upon one's membership in a community, with the aim of bringing one's audience to recognize one's membership (as opposed to bringing one's audience to affirm justifications for one's membership).

3. One important constraint on the viability of alternative discursive strategies for an emancipatory politics is the extent to which such strategies will be intelligible to one's audience *as alternatives* to comporting oneself reasonably in the face of oppressive ideology. Delany's pessimism is grounded, in part, in the seeming inevitability that Douglass's audience will hear his declarations as claims in need of justification. Because reasonableness is a norm deeply engrained in our political culture, it is important to ask whether the norm is likely to distort a particular alternative discursive strategy that we may employ in advancing emancipatory political aims.

Chapter 2: On Plantation Politics: Citizenship and Antislavery Resistance in Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*

2.1 Introduction

The question ‘who counts as a member of the polity’ is both a fundamental matter in political philosophy and an urgent issue in American political culture today. As a matter of political philosophy, the answer to this question determines to whom the polity owes distinctive obligations of justice. As an urgent issue today, exclusionary conceptions of membership are marshaled in order to deprive immigrants of essential social goods, as in the Trump administration’s proposed rule to penalize green card applicants for accessing social services like SNAP and Medicaid.¹ There is a role for political philosophers and theorists in combating these harmful policies and the exclusionary conceptions of political membership that underlie them: we can, and should, articulate alternative, inclusive conceptions of political membership, furnishing the normative arsenal of emancipatory politics.²

In this chapter, I show that we can look to Black abolitionist political thought for conceptions of political membership that bear emancipatory potential today. In particular, I argue that Frederick Douglass articulates a conception of American citizenship specifically crafted to combat oppressive exclusion from the political sphere. For Douglass, what it is to be a citizen is to enact a commitment to the fundamental principles of a polity.³ Douglass argues that a

¹ Salonee Bhaman, “Perspective | How President Trump’s New Immigration Rule Could Erode the Social Safety Net,” *Washington Post*, August 14, 2019, sec. Made by History Perspective Perspective Discussion of news topics with a point of view, including narratives by individuals regarding their own experiences, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2019/08/14/how-president-trumps-new-immigration-rule-could-erode-social-safety-net/>.

² Of course, emancipatory movements do not always aim at making extant polities more inclusive. Sometimes the task is to break with a hopelessly oppressive polity. I am not arguing that emancipatory movements ought to prioritize efforts to make extant polities more inclusive— this question depends on many contextual factors. Rather, I am arguing that the conception of political membership I develop here is particularly apt for that aim, when the aim is adopted.

³ This generic conception of citizenship is itself a particular version of a more generic conception of social relations — in particular, social relations that bear substantial responsibilities and rights— as constituted by enacted commitments. See Mara G. Marin, *Connected by Commitment : Oppression and Our Responsibility to Undermine It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017).

commitment to resist tyranny and oppression is the fundamental principle of the American polity. Thus, according to Douglass, what it is to be an American citizen is to enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression.

Douglass, and other Black abolitionists in the antebellum period, theorized about citizenship in the context of efforts to undermine slavery and white supremacy in the US. Citizenship was, in this period, an underdetermined, contested concept in American political thought. Just after the Civil War, former congressman Horace Binney observed that “The word citizen is found ten times at least in the Constitution of the United States, and no definition of it is given anywhere.”⁴ For abolitionists who, like Douglass after his break with Garrisonians, believed that any viable antislavery movement must avail itself of American political institutions, it was essential to defend the standing of enslaved and free Black people to participate in these institutions in order to further emancipatory aims.

One important dimension of abolitionists’ defense of the political standing of enslaved and free Black people is birthright: if someone is born within a polity’s territory, then she is a citizen. For instance in their “Address of the New York State Convention of Colored Citizens, to the People of the State,” participants in the 1840 Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York declare: “We are native born citizens of the state-- immediate descendants of men, held, not long since, as slaves.”⁵ Through declarations like these, free Black people “asserted their rights as ‘native born citizens’ and opposed all distinctions among state citizens ‘growing out of complexion.’”⁶ This dimension of abolitionist thought on citizenship ultimately crystallizes in the Fourteenth Amendment: “All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject

⁴ Eric Foner, *The Second Founding : How the Civil War and Reconstruction Remade the Constitution* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2019), 5.

⁵ Philip Foner and George Walker, “Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York, August 18-20, 1840,” in *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 18.

⁶ Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens : A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 63.

to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.”

But an equally important dimension of antebellum Black political thought grounded citizenship in participation in the social and political life of the community. In the very same address, participants in the 1840 New York convention maintain they are American citizens with rightful claim to its “prerogatives” because “In times when patient toil and hardy industry were demanded, it will thus be seen, we have ever been present and active.... In times of peril has our aid been called for, and our services as promptly given.”⁷ Martin Delany similarly discusses both “natural,” birthright justifications for citizenship and “political,” participatory justifications for free Black people’s citizenship in his 1852 pamphlet, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*.⁸ Douglass, I argue below, elaborates this participatory, republication conception of citizenship to advance the even more radical claim that enslaved Black people in the US are already American citizens, because they are engaged in political resistance against slavery and white supremacy.⁹

Political theorists and philosophers addressing issues of migration today take up this connection between participation in the social and political life of a community and membership. Joseph Carens maintains that “[p]eople who live and work and raise their families in a society

⁷ Foner and Walker, “Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York, August 18-20, 1840,” 21. Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, 89. The 1840 address ultimately grounds free Blacks’ rightful claim to the prerogatives of citizenship neither in birthright nor in participation, but rather in their “common humanity” (22). The appeal to common humanity, I think, is ultimately meant to ground enslaved Black people’s standing as citizens and claim to its prerogatives; this is the same motivation, I contend, for Douglass’s radical republican account of citizenship.

⁸ Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Bensenville: Lushena Books, 2014), 47–48. Delany is ultimately pessimistic that any form of justification will suffice to secure the political standing of enslaved and free Black people in the US, but the fundamental issue driving Delany’s pessimism is the idea that polities must confer citizenship on persons on the basis of justification, not any particular grounds one might attribute to citizenship.

⁹ Why couldn’t birthright ground this more radical claim? While such an argument would be possible in principle, Jones observes that it was built into the logic of birthright in the early 19th century US that one’s status as property preempts one’s claim to birthright citizenship (5). We might think this is echoed in order of the 13th and 14th Amendments: first we must abolish slavery, and only then can we extend citizenship to all on the basis of birthright. The kind of activity that constitutes citizenship on Douglass’s account, by contrast, cannot be annulled in this way: one’s resistance against tyranny and oppression qualifies as such even (and perhaps especially) when one is subjected to radical forms of subordination.

become members, whatever their legal status.” Their standing as members who participate in the life of the polity entails that “[i]t would be wrong to deport them... even if we have good reasons for wanting to make them leave and trying to prevent others like them from coming.”¹⁰ Sarah Song similarly argues principles of social membership and fair play (that one contributes to a polity through (e.g.) labor) justify the extension of political standing and rights to temporary migrants, permanent non-citizen residents, and unauthorized migrants.¹¹

Douglass’s radical republican account of citizenship is of interest against this contemporary backdrop because he argues social and political activity does not simply justify the extension of some political standing and some rights. Rather, such activity *constitutes* us as *full members*—citizens— with a justified claim to the full array of civil and political rights.¹² Douglass’s thought on political membership in the 1850s provides a framework through which we can examine a maximally robust account of radical republican citizenship. In particular, it is an account on which my status as a citizen is not conferred on me by the polity, but is rather constituted through my exercise of political agency. This is not to say that my status as a citizen is wholly detached from my relationship to other members of the polity. For Douglass, the exercise of my political agency is citizenship-constituting when, through its exercise, I cultivate emancipatory social bonds— bonds of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism— with others. But crucially for Douglass, the form of membership grounded in such exercises of political agency in concert with one another is not a normative backstop for birthright citizenship; the proper exercise of political agency makes us members in full.

In section 2.2, I show that this conception of citizenship is implicit in Douglass’s claim that

¹⁰ Joseph H. Carens, *The Ethics of Immigration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 150.

¹¹ Sarah Song, *Immigration and Democracy* (New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2019), 173–88; Sarah Song, “The Significance of Territorial Presence and the Rights of Immigrants,” in *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*, ed. Sarah Fine and Lea Ypi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 225–48.

¹² As Jones observes, for many Black abolitionists, “citizenship was said to be a gateway to rights.” Jones, *Birthright Citizens*, 11.

slaves possess a political ‘right of rebellion.’ In section 2.3, I show that Douglass’s conception of citizenship as an enacted commitment is of a piece with a wider picture on which important social relations generally are constituted by enacted commitments. In section 2.4, I argue that American citizenship is constituted through a distinctive variety of resistance against tyranny and oppression, which I call political resistance. In section 2.5, I argue that resistance is political when it cultivates bonds of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism (what I call emancipatory social bonds) among those engaged in resistance. Douglass demonstrates that many forms of antislavery resistance performed by slaves on the plantation cultivate emancipatory social bonds; it is for this reason that, on Douglass’s view, enslaved and free Black people are paradigmatic American citizens (and white slaveholders stand at the margins of American citizenship).

The emancipatory potential of Douglass’s conception of citizenship consists in two points. First, the kind of activity through which one constitutes herself as a citizen— political resistance — is something that people subject to oppression engage in ubiquitously. Second, the performance of political resistance helps to reinforce a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression as the fundamental normative principle of the American polity. These points suggest that Douglass’s radical republican conception of citizenship avoids charges of hierarchy and subordination to which traditional republican accounts are liable.¹³ Citizenship is one fulcrum by which Douglass seeks to radically transform the normative foundation of the American polity, and thereby its self-understanding of political inclusion. This transformative potential also implies that Douglass’s radical republican conception of is relevant beyond the American context: wherever political actors resist tyranny and oppression in concert with one another, Douglass sketches a path through which a polity can be reforged in the active reconstitution of its

¹³ “[I]n the classical republics, the freedom of citizens *presupposed* the unfreedom of slaves.” Alexander Gourevitch, *From Slavery to the Cooperative Commonwealth : Labor and Republican Liberty in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 14. Emphasis his.

membership.

2.2 Citizenship as Enacted Commitment

Douglass explicitly declares that Black Americans are already American citizens in an 1853 address, “The Claims of Our Common Cause,” at the Colored National Convention in Rochester: “[W]e declare that we are, and of right we ought to be *American Citizens*.”¹⁴ The speech, addressed to “the People of the United States” (and in particular white members of the polity), insists throughout that members of the convention are addressing other Americans as “fellow-citizens.”¹⁵ The speech, moreover, situates this declaration of citizenship in relation to a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression (“resistance against tyranny is obedience to God”)¹⁶ and the Declaration of Independence (“we are American citizens... by the principles of the Declaration of Independence”).¹⁷ But read in isolation, “The Claims of Our Common Cause” does not unambiguously illustrate the account of citizenship and declaration that I attribute to Douglass. The connection between resistance against tyranny and citizenship is intermingled with claims to citizenship on the basis of birthright (“By birth, we are American citizens”)¹⁸ and the conferral of legal rights.¹⁹ The variety of conceptions of citizenship we find in this address reflects its status as a product of a convention.

But we can crystalize the strand of Douglass’s thought concerning republican citizenship and declaration by situating the declaration of citizenship we find in “The Claims of Our Common Cause” in the context of *My Bondage and My Freedom* and Douglass’s Fifth of July speech. Together, these moments in Douglass’s post-Garrisonian thought articulate a picture of

¹⁴ Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 264. His emphasis.

¹⁵ Douglass, 261, 263.

¹⁶ Douglass, 260.

¹⁷ Douglass, 264.

¹⁸ Douglass, 264.

For an extensive study of the role of birthright citizenship in abolitionist thought, see Jones, *Birthright Citizens*.

¹⁹ Douglass, *Frederick Douglass*, 265.

American citizenship as constituted by the enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression.

In a crucial passage in *Bondage*, Douglass argues that the hypocrisy of slaveholders justifies a right of rebellion for slaves:

The slaveholder, kind or cruel, is a slaveholder still—the every hour violator of the just and inalienable rights of man; and he is, therefore every hour silently whetting the knife of vengeance for his own throat. He never lisps a syllable in commendation of the fathers of this republic, nor denounces any attempted oppression of himself, without inviting the knife to his own throat, and asserting the rights of rebellion for his own slaves.²⁰

In this passage, Douglass asserts directly that, insofar as slaveholders affirm the principles of the American polity, they assert the right of their slaves to revolt. In this section, I argue that the right of slaves to rebel stems, for Douglass, from their standing as American citizens. For Douglass, enslaved and free Black people in the US are American citizens because they enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. A commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, Douglass thinks, is a founding principle of the American polity, which advocates of emancipatory politics can draw on in reforging a more just polity.

An immediate worry for this interpretation is that the right of rebellion Douglass asserts here isn't obviously a claim on the American polity. One might say that Douglass is gesturing to a reversionary right to forcefully break from a polity that fails to promote, and indeed radically harms, one's interests. (The right is 'reversionary' because, on a Lockean framework, we'd think of its invocation as a reversion to a state of nature.) Such a right wouldn't make a claim on the American polity, because its enactment would circumvent the political institutions of the US.

Against this interpretation, note that Douglass emphasizes that slaveholders' *hypocrisy*

²⁰ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 165.

justifies slaves' right of rebellion. Douglass's emphasis on the hypocrisy of slaveholders in this passage is of a piece with his general emphasis in the period on the hypocrisy of white America, as we see for instance in the Fifth of July speech:

I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.²¹

In decrying the hypocrisy of slaveholders, and white Americans generally, Douglass directs his audience's attention to the fact that the actions of slaveholders are inconsistent with the fundamental political principles they espouse. But Douglass would not need to point to an *inconsistency* between the practices and principles of white Americans in order to justify a right to break from the polity. The plain fact that slavery and white supremacy are wrong— and severely harm enslaved and free Black people in the US— would suffice to justify a right to break with the polity, regardless of whether racist practices are consistent with the fundamental principles of the American polity. If the polity were rotten to the core, that would simply be all the more reason to break with it.

Instead, Douglass's reference to slaves' right of rebellion captures a political power slaves have as members of the American polity: the fundamental principles of the American polity empower slaves to rebel against the tyranny and oppression to which they are subjected.²² The right to rebellion (i.e., to resist tyranny and oppression), on this reading, is a political power that slaves have a rightful claim to exercise just as citizens have a rightful claim to participate in the

²¹ Douglass, *Frederick Douglass*, 195.

²² Although Douglass is focused in this passage on the right of rebellion for enslaved Black people in the US, I think that he can offer a similar justification for free Black people's right of rebellion, in virtue of their subjection to white supremacist forms of tyranny and oppression.

selection of their representatives in government. If slaves are empowered to participate in American politics by exercising a right of rebellion, then slaves possess political standing in the American polity. The relevant type of political standing in this context is citizenship (full membership in a polity). In other words, since Douglass holds that enslaved Black people possess a political right of rebellion, he must also hold that they are already American citizens.

The claim that slaves are already American citizens might seem puzzling, since slaves are systematically deprived of legal recognition as citizens. In one sense of the term operative in Douglass's time, to be a citizen was simply to possess the "elective franchise" (right to vote).²³ This conception of citizenship exemplifies what Kymlicka and Norman call "citizenship-as-legal-status," on which citizenship consists in the possession of rights.²⁴ On this conception of citizenship, when one is deprived of legal recognition of the rights of the citizen, one is deprived of citizenship itself. Slaves are deprived of all plausible rights of the citizen. In particular, slaves in the antebellum US plainly do not possess a legal right to rebellion. Douglass clearly cannot mean that enslaved Black people in the US already possess citizenship qua legal status.²⁵

Instead, Douglass is invoking a conception of citizenship as "desirable activity," in Kymlicka and Norman's terminology, which is "a function of one's participation in [a] political community."²⁶ Citizenship-constituting activity is desirable, on such conceptions, not for the individual alone, but for the community in which the individual is embedded through such activity. What is desirable for the community, in this sense, is reflected in the fundamental principles of the community.²⁷

²³ Foner, *The Second Founding*, 7.

²⁴ Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, "Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory," *Ethics* 104, no. 2 (1994): 353.

²⁵ This account resonates with Hooker's category of liminal citizenship: "persons who are not yet legal citizens but who act as (and could become) such, and those who are citizens according to the law but not yet treated thus in practice," which she attributes to Douglass in his Fifth of July speech. Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 30.

²⁶ Kymlicka and Norman, "Return of the Citizen," 353.

²⁷ This is not to say that citizenship-constituting activity is necessarily, or typically, undesirable for individuals. In the background here is a commitment to a version of the Aristotelian claim that individuals flourish as members of

The kind of activity that constitutes citizenship, on this account, depends on what the fundamental principles of a particular political community are. This might seem to fatally constrain the emancipatory potential of the account. It is undoubtedly conceivable that the fundamental principles of a polity— especially one with deeply-ingrained structures of oppression— might limit what counts as citizenship-constituting activity in ways that exclude those who are subject to oppression.²⁸

The solution to this worry rests on the plausible assumption that the fundamental principles of a polity depend on what its members do. On the one hand, this assumption implies that if members of a polity act in unjust and oppressive ways, their patterns of action can indeed calcify into exclusionary principles. But on the other hand, this assumption also implies that the fundamental principles of a polity can be transformed in a more just, inclusive direction, by altering the patterns of action in which members of a polity engage. If the fundamental principles of a polity are dynamic and contestable, then even a polity which has maimed itself with oppressive practices that have calcified into exclusionary principles still possesses the potential to be transformed into a just, inclusive community. We realize this potential, I will argue below, by intervening in the daily practices of political life through which the fundamental principles of a polity are shaped.

Douglass deploys this line of reasoning in casting the history of America as a narrative of decline in his antebellum political thought.²⁹ The oppressive practices of slavery and white supremacy threaten to calcify into irreparably exclusionary principles. But the threat these oppressive practices pose is a threat to dislodge emancipatory principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence that Douglass takes as “the ringbolt to the chain of [the] nation’s

communities, so that the flourishing of the community typically contributes to the flourishing of the individual.

²⁸ For example, principles that value deliberation might limit citizenship-constituting activity to participation in long debates in an exclusive forum, thereby constraining full membership to an elite subset of the polity.

²⁹ Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois : Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 194–96.

destiny,” in that “[t]he principles contained in that instrument are saving principles.”³⁰ Through the Declaration, the founders “pronounce[d] the measures of government unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not be quietly submitted to.”³¹ In so doing, they express a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. But the Declaration does not only express a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression; it enacts such a commitment, through its resolution that “these united colonies are, and of right, ought to be free and independent States; that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown; and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, dissolved.” The founders, on Douglass’s reading of the Declaration, forge the polity through action that builds in a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression as a founding principle.^{32, 33}

The founders constitute themselves as American citizens on this picture with the same actions through which they forge the polity. Through acts of resistance like the Declaration, the founders enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression which, at the same time, they institute as a fundamental principle of the polity. But in instituting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression as a fundamental principle of the polity, the founders determine what activity constitutes individuals as citizens of the polity. This citizenship-constituting activity is political activity that enacts a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. This is precisely the kind of activity in which the founders are engaged in forging the polity, thereby constituting themselves as citizens. This is one way in which we can understand the dually descriptive and normative language (“is, and ought to be”) in the resolution that Douglass focuses on in his Fifth

³⁰ Douglass, *Frederick Douglass*, 191.

³¹ Douglass, 190.

³² Compare Song: “a people comes into being by *participating* together in ways that express an aspiration to be authors, not merely subjects, of the rules governing collective life.” Song, *Immigration and Democracy*, 57.

³³ This reading of the Declaration indulges in mythology, as it overemphasizes the role the founders in penning a single document. A more accurate interpretation would account for the various forms of political activity Americans across the colonies engaged in which culminated in the Declaration. Such an interpretation is simply more grist for Douglass’s mill, however, because it suggests that the kinds of political action that qualify as citizenship-constituting are even more capacious, and thus more accessible to enslaved and free Black people resisting oppression.

of July speech: in the same act, the founders lay the normative basis for citizenship and constitute themselves as citizens.³⁴

In the rights of rebellion passage, Douglass indicates that slaves' right of rebellion stems from threats to "the just and inalienable rights of man," recalling the language of the Declaration of Independence. For Douglass, Gooding-Williams observes, through resistance slaves "aspired to keep faith with the work of the founders... which was to establish a republic that respected 'the just and inalienable rights of man.'"³⁵ Thus, in framing slaves' right of rebellion as stemming from the rightful demand for a republic that respects the just and inalienable rights of persons, Douglass suggests that those engaged in antislavery resistance are engaged in the same political project as the American founders. Gooding-Williams observes that "Douglass presents the nation's black sons, men the July 5 speech describes as not sharing the 'inheritance of ... liberty' bequeathed by the fathers, as imitating those heroes and acting to refound the nation."³⁶ Through antislavery resistance, enslaved and free Black people in the US imitate the founders' resistance against tyranny and oppression. But the founders, through their resistance, made themselves citizens by enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression that at the same time forged a polity with such a commitment as its fundamental principle. So in imitating the founders through resistance, enslaved and free Black people in the US make themselves citizens by enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression that at the same time *reforges* the polity with such a commitment as its fundamental principle.

2.3 Social Relations as Enacted Commitments

Douglass, I've argued in the previous section, thinks that what it is to be an American citizen

³⁴ Jacques Derrida, "Declarations of Independence," *New Political Science* 7, no. 1 (June 1, 1986): 7–15. B. Honig, "Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the Problem of Founding a Republic," *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1 (1991): 97–113. Yarran Hominh, "Re-Reading the Declaration of Independence as Perlocutionary Performative," *Res Publica* 22, no. 4 (November 1, 2016).

³⁵ Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 192.

³⁶ Gooding-Williams, 194.

is to enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. This is a particular case of a more general conception of citizenship as consisting in the enactment of a commitment to the fundamental principles of a polity. In this section, I argue that Douglass's conception of citizenship (as consisting in an enacted commitment of this sort) is of a piece with a wider conception of social relations as constituted by the enactment of commitments.

Mara Marin articulates a contemporary version of this conception of social relations in *Connected by Commitment*. Marin argues that social relationships that involve substantial obligations (e.g., those between parents and children) “develop over time, through the long-term open-ended responsive action between two or more persons.”³⁷ The fact that one bears a certain substantial (i.e., responsibility-bearing) relationship to others is not static, but rather sustained through consistent activity: “Social positions are a function of the continuous actions that sustain them.”³⁸ Commitment, for Marin, is something one does, through a pattern of action.³⁹

The kinds of action that forge commitments, on Marin's picture, are in part determined by the circumstances in which agents find themselves. If neighborly-commitment involves trust, then the particular situation I find myself in constrains in what ways I can act in a trustworthy way towards you. Moreover, what actions forge neighborly-commitments depend on what neighbors understand as trustworthy— your responsiveness to what I do is integral to the constitution and maintenance of our relationship qua neighbors.⁴⁰ Finally, commitment-based social relationships are always embedded in wider historical contexts: you and I cannot decide today to radically reconstitute what it means to relate to one another as neighbors just by willing it so.

But this is not to say that, on Marin's picture, that there is a (metaphysically or historically) fixed fact about what it is to be a sibling, neighbor, or citizen. We continually reshape the kind of

³⁷ Marin, *Connected by Commitment*, 3.

³⁸ Marin, 49.

³⁹ “One single act, even one of deliberate consent, cannot create a long-term relationship of obligations; only repeated, accumulated action can.” Marin, 37.

⁴⁰ Marin, 35.

commitment involved in these relationships in the very activity through which we forge these relationships. What it is to be a sibling, a neighbor, or a citizen is up to us— not in how we might define these relationships as if legislators, but in the open-ended and fluid ways in which members of a community comport themselves in relation to one another every day.⁴¹

Finally, one stands in a social relationship constituted by commitment in virtue of one's own actions (in conjunction with the responsiveness of others): "Nobody can commit someone else."⁴² My wider community, as we saw just above, determines what it would be for me to inhabit a particular social relationship; but my own open-ended actions are required in order for me to in fact inhabit this position.⁴³

This picture of social relationships as constituted by the enactment of commitments resonates with Douglass's conception of citizenship. The founders (for instance) are citizens because of what they do: enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression by (for example) declaring independence from the British crown. Through their resistance, the founders instituted a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression as a fundamental principle of the polity, and thereby as a norm of American citizenship. At the same time, the need for a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression arises from the situation in which the founders find themselves: their principle-instituting actions are responsive to their environment, and the commitment shapes the conduct of citizens going forward. Moreover, while the commitment to resist tyranny and oppression shapes the conduct of citizens going forward— by helping to determine what it is to be an American citizen— the norms of the social position are nevertheless responsive to the conduct of actual citizens. This is the sense in which Douglass can speak of the fundamental principles of the American polity as in decay. Finally, it is the founders' own actions that make

⁴¹ Marin, 58.

⁴² Marin, 43.

⁴³ My own actions are required, but not alone sufficient because open-endedness also requires that others are responsive to my actions.

them citizens: their own actions enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. No one can do this for them, on Douglass's picture.

This picture of social relationships as constituted by the enactment of commitments also reflects Douglass's characterization of familial relationships. In the early chapters of *Bondage*, Douglass observes that his relations to family members are strained and strengthened through constraints and opportunities to interact with, and particularly to care for, one another. When, around the age of seven, Douglass is removed from his grandmother's care to the plantation of Edward Lloyd, he finds himself around siblings with whom he had little contact with before (because they too had been removed from their home and sent to the plantation at a young age). Douglass observes that "Brothers and sisters we were by blood, but *slavery* had made us strangers....The conditions of brotherly and sisterly feeling were wanting—we had never nestled and played together."⁴⁴ Here Douglass asserts that slavery made him and his siblings strangers because they lacked the opportunity to 'nestle and play' together—that is, to interact in ways that forge bonds between one another. For Douglass, familial relations—here understood as social relations, in contrast to biological relations—depend on the enactment of commitments: to nestle and play together is, in part, to enact a commitment of care for one another. Because slavery prevents siblings from playing with and caring for one another, by wresting them away from one another and compelling them to work even when near one another, Douglass observes that "[t]here is not, beneath the sky, an enemy to filial affection so destructive as slavery."⁴⁵ Implicit in Douglass's characterization of slavery as destructive to familial bonds is a picture of such social relations as constituted by the enactment of commitments.

In contrast, Douglass's relationship to his mother is strengthened by the commitment of care she enacts for him while he is on the Lloyd plantation. Douglass recounts an episode in which he

⁴⁴ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 36.

⁴⁵ Douglass, 43.

is deprived of dinner by the plantation cook, Aunt Katy. That night, Douglass's mother, who was enslaved on another plantation, slips away to visit Douglass. Upon arriving, she learns from the young Douglass that Aunt Katy has refused to serve him dinner, and that he is trying to sate himself on a few grains of Indian corn. His mother, with "fiery indignation... read Aunt Katy a lecture she never forgot" and secures dinner for her child. Douglass observes, "[t]hat night I learned the fact, that I was not only a child, but *somebody's* child."⁴⁶ Douglass comes to see himself as his mother's child because of the commitment of care she exercises on his behalf. Here their familial bond (again, understood as a social, rather than biological, relation) is strengthened through their interaction.

Douglass's account of familial relations in *Bondage*, then, articulates a conception of social relations as constituted by commitments.⁴⁷ The strength of Douglass's relationship to his family members depends on the opportunity they have to interact with one another in ways that express a commitment of care. These relationships are open-ended, moreover, because the commitment that constitutes the relationship is responsive to the situation in which the actors find themselves: Douglass finds himself in need of care, and his mother finds herself able to care for Douglass. Moreover, Douglass and his mother are responsive to the actions of one another: Douglass's mother is responsive to Douglass's needs, and Douglass comes to see his mother as his mother (a corollary of seeing himself as her child). Finally, the strength of their familial bonds depends on their own actions— Douglass's mother must enact her commitment to care for Douglass herself.

⁴⁶ Douglass, 40–41.

⁴⁷ We should note that Douglass thus diverges from Marin in understanding familial relations as social relations constituted by commitment. Marin denies this, maintaining that we simply "find ourselves in relationships with our family" (32). (Marin does herself note throughout chapter 1, however, that at least some family relations, like spousal relations, are constituted by commitments.) Insofar as we understand relationships between siblings, or between parents and children, as social relationships responsive to external conditions (e.g., the fact that two individuals are related through birth or adoption), it seems plausible to me to extend the commitment relation to familial relationships in the way that Douglass does.

One might object that an important discontinuity between Douglass's account of his family relationships and Marin's account of commitment-relationships is that the actions of Douglass's family members do not reshape the norms of familial relations-- they are simply responsive, or unresponsive, to the demands of a commitment of care. In this sense, Douglass's characterization of his familial relationship might not seem fully open-ended in Marin's sense.

Two lines of response are relevant. First, in the case of Douglass's siblings, the issue is that they are unable to interact substantially with one another in any way for a long period of time. There is no form of open-ended interaction available through which they can shape the commitments constitutive of their relationship. Second, these episodes illustrate the pressures that external constraints impose on the character social relationships— Douglass needs care (as do his siblings), and familial relationships are one primary social locus through which needs of care are addressed. As emphasized above, it is not that anything goes in constituting and maintaining a type of social relationship. The circumstances in which Douglass is situated, and the history of familial relationships, informs the norms which Douglass's relationships must satisfy, in order to be constituted and maintained as familial relationships. The normative character of such relationships can be reshaped, but only through action responsive to these external constraints.⁴⁸

Thus, Douglass understands familial relationships as constituted by the enactment of commitments. This strengthens the case for attributing a conception of citizenship as constituted by the enactment of a commitment to the polity in two ways. First, Douglass's characterization of familial relationships suggests that he generally subscribes to a conception of social relationships as constituted by enacted commitments. Douglass's conception of citizenship thus

⁴⁸ This point applies to Douglass's conception of American citizenship as well: while slaveholders affect the normative fabric of American citizenship through their actions, the history of the social position and the conditions in which members of the polity are situated. Thus Douglass can intelligibly talk about the decay of the institution of citizenship (and American political values more generally), and urge a recovery of its formative normative principles. The normative character of social relations, on this picture, is dynamic, but nevertheless 'sticky.'

appears as a particular case of a wider view. Second, Douglass characterizes the above episode in which his mother cares for him as “instructive.”⁴⁹ Surely the episode is instructive to Douglass in a variety of ways; but, since the first half of *Bondage* presents Douglass’s picture of plantation politics, it seems that Douglass is asserting (in part) that his mother’s actions in this episode inform his emancipatory politics. One way in which the episode informs Douglass’s emancipatory politics, I claim, is that it reinforces for Douglass the thought that social relationships, including political relationships, are constituted and maintained through the consistent enactment of commitments.

2.4 Political Resistance

According to Douglass, American citizenship consists in the enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. To this point, we have a clear example of the enactment of this commitment: the American founders’ declaration of independence (through the document of the same name). Douglass must think that slaves also enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, because he holds that slaves are empowered to rebel against slaveholders as American citizens. But we haven’t yet fully spelled out what sorts of actions qualify as enactments of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression.

I argue in this section, however, that resistance per se is not a *sufficient* condition for enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression in a way that constitutes the agent as a citizen. Call resistance that enacts a citizen-constituting commitment to resist tyranny and oppression *political resistance*. The view I am rejecting in this section is that resistance is intrinsically political. If resistance is not intrinsically political, then we must look to the contextual character of acts of resistance in order to explain what makes some (indeed, many) acts of resistance political.

We act politically when we act in consideration of a collective. The political is frequently

⁴⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 41.

characterized as involving, for instance, a commitment to something ‘bigger than oneself,’ a concern for the well-being of others, or the adequate (e.g., just, orderly, free, etc.) organization of a community. Similarly, we variously speak of communities acting politically when they generate and execute a general will, when they are persuaded or coerced to obey commands, or achieve some kind of self-actualization in relation to one another. And when we identify opponents in political life, we identify them as members of some collective (a party, movement, ideology, etc.) or as opposed to some collective. Each of these specific characteristics can be contested. For instance, a political liberal might reject a concern for the well-being of others as characteristic of the political as such, to the extent that it invokes a comprehensive doctrine of what well-being consists in. But each of these specific characteristics invokes a consideration wider than one’s individual interests wholly detached from reference to a collective. This commonality suggests that consideration of a collective is a generic characteristic of the political. This characteristic implies, moreover that the political is not a specific (and thereby restricted) domain of social activity, but rather a formal relation to a particular sphere of social life through which agents orient themselves toward and act for the sake of some kind of collective good or interest.

This generic characteristic of the political is reflected in Douglass’s account of citizenship: I make myself a member of the polity by enacting a commitment to its fundamental values. I act in consideration of a collective, the polity, by enacting a commitment to its fundamental values. In the American case, I make myself a citizen by enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. Thus, the kind of activity that is citizenship-constituting, for Douglass, is itself political activity.

But not all acts of resistance involve consideration of a collective. Imagine that the mayor of my city issues an unlawful curfew order. Caught out after curfew, I might resist arrest without

taking any attitude toward the lawful status of the order; in resisting arrest, I might just desire to get home and away from immediate danger. In this case, my resistance expresses only a (important!) commitment concerning my immediate circumstances, and not wider consideration of collective interests. If resisting arrest qualifies as resistance— and I think that it should, on pain of begging the question about the character of resistance here-- then resistance is not intrinsically political.

Contrast the resisting curfew arrest case with Douglass's discussion of appeals by slaves to slaveholders when threatened with punishment. Douglass observes that slaves who appeal to slaveholders when threatened with violent punishment by overseers incur "a fearful hazard," as the slave is likely to suffer a more severe punishment for attempting to override the authority of the overseer. But Douglass does not claim that slaves are necessarily mistaken in appealing to slaveholders in this way:

When a slave has nerve enough to [appeal], and boldly approaches his master, with a well-founded complaint against an overseer, though he may be repulsed, and may even have that of which he complains be repeated at the time, and, though he may be beaten by his master, as well as by the overseer, for his temerity, in the end the policy of complaining is, generally, vindicated by the relaxed rigor of the overseer's treatment. The latter becomes more careful, and less disposed to use the lash upon such slaves thereafter. It is with this final result in view, rather than with any expectation of immediate good, that the outraged slave is induced to meet his master with a complaint.⁵⁰

Slaves' appeals to slaveholders, Douglass observes, are often directed at altering the future behavior of overseers: through these appeals, slaves aim to restrain overseers' use of violence in the future, without necessarily expecting 'immediate good' (i.e., avoiding a particular, immediate

⁵⁰ Douglass, 56.

act of violent punishment). Moreover, it's plausible to think that these appeals aim at restraining overseers' general behavior on the plantation, to the extent that one slave's appeal threatens the potential for other slaves to appeal as well.⁵¹ Douglass's description of appeal is part of what we can call his plantation politics— i.e., his picture of political antislavery resistance performed by enslaved and free Black people in the South.⁵² The political character of such resistance is marked by its orientation beyond the resistor's immediate circumstances⁵³ toward collective interests.

One might object that this characterization of the political is at odds with familiar emancipatory principles like the feminist mantra that “the personal is political,”⁵⁴ or Audre Lorde's assertion that “self-care is an act of political warfare.”⁵⁵ It might appear that this picture of political resistance as necessarily involving consideration of a collective smuggles in a traditional distinction between public and private spheres that those engaged in emancipatory politics have good reasons to reject.

I am not, however, contesting critiques of the public/private distinction, or the claim that acts of care, for oneself or others, are political. Rather, I am contesting the claim that acts of resistance in the so-called ‘private’/‘domestic’ sphere, or warfare through care for oneself or others, are political simply in virtue of their status as resistance. If acts of resistance in the ‘domestic’ sphere are political, or if acts of self-care are acts of political warfare— as I think Hanisch, Lorde, and other intersectional feminist theorists give us good reason to think— but resistance itself is not intrinsically political, then we should look to the rich contextual character

⁵¹ Of course, one foreseeable limit of this strategy is that it might lead overseers to target slaves who are less likely to appeal to the slaveholder; but this limit on the efficacy of appeal doesn't undermine its political character.

⁵² Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 182–97.

⁵³ To be clear, my claim is not that a political action *cannot* express a concern with, or commitment to, one's immediate circumstances— political acts do not have to be acts of self-sacrifice. Rather, the claim is that an action cannot qualify as political without also expressing a commitment to collective interests.

⁵⁴ <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>

⁵⁵ Audre Lorde, *A Burst of Light: And Other Essays* (Courier Dover Publications, 2017), 130.

of such acts of resistance in order to explain their political character. I argue in the following sections that Douglass, through his analysis of antislavery resistance, has a compelling account of the contextual features of such resistance that renders it political, and thereby as action that enacts a citizenship-constituting commitment to resist tyranny and oppression.

2.5 Enacted Commitments and Emancipatory Social Bonds

In this section, I argue that antislavery resistance is political, on Douglass's view, when such resistance cultivates bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism— which I call *emancipatory social bonds*— among those engaged in such resistance. This account of what makes resistance political renders many day-to-day acts of antislavery resistance political, enabling Douglass to maintain that enslaved and free Black people in the US are already American citizens.

A. The Sabbath School and Runaway Plot

In January 1835, Douglass arrives at the plantation of William Freeland, to whom Douglass's master, Thomas Auld, had hired him out. Not long after he arrives, Douglass begins organizing a Sabbath school, through which he intends “to impart the little knowledge of letters which I possessed, to my brother slaves.”⁵⁶ From two initial students, John and Henry Harris, “the contagion spread” to “twenty or thirty young men, who enrolled themselves, gladly, in my Sabbath school, and were willing to meet me regularly, under the trees or elsewhere, for the purpose of learning to read.”⁵⁷

Douglass observes that the group as a whole was “impressed with the necessity of keeping the matter as private as possible,” because a previous Sabbath school Douglass had help organize at St. Michael's had been attacked and shut down by slaveholders.⁵⁸ The need for covertness is a persistent feature in Douglass's account of antislavery resistance. In 1836 Douglass organizes a

⁵⁶ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 162.

⁵⁷ Douglass, 162.

⁵⁸ Douglass, 162.

runaway plot with core members of the second Sabbath school, John and Henry Harris, Sandy Jenkins, Charles Roberts, and Henry Bailey. Douglass remarks that he “hated the secrecy” with which the member conducted their plotting, “but where slavery is powerful, and liberty is weak, the latter is driven to concealment or to destruction.”⁵⁹ Organizing in secret, Douglass observes that their “meetings must have resembled, on a small scale, the meetings of revolutionary conspirators, in their primary condition. We were plotting against our (so called) lawful rulers; with this difference— that we sought our own good, and not the harm of our enemies.”⁶⁰ Here Douglass gestures to the political character of the runaway plot: in seeking their own good, the plotters act in consideration of a collective, and thus politically.^{61, 62}

The claim that the second Sabbath school and runaway plot are examples of antislavery resistance is reinforced by the fact that the ‘rights of rebellion’ passage we examined in section II is bookended by these two episodes. The right of rebellion passage tacitly maintains that enslaved and free Black people are already American citizens, as it is in virtue of this fact that they are empowered to participate in American politics through rebellion. Through the placement

⁵⁹ Douglass, 171.

⁶⁰ Douglass, 171.

⁶¹ See also Gooding-Williams’ claim that “[i]n Douglass’s revolutionary imagination, the black sons and white sons must *conspire together* to refund, reconstruct, and reconstitute the American nation.” *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 197.

⁶² We should acknowledge that there is a gendered dimension to Douglass’s picture of emancipatory political agency. The band which talks, plots, and eventually acts in antislavery resistance is after all one of *brothers*. Gendered political claims do crop up with some frequency in Douglass’s political thought, however. See, for instance, Douglass’s 1855 lecture for the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society, “The Anti-Slavery Movement” in Douglass, *Frederick Douglass*, 323–24.

Gooding-Williams notes that it isn’t obvious these gendered commitments are part of the substantive architecture of Douglass’s political thought (*In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 318 fn 125). For a demonstration of this point, which draws on the “restorative care” relationships among Douglass and the other participants in the runaway plot, see Ange-Marie Hancock Alfano, “Black Masculinity Achieves Nothing without Restorative Care: An Intersectional Rearticulation of Frederick Douglass,” in *A Political Companion to Frederick Douglass*, ed. Neil Roberts (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 236–51. Indeed, on the interpretation I offer in this chapter, Douglass’s account of political resistance as consisting in the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds complements feminist critiques of the standard public/private distinction, since such social bonds can, and are, cultivated through resistance in the so-called ‘private’ sphere. Nevertheless, the issue requires a full treatment in its own right, and so is beyond my scope in this chapter.

of this passage, Douglass is suggesting that his audience should acknowledge that enslaved and free Black people in the US are already American citizens on account of episodes of conspiratorial resistance like the second Sabbath school.

Moreover, the placement of the rights of rebellion passage points to what makes acts of conspiratorial resistance political for Douglass. The rights of rebellion passage immediately follows a characterization of the social bonds forged among the school's participants:

I never loved, esteemed, or confided in men, more than I did in these. They were true as steel, and no band of brothers could have been more loving. There were no mean advantages taken of each other, as is sometimes the case where slaves are situated as we were; no tattling; no giving each other bad names to Mr. Freeland; and no elevating one at the expense of the other. We never undertook to do any thing, of any importance, which was likely to affect each other, without mutual consultation. We were generally a unit, and moved together. Thoughts and sentiments were exchanged between us, which might well be called very incendiary, by oppressors and tyrants.⁶³

On Douglass's characterization of the social bonds forged through the Sabbath school, its participants 'moved together as a unit' because they stood in relations of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism to one another. In moving together as a unit in this way, the participants come to express a commitment to oppose tyranny and oppression, which they enact through the purpose of the Sabbath school itself, teaching one another to read. This passage suggests that the participants in the Sabbath school enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression through their cultivation of emancipatory social bonds.

One might see the role of emancipatory social bonds in rendering resistance political as purely instrumental. In order to engage in conspiracy against overseers, slaveholders, and the general system of white supremacy, the participants in the Sabbath school must be able to rely on

⁶³ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 165.

one another to effectively conduct their covert activity. Social bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism facilitate effective covert coordination. So emancipatory social bonds enable agents engaged in resistance to conspire with one another, and some other feature of conspiracy constitutes such resistance as political.

But in fact, the political character of antislavery resistance in episodes like the second Sabbath school and runaway plot is realized in the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds. In order for resistance to be political, it must involve consideration of a collective. But the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds necessarily involves consideration of a collective: cultivating trust and loyalty is something that we do in relation to others. Moreover, under conditions of oppression, to cultivate emancipatory social bonds is itself to resist tyranny and oppression—slavery seeks to dissolve social bonds among slaves, as Douglass makes clear in his discussion of familial bonds in the early chapters of *Bondage*.⁶⁴ So, in antebellum America, the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds among those subjected to slavery and white supremacy constitutes not only a generic political commitment, but a commitment to what Douglass takes as the fundamental principle of the American polity. The cultivation of emancipatory social bonds can thus explain directly why much of antislavery resistance renders enslaved and free Black people in the US American citizens.

One might object that there are other viable candidates for the consideration of a collective, which would explain why the second Sabbath school and runaway plot are acts of political resistance. For example, one might observe that the second Sabbath school aims to teach slaves to read, and claim that it is the character of this aim that renders the resistance political. After all, teaching others to read involves consideration of what is good for others. Moreover, slavery aims to prevent slaves from learning to read, so teaching another to read expresses a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. Thus, we can explain what makes the second Sabbath school an

⁶⁴ Douglass, 36, 43.

act of political resistance in terms of its particular aim, rather than in terms of the social bonds cultivate through, or for the sake of, the pursuit of this aim.

The objector claims that what makes the second Sabbath school political resistance is the character of the particular aim of the school— to teach slaves to read. I claim that the political character of the second Sabbath school consists in its cultivation of emancipatory social bonds through the pursuit of this aim. In essence, the dispute between my view and the objector's view concerns the means-end relationship between the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds and the aims of particular acts of resistance. The objector claims that the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds is instrumental to the realization of the aims of an act of resistance, and the political character of that resistance is realized in the aim pursued. I claim that the aim of a particular act of resistance is instrumental to the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds, and it is in the cultivation of these bonds that the political character of resistance is realized.

There are two advantages to the view I ascribe to Douglass. First, the claim that the political character of antislavery resistance consists in the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds gives a more consistent explanation of why such resistance is political than appeal to the character of the aims of resistance. Given the diversity of aims we find in different sorts of antislavery resistance, one might worry that an account of what makes such resistance political in terms of the character of these aims will be too unwieldy. We have a clear explanation of how the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds enacts a citizenship-commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. One might worry that an account of political antislavery resistance given in terms of the particular aims of particular acts of resistance will become so complex as to appear ad hoc.

Second, my account ensures that resistance will continue to qualify as political even as the particular aims of those participating in resistance change. The transition from the second Sabbath school to the runaway plot is illustrative here: central participants in the second Sabbath

school decide to redirect their efforts towards an attempt to escape from slavery. Plainly, for Douglass, if the participants in the second Sabbath school are engaged in political resistance, they are still engaged in political resistance when organizing the runaway plot. (This is clear, for instance, in Douglass's description of the runaway plotters as 'revolutionary conspirators.')

While it is not impossible to explain the continuous political character of their resistance in terms of the particular aims pursued-- it just so happens that the two particular aims selected qualify as political— it is easier to ensure the continuous political character of their resistance in terms of a feature that remains constant over the changes in the particular aims they pursue. The cultivation emancipatory social bonds is a constant across this development of their aims. Thus, we have good reason to hold that the cultivation of emancipatory social bonds constitutes the political character of citizenship-constituting resistance.

B. The Political Character of Emancipatory Social Bonds

We have good reason to think that, on Douglass's view, bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism render resistance political. What remains is to show why social bonds guided by these particular values involve consideration of a collective— thereby rendering the activity through which they are forged political. In this subsection, I explain how each of these characteristics contributes to the enactment of a commitment beyond one's immediate circumstances.

The structure of argument for each value is as follows. The value is instrumentally valuable in resisting oppression. This explains why people engaged in resistance conduct themselves in ways responsive to the value. But, at the same time, the enactment of each value is itself a way of considering a collective. Thus, because it cultivates and enacts these values, antislavery resistance is political. Given that the fundamental value of the American polity is a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, antislavery resistance is citizenship-constituting.

In his description of the social bonds forged through the Sabbath school, Douglass connects love with esteem. ‘Love,’ in this context, picks out a personal connection established around the recognition of value in another. Because Douglass takes emancipatory social bonds to reflect familial bonds, we might liken the attitude to which Douglass points to the pride and esteem family members take in one another—in particular, it is a form of pride or esteem that does not depend on achievement or ability (we take pride in our family members because they are our family members, even if we sometimes express this pride by identifying their exceptional abilities or achievements). In the familial context, love in this sense helps ground the characteristics which enable a family to function as a cohesive unit—in particular, trust, loyalty, and solidarity. As Douglass observes of his relationship with Henry and John Harris, “I felt a friendship so strong as one man can feel for another; for I could have died with and for them.”⁶⁵ Douglass’s friendship with the Harris brothers, which is strong enough to be characterized as love, results in a deep commitment to conspire against white supremacy and slavery to the death with them.

Trust, in Douglass’s discussion of plantation politics and his first runaway plot, enables political actors to confide in one another, and to rely on one another to act well on behalf of (or for the sake of) the group. Douglass sets the runaway plot in motion by “disclos[ing] [his] sentiments and plans... on the subject of running away” to Henry and John.⁶⁶ While Douglass acknowledges that he begins to instigate the runaway plot “with a suitable degree of caution,”⁶⁷ even this cautious, tentative floating of the idea of a runaway plot depends on trust Douglass places in Henry and John not to give him up to the overseer or slaveowner. As Douglass confides in Henry and John, it becomes clear to him that they “were ready to act, when a feasible plan

⁶⁵ Douglass, 167.

⁶⁶ Douglass, 168.

⁶⁷ Douglass, 167–68.

should be proposed.”⁶⁸ Douglass is thus able to rely on his fellow conspirators as good faith interlocutors in plotting their escape: he can trust them to keep his (now their) aims and plans secret, and that their contributions to deliberation are earnestly directed toward achieving their shared objective. Once the plot is discovered, Henry puts up stiff resistance against the group which arrives to arrest the conspirators, giving Douglass the opportunity to toss passes forged for the plot into the fire— this pass, if discovered, would have been decisive evidence against the conspirators. While Douglass describes Henry’s actions as “providential,” Henry’s actions demonstrate that the other conspirators can rely on him to act in support of the group in moments of urgency. (We can imagine Henry judging that stalling and creating a distraction will help the other conspirators, even if Henry doesn’t have in mind precisely how this will help. In the context, it is also not implausible to imagine that Henry was aware that Douglass had a forged pass on him, and that he was about to be searched).⁶⁹

Trust, in these episodes, is clearly instrumental to the pursuit of the conspirators’ particular aims. But trust also expresses a commitment to rely on one’s fellow conspirators even in the face of adversity. Moreover, among those subjected to slavery, it is a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, as slavery seeks to rupture robust social bonds between slaves in part by undermining their trust in one another. For instance, Douglass observes that “[s]laveholders have been known to send spies among their slaves, to ascertain, if possible, their views and feelings in regard to their condition.” Douglass goes on to observe: “The frequency of this has had the effect to establish among the slaves the maxim, that a still tongue makes a wise head.”⁷⁰ Under these circumstances, to rely on others in the face of adversity is itself to stand in opposition to tyranny and oppression.

Loyalty serves as the complement of trust in Douglass’s account of the social conditions that

⁶⁸ Douglass, 168.

⁶⁹ Douglass, 178–79.

⁷⁰ Douglass, 76.

constitute antislavery resistance as political. Whereas trust enables emancipatory political actors to rely on their fellow conspirators, loyalty ensures that such actors comport themselves in ways which accord with the trust afforded to them. Douglass's account of the role of Sandy in the runaway plot illustrates the importance of loyalty in conspiring together under conditions of oppression. While Sandy was initially a committed conspirator, who also helped Douglass in the lead-up to his fight with Covey,⁷¹ Douglass points to several episodes during which Sandy's commitment to the runaway plot seems to waver. Douglass notes that "[i]n the progress of our preparations, Sandy... became to be troubled" by dreams about the failure of the plot.⁷² On the verge of its execution, Sandy withdraws from the plot, and, when the plot is discovered, he is not detained with the others.⁷³ Douglass ultimately concludes "Several circumstances seemed to point SANDY out, as our betrayer."⁷⁴ Douglass thus suggests that Sandy's failure to act in accord with the trust afforded to him (i.e., his lack of loyalty to his fellow conspirators) undermined the runaway plot. But loyalty, like trust, does not only play an instrumental role in resistance. In failing to make good on the trust others had placed in him, Sandy fails to stand by a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. To the extent that Sandy's failure to stand by this commitment results from fear of how the discovery of the plot would impact him individually, Sandy fails to act in consideration of the collective. In this way, Sandy's disloyalty is also a failure to comport himself politically. We might characterize Sandy's desire as one of 'just wanting out' from the conspiracy— to remove himself from the political sphere into which he and his conspirators have entered.

Whereas loyalty, on the picture of emancipatory politics Douglass offers, characterizes a constraint on the actions of political actors— that they cannot act in ways which violate the trust

⁷¹ Douglass, 145–48.

⁷² Douglass, 173–74.

⁷³ Douglass, 176–78.

⁷⁴ Douglass, 181.

afforded to them— solidarity captures a positive impetus towards collective action in the interests of the group. Solidarity manifests among the runaway plot conspirators when, for instance, after their arrest, Douglass exhorts his fellow conspirators to “Own nothing!” (i.e., not to reveal any details of the plot, or to affirm their involvement, to their interrogators). This instruction “was passed around and enjoined, and assented to.” Through this act, Douglass observes “[o]ur confidence in each other was unshaken; we were quite resolved to succeed or fail together— as much after the calamity which had befallen us, as before.”⁷⁵ While it would have been disloyal for any of the conspirators to reveal details of the plot to their interrogators for personal benefit, their commitment to remain silent becomes an act of solidarity when it is collectively affirmed (‘passed around and enjoined, and assented to’). With this collective affirmation, the conspirators’ commitment to remain silent becomes a collective action, through which each of the conspirators situates their particular silence within a general effort to preserve the group and its aims.⁷⁶ Through manifestations of solidarity (collective actions), emancipatory political actors act in concert to sustain their conspiracy together and pursue their mutual aims.⁷⁷

Douglass also emphasizes throughout his description of the runaway plot that the aims of the group, which reflect the interests of the conspirators, are promoted in a non-paternalistic fashion.⁷⁸ While Douglass acknowledges that he exerts influence over the other members of the

⁷⁵ Douglass, 180.

⁷⁶ Once the plot is discovered and the conspirators are arrested and their immediate opportunity for escape is compromised, it seems plausible that the group’s aim is to (1) minimize the violence likely to be inflicted on each of them (in particular, to avoid being sold to slaveowners in the deep South) and (2) act so as to reaffirm to one another a long-term commitment to resisting slavery and white supremacy.

⁷⁷ I thus take Douglass’s plantation politics, on which persons express commitment to one another through action, to resonate with Arendt’s understanding of politics as action in concert. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

⁷⁸ Andrews, William L. *To Tell a Free Story : The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1769-1865*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986, 230-31. In the following argument, I depart from Sundquist’s claim that “Douglass himself remains paternally linked to the rhetoric and philosophy of the fathers, having identified himself as the single leader capable of espousing the right of revolution and planning the revolt.” Eric J. Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations : Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), 131.

group,⁷⁹ his aim in so doing is to persuade them to adopt escape as their objective and to thereby begin organizing themselves around this aim: “Perhaps not one of them, left to himself, would have dreamed of escape as a possible thing. Not one of them was self-moved in the matter. They all wanted to be free; but the serious thought of running away, had not entered into their minds, until I won them to the undertaking.”⁸⁰ Douglass exerts his influence to catalyze the ‘serious thought of running away,’ and thereby persuade (win) his fellows to join him in conspiracy. It is crucial, on Douglass’s picture of emancipatory politics, that political actors affirm, as in their interest, the aims promoted by the group. It is apparent that part of the reason Douglass takes this to be crucial is that political actors become involved in advancing their own interests when they affirm aims which reflect these interests. The interventions of others are generally meant to assist actors in promoting their own interests.⁸¹

Non-paternalism substantially informs Douglass’s understanding of what consideration of a collective’s good looks like. First, the very invocation of non-paternalism in spelling out the political character of antislavery resistance presupposes that there is, at least typically, some connection between one’s own interests and the commitment one makes: to commit oneself to a collective good is not to wholly disavow one’s interests— this is not a picture of politics as self-sacrifice. Rather, it is to take a wider-perspective on one’s interests, and how these interests intersect with the interests of others. Non-paternalism makes a further claim about how this commitment must be held. For Douglass, a political agent does not merely endorse someone else’s claim about what it is one’s own interests, and how one’s interests intersects with the collective’s. Rather, a political agent must come to see and affirm these interests and connections herself. This reflects Marin’s claim that commitment is not something that one can do for another

⁷⁹ “I did my *very best* to imbue the minds of my dear friends with my own views and feelings.” (*Bondage*, 168)

⁸⁰ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 170–71.

⁸¹ Note that the non-paternalism condition resonates with Douglass’s view that one must constitute oneself as a member, even if one does this in concert with others.

— only I can commit myself, and so only I can render my participation in resistance (or social activity more generally) political.

Political resistance, for Douglass, is resistance coordinated among agents through bonds of trust, loyalty, and solidarity. These bonds are grounded in (a particular sort of) love between those engaged in resistance, and non-paternalistically advance the interests of each of those engaged in resistance together. The contribution of each of these social attitudes/characteristics to the political character of antislavery resistance involves two elements: 1. The attitude expresses consideration of a collective's good— in particular, a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression; 2. These attitudes enable those engaged in resistance to, in Douglass's terms, 'move together as a unit'— that is, to engage and persist in resistance against oppression to which they are subjected. Both of these elements are necessary in order for these attitudes to contribute to the political character of resistance: resistance cannot be political unless it involves consideration of a collective, but the commitment cannot constitute the agent as a citizen unless it is enacted (i.e., through the actual execution of resistance). Love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism constitute the political character of antislavery resistance, for Douglass, because they both orient agents towards a shared community (and against oppression and tyranny) and sustain the enactment of activity from this orientation.

2.6 Conclusion

I have argued that, for Douglass, one constitutes herself as an American citizen through resistance that cultivates emancipatory social bonds. Such resistance enacts a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, which Douglass takes (and seeks to reinforce) as a fundamental normative principle of the American polity. Antislavery resistance performed by enslaved and free Black people in the US— plantation politics— is a paradigmatic instance of political resistance. Douglass's conception of citizenship is crafted specifically to defend the political

standing of those who are politically disempowered under oppressive regimes.

At the same time, Douglass situates his conception of citizenship in the American revolutionary tradition, arguing that enslaved and free Black people in the US constitute themselves as citizens in the same way as the American founders did through the Declaration of Independence and political activity surrounding the document. Through this conception of citizenship, Douglass aims to radically reforge an extant polity (itself an exercise of his citizenship), which he believes possesses normative principles deployable for emancipatory ends.

One crucial aspect of Douglass's conception of citizenship is that it is constituted by a political actor's own activity (undertaken in concert with others); citizenship on this conception is seized rather than conferred. Douglass's conception of citizenship coheres with versions of emancipatory politics that maintain that resistance against oppression must be driven by the political agency of those who are subject to oppression. On this picture, citizenship, in polities with emancipatory potential, is a status within the reach of any political actor who resides within a polity among others striving for emancipation.

Chapter 3: Declaration in Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom*

3.1 Introduction

In the “Editor’s Preface” to Frederick Douglass’s *My Bondage and My Freedom*, the editor publishes a letter from Douglass that states his purpose in penning a second autobiography: “Not only is slavery on trial, but unfortunately, the enslaved people are also on trial.”¹ Douglass observes that public discourse about the legitimacy of slavery inevitably turns to whether enslaved and free Black people are members of the American moral and political community. One main purpose of *Bondage* is to address the challenge posed by the trial of the enslaved by securing enslaved and free Black people standing as full members of the American polity. Securing such standing involves bringing the polity to understand enslaved and free Black Americans as moral persons to whom the polity bears obligations and as political agents who have a rightful claim to participate in the polity’s political life— it is a project that strives to reforge a more inclusive polity.²

By the early 1850s, when Douglass has broken decisively with the moral suasionist program of the Garrisonians and adopted a stance of political abolitionism, he thinks that a viable antislavery politics must address the trial of the enslaved by availing itself of American political institutions and values. Part of Douglass’s strategy in this period is to hold that Black people in

¹ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 4.

² Douglass’s assumption of integration (i.e., full incorporation into the American polity) as an aim for antislavery politics derives, on my view, from his assessment that the means for integration are more viable than the means for separatism (i.e., emancipatory strategies that seek to forge distinct communities for oppressed groups). It is not that Douglass thinks that integration is necessary, and so there must be means to achieve it. Rather, Douglass thinks that there are viable means for achieving integration— and these means are more viable than the means for achieving separatist aims— so abolitionists ought to adopt integration as an aim. By contrast, separatists like Martin Delany think that there are viable means for achieving separatism— and these means are more viable than the means for achieving integration— so abolitionists ought to adopt separatism as an aim. On this picture, the strands of integrationism and separatism in antebellum Black emancipatory politics share a fundamentally pragmatist orientation toward emancipation: the shape of liberation is going to be informed in part by the viable means that are available in pursuit of liberation. See Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois: Afro-Modern Political Thought in America* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 5–9. Tommie Shelby, “Two Conceptions of Black Nationalism: Martin Delany on the Meaning of Black Political Solidarity,” *Political Theory* 31, no. 5 (2003): 664–92. Philip Yaure, “Deliberation and Emancipation: Some Critical Remarks,” *Ethics* 129, no. 1 (October 2018): 36–37.

the US have a rightful claim to the same civil, political, and legal rights as white Americans because Black Americans are themselves already American citizens. As we saw in chapter 2, this strategy centrally depends on a conceptual distinction between, on the one hand, citizenship as moral status forged through the enactment of a polity's values and, on the other, citizenship as a legal status conferred by a polity. On Douglass's view, Black Americans make themselves American citizens in the moral sense through resistance against tyranny and oppression. It is because Black Americans are citizens in this moral sense that they ought to be acknowledged as citizens in the legal sense through the conferral of a schedule of civil, political, and legal rights. The conception of citizenship as a moral status frames the task of political abolitionism as a matter of brining a polity to acknowledge who its members are and treat them as such, rather than as persuading the polity to extend the privilege of membership to persons who lack it.³

Declaration is one mode of political action through which Douglass seeks to secure acknowledgment of Black Americans as citizens. Acts of declaration forcefully manifest the declarer's moral and political standing as a member of the community to whom the declaration is directed.⁴ By forcefully manifesting her standing, the declarer compels her audience to

³ Melvin Rogers attributes a similar conception of citizenship to David Walker in his reading of Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*. Walker, according to Rogers, thinks that "one need not rely on legal recognition to underwrite one's status as a citizen" (209). Instead, for Walker, citizenship is an activity constituted by political judgment. Douglass (on my reading) and Walker (on Rogers' reading) are both concerned with a conception of citizenship that is independent of, and indeed normatively antecedent to, legal recognition; they both maintain that enslaved and free Black people in the US are already American citizens. Douglass and Walker also both aim to articulate this conception of citizenship, on which enslaved and free Black Americans are already citizens, through varieties of political action— declaration or appeal. Declaration and appeal make manifest, rather than argue for, the standing of the agent and her audience.

For Douglass, however, what makes one a citizen is clearly the *enactment* of a capacity. For Walker, it is not wholly clear whether it is the *exercise* of political judgment or the *capacity* for political judgment that makes me a citizen. At some times, Walker clearly emphasizes the importance of acting on the basis of one's political judgment. At other times, however, Walker emphasizes the role of appeal in 'demonstrating' the illegitimate, oppressive character of the slave system: "[t]hese positions, I shall endeavour, by the help of the Lord, to demonstrate in the course of this *Appeal*, to the satisfaction of the most incredulous mind" (8). Walker characterizes appeal as a mode of reasonable argument, which, when executed effectively, will decisively prove to even 'incredulous' minds that the slave system is illegitimate and oppressive. In passages like this, Walker situates appeal in a marks-and-features strategy for addressing oppressive ideology: appeal appears to evince evidence to establish the veracity of claims for an audience.

⁴ Note that this account does not rule out the possibility of declaring other varieties of normative standing, such as

acknowledge it— to act in ways that reflect the fact that she possesses such standing. Declaration is a category of political action that cuts across traditional distinctions between violence and non-violence: Douglass forcefully manifests his standing as an American citizen by seizing the podium in his July 5, 1852 speech “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July;” he also does so by forcefully resisting and overpowering the ‘slavebreaker’ Edward Covey. What unites these seemingly disparate modes of political action is that they bring their audiences to act in ways that respond to the standing of those whose citizenship is forcefully manifested in these acts. Declaration thus captures one characteristic which violent and non-violent forms of political action Douglass uses and supports have in common: they aim to reforge the boundaries of the American polity by inducing acknowledgment of Black Americans’ standing as citizens.⁵

Acknowledgment, I claim, is the interpretive key to understanding the role of declaration in Douglass’s political abolitionist program. Acknowledgment is a practical mode of understanding embodied in our actions. I acknowledge you as a fellow citizen by treating you, in our day-to-day interactions, as a fellow citizen. Acknowledgment, crucially, is a more capacious category of understanding than some forms of recognition, on which understanding someone as (e.g.) a fellow citizen requires the conscious thought that she is a fellow citizen. Bernard Boxill attributes this more demanding sense of recognition to Douglass in his reading of the fight with Covey. For Boxill, Douglass induces Covey to “deliberate more honestly on the evidence of Douglass’s humanity.”⁶ I will argue that Douglass understands the efficacy of his fight to instead consist in a change to Covey’s behavior, rather than his consciously affirmed attitudes towards

moral personhood. I focus on the role of declaration in forcefully manifesting the declarer’s standing as a citizen because citizenship-status is an integral aspect of Douglass’s post-Garrisonian political abolitionism.

⁵ On the continuity between violent and non-violent forms of political action in Douglass’s thought, see Bernard Boxill, “Two Traditions in African American Political Philosophy,” *The Philosophical Forum* 24, no. 1 (1992): 125–31; Frank Kirkland, “Enslavement, Moral Suasion, and Struggles for Recognition: Frederick Douglass’s Answer to the Question - ‘What Is Enlightenment?’,” in *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bill Lawson and Frank Kirkland (Maiden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 271–95. Nick Bromell, “A ‘Voice from the Enslaved’: The Origins of Frederick Douglass’s Political Philosophy of Democracy,” *American Literary History* 23, no. 4 (2011): 713–14.

⁶ Bernard Boxill, “The Fight with Covey,” in *A Political Companion to Frederick Douglass* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 80–82.

Douglass. This is precisely the kind of change that acknowledgment, but not conscious recognition, captures, and on my reading it is precisely in this space beyond conscious recognition that the emancipatory potential of declaration that animates Douglass's political abolitionism resides.

While Douglass does not himself provide an explicit analysis of declaration in terms of acknowledgment, the interpretation I provide here explains why Douglass thinks that declaration is integral to an effective political abolitionist program (and perhaps why we should affirm this with respect to emancipatory politics today) by elaborating concepts in Douglass's own repertoire in this period, especially in his Fifth of July speech and *My Bondage and My Freedom*. Thus, while I am not transcribing Douglass's own theory of declaration and acknowledgment as such, I take my account of declaration and acknowledgment to be presented in terms that Douglass himself could by and large endorse.

Douglass consciously situates his declarations of citizenship in relation to the American Founders and Declaration of Independence. This reflects David Armitage's claim that declarations are a genre: particular instances of a genre situate themselves with respect to earlier instances (as Douglass does with respect to the American Founders), but often in ways that elaborate the genre. Douglass repurposes declaration as a mode of political action for remaking communities, rather than, as Armitage claims of earlier instances of the genre, making states.⁷

Douglass's repurposing of declaration as an instrument of remaking political communities reflects a shift in his understanding of how an effective antislavery politics incorporates the agency of Black political actors. Jeannine DeLombard observes that in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass breaks with a model of antislavery politics which figures former slaves as witnesses who furnish the public with testimony on the conditions of slavery.⁸ DeLombard

⁷ David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 17.

⁸ Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, c2007), 125–49.

argues that the shift that Douglass effects is one from witnessing to advocacy: “Douglass presented black advocacy as an alternative to the ‘plain narration’ required of the antislavery witness.... African American civic participation required a black advocacy that foregrounded forensic argumentation even as it retained the personal narrative of racial oppression.”⁹ Indeed, it is a common (although by no means universal) refrain among Douglass scholars that his political abolitionism in the 1850s is driven by a model of advocacy on which the primary task is to persuade his audiences of the wrongness of slavery and convince them to contribute to the antislavery struggle.¹⁰

I argue, in contrast, that we should not understand this shift in Douglass’s post-Garrisonian political thought in terms of a change in emphasis from one mode of political action to another (witnessing to advocacy). Rather, Douglass’s shift in this period ultimately consists in a fundamental reorientation towards the role of agency in re forging a more inclusive polity. For Douglass in this period, the question is not what mode of political action will most persuasively cultivate antislavery sympathies in audiences, but, more fundamentally, what it looks like to reshape the practices of a polity to reflect the rights and powers of its citizenry (in the moral sense). Conscious efforts at persuasion, on my reading of Douglass, are only one aspect of a wider program through which Douglass seeks to induce acknowledgment of Black Americans as citizens by contesting and reshaping the political habits of the polity.

Declaration, as a mode of political action that contests and reshapes the political habits of a polity to induce acknowledgment of Black Americans as citizens, illustrates this reorientation in Douglass’s post-Garrisonian political thought. In this way, declaration is integral to Douglass’s “enlarged account of political founding moments that foregrounded black contributions and the

⁹ DeLombard, 126.

¹⁰ Nolan Bennett, “To Narrate and Denounce: Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Personal Narrative,” *Political Theory* 44, no. 2 (2016): 240–64; Nicholas Buccola, *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass: In Pursuit of American Liberty* (London: New York University Press, 2012); Peter C. Myers, *Frederick Douglass: Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

development of a broad and inclusive notion of an American... political inheritance.”¹¹ This enlarged account of political founding moments consists, as Frank observes, in “radically reimagin[ing]” the “constitutive norms of the polity” on “the conflicted terrain of everyday life.”¹² But this radical reimagining, I claim, consists not only in a first-order shift in *who* the polity understands as a (full) member, but a second-order shift in *how* we understand one another as members of a shared political community, which Douglass casts in terms of acknowledging other persons as already fellow citizens, instead of conferring a status of citizenship upon them. In other words, the efficacy of declaration in emancipatory politics depends in part on the political epistemology of acknowledgment that it invokes and inculcates in audiences to whom it is directed.

In section 3.2, I show how the conception of citizenship developed in chapter 2 figures into Douglass’s program of political abolitionism as a manifest fact the polity must appreciate. In section 3.3, I provide two examples of declaration in *Bondage*: Douglass’s 1852 Fifth of July speech (an excerpt of which is attached as an appendix to the original edition of *Bondage*) and Douglass’s fight with the slave breaker Covey in 1834. In section 3.4, I first explain what acknowledgement consists in: comporting oneself in ways responsive to the standing of another. Declaration compels acknowledgment by forcefully confronting an audience with a manifestation of the declarer’s standing as a citizen. Finally, in section 3.5, I develop the political

¹¹ Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas : Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 265. Hooker observes that this enlarged conception of political community encompasses a “hemispheric” understanding of the American political community. I do not contest this point as reflective of Douglass’s political thought, especially in the 1860s and 70s, but will not pursue the issue here.

¹² Jason A. Frank, *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2010), 227.

epistemology of acknowledgment as involving direct apprehension of a normative status, contrasting it with epistemologies on which political standing is the target of inquiry into marks and features.

3.2 Douglass's Conception of Citizenship

In declaring that Black Americans are already American citizens, Douglass understands citizenship as, in the first place, a moral status that justifies one's claim to specific political and legal rights.¹³ Douglass is especially concerned, for instance, with securing claims to the right to assemble, the right to testify in court, and the right to rebel against tyranny, because these rights are integral to a viable antislavery strategy that avails itself of the political mechanisms of the US.¹⁴

Citizenship in the moral sense, for Douglass, consists in the enactment of a commitment to the fundamental principles of the polity. Douglass maintains that the (or one of the) fundamental principles of the American polity is the commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. Thus, for Douglass, American citizenship consists in the enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. Enslaved and free Black people in the US are already US citizens, on this picture, because they enact a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression through resistance against slavery and white supremacy.¹⁵

¹³ Douglass's conception of citizenship is constituted in a broader category of political membership, on which one is a member of a political community in virtue of participating in the political activity of that community. But, because Douglass's concrete political aim is secure full political and legal rights for Black people in the US, citizenship is the relevant status. This contrasts with weaker forms of political membership which ground claims to more limited rights (e.g., permanent residency). Sarah Song, "The Significance of Territorial Presence and the Rights of Immigrants," in *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*, ed. Sarah Fine and Lea Ypi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 225–48; Sarah Song, *Immigration and Democracy* (New York, NY, United States of America: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹⁴ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 192, 165; Frederick Douglass, "Life and Times of Frederick Douglass," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. John R. McKivigan, vol. 3, 2 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 173.

¹⁵ Enacting a citizenship-constituting commitment, for Douglass, involves cultivating social bonds with others. On Douglass's conception of American citizenship in particular, one enacts a citizenship-constituting commitment by resisting oppression in ways that cultivate bonds of trust, loyalty, and solidarity with others. In this regard, Douglass's conception of citizenship is non-sovereign— what makes me a citizen depends on the way others comport themselves in relation to me. But crucially, this sense of dependence is not appropriately cast as others

The moral sense of citizenship Douglass invokes contrasts with a legal sense, on which one's status as a citizen is *constituted* by the possession of specific political and legal rights.¹⁶ We do sometimes say that when someone is deprived of a particular right— e.g., the right to vote— she is deprived of her citizenship. By contrast, on Douglass's moral conception of citizenship, one can be a citizen even if one is deprived of specific political and legal rights. Douglass invokes this moral conception of citizenship precisely because it stands in a meaningful normative relationship to conception of citizenship as a legal status: if I am a citizen in the latter sense, because I participate in the political life of a community, then I ought to be legally recognized as a citizen. Moral citizens denied legal and political rights are wronged. Citizenship as moral status is the normative foundation for citizenship as legal status.

As we saw in chapter 2, the idea of citizenship as a moral status constituted by participation in the political life of a community is part of a more general view on which social relations are constituted by commitments that are enacted over time. Mara Marin articulates a version of this view of social relations in *Connected by Commitment*. According to Marin, those social relations which are constituted by commitments “are relationships that develop over time through the accumulated effect of open-ended actions and responses.”¹⁷ Douglass takes on this view for a wide variety of social relations, from the family to the citizen. Crucially, the activity that forges and maintains social relations on this picture— the patterns of action through which we enact commitments— constitutes a normative fabric of mutual obligations between those connected by commitment.¹⁸

conferring citizenship upon me through some formal or conscious process of recognition. Sharon R. Krause, *Freedom beyond Sovereignty : Reconstructing Liberal Individualism* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹⁶ As we saw in chapter 2, this is what Kymlicka and Norman refer to as the concept of “citizenship-as-legal-status.” Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory,” *Ethics* 104, no. 2 (1994): 352–81.

¹⁷ Mara G. Marin, *Connected by Commitment : Oppression and Our Responsibility to Undermine It* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 25.

¹⁸ Marin, 31, 36.

It is on this basis that Douglass declares, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, that enslaved and free Black Americans possess a right of rebellion.¹⁹ The right of rebellion Douglass has in mind here is plainly not a positive legal right that slaves possess. But Douglass is not referring (simply) to a revisionary natural right that slaves possess, either. We see that slaves possess this right of rebellion, Douglass argues, because of the *hypocrisy* of slaveholders, and white Americans generally: slaves have a rightful claim to rebel because they act in ways that fail to reflect the fundamental values of the polity. Slaves possess a right of rebellion in virtue of the American polity's fundamental values. If Douglass were referring to a right to break with the polity, he could appeal to moral values without making reference to American hypocrisy and political values. The right of rebellion is thus a claim slaves have on the American polity, because it is a right grounded in the polity's own values.²⁰ Douglass's right of rebellion empowers slaves—as well as free Black Americans—to resist the tyranny and oppression to which they are subjected as members of the polity. It is a right that empowers one to participate in the politics of the polity, in the same sense that the right to vote empowers.

Such rights derive, on Douglass's view, from social bonds forged by enacting a commitment to the polity's fundamental values. Slaveholders (inadvertently) assert slaves' rights of rebellion by affirming that the fundamental values of the American polity involve a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. The value to resist tyranny and oppression is fundamental in the sense that enacting the principle is to enact a commitment to the polity in a way that renders one a citizen. Enslaved and free Black people in the US, Douglass maintains, enact this commitment ubiquitously; the rights of rebellion passage itself is situated between Douglass's accounts of how he helped organize a covert Sabbath school on the Freeland

¹⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 165.

²⁰ This is not to say that Douglass denies that slaves have a right of rebellion in the revisionary sense; it is only to say that Douglass *also* thinks that enslaved and free Black people in the US have a claim to participate in American politics through rebellion. Thanks to Yarran Hominh for helpful discussion on this point.

planation to teach other slaves to read, and how he and other central members of this school went on to organize an (ultimately unsuccessful) run-away plot. The diverse modes of resistance that enslaved and free Black Americans engage in enact this citizenship-constituting commitment; as Hooker observes: “By connecting the law-breaking of fugitive slaves to the United States’s founding, Douglass can be read as suggesting that revolutionary acts of resistance are constitutive to the praxis of democratic citizenship.”²¹ In engaging in antislavery resistance, Douglass understands enslaved and free Black people in the US as imitating the founders by enacting their own commitment to resist tyranny and oppression; in so doing Black Americans constitute themselves as American citizens with political rights like that to rebel against tyranny and oppression.²²

It is worth emphasizing that Douglass’s view of the American founders in (for instance) the Fifth of July speech is pointedly ambivalent. While he lauds the founders’ commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, he of course also notes that “[t]he point from which I am compelled to view them is not, certainly, the most favorable.”²³ Douglass plainly does not think a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression is the only principle guiding the political practices of the American polity. The narrative of American decline Douglass deploys in the Fifth of July and other contemporary writings clearly implies that other oppressive commitments undermine the realization of a principle of anti-oppression.²⁴ But this is precisely why, for Douglass, antislavery resistance serves a central role in reforging the American polity. To the extent that American political practices have become detached from a commitment to resist tyranny and

²¹ Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas*.

²² It is worth noting that there is a close connection between the kind of activity that constitutes one as a citizen in the moral sense, and (at least some) core rights that citizenship in this sense justifies. Resistance against tyranny and oppression, for instance, constitutes American citizenship on Douglass’s view, and a right to engage in such resistance is attached to citizenship-status.

²³ Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 192.

²⁴ Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 193–94.

oppression, Douglass thinks that antislavery resistance— and especially varieties of resistance like declaration— will help to recenter a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression as a fundamental principle of the polity, and help to bring American political practices into accord with this principle.

In essence, just as the American founders render themselves citizens by forging a polity through the enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, enslaved and free Black people render themselves citizens by reforging the same polity through the enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. For Douglass, plantation politics— and Black-led abolitionist politics more generally— is a politics of antislavery resistance through which slaves render themselves citizens with a rightful claim to the political practices of the polity. The emancipatory potential of Douglass’s picture of American politics is that citizenship, in its fundamental moral sense, is a status that we secure for ourselves by acting in concert with others-- as in collective efforts to resist tyranny and oppression.

But while Douglass thinks that this conception of citizenship as a moral status constituted by enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression is built into American political culture, he does not think that simply articulating it will bring white Americans to consciously recognize enslaved and free Black Americans as fellow citizens. Rather, the task is to reshape the social and political practices of Americans to reflect the fact that Black Americans already possess standing as citizens in the moral sense, and thus must be extended the rights of the citizen in the legal sense.

3.3 Two Examples of Declaration

Declaration is one mode of political action through which Douglass believes this task-- to bring the polity to acknowledge Black Americans as citizens-- can be achieved. I will outline two

examples of declaration in *My Bondage and My Freedom*. The first is Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" speech, an excerpt of which is attached as an appendix to the original edition of *Bondage*. The second is Douglass's fight with the 'slave breaker' Edward Covey.

Declaration helps promote the political standing of enslaved and free Black people in the US in two ways. First, when performed by agents subject to oppression, declaration is a form of citizenship-constituting resistance. Such acts of declaration are thus themselves enactments of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. By enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression in a polity where such resistance is a fundamental principle, declaration helps constitute and maintain the declarer's standing as a citizen.²⁵ This is one way in which declaration is continuous with other forms of antislavery resistance. But, second, declaration calls attention to itself as action that constitutes and maintains the declarer as a citizen. In this way declaration contrasts with other, covert forms of antislavery resistance. By calling attention to itself in this way, declaration compels acknowledgement of the declarer as a citizen: forcefully confronted with a citizenship-constituting act, an audience responds to the declarer as constituting herself as a citizen. It is this characteristic, moreover, that articulates the potential of declaration to contribute to the reforging of the polity. Declaration not only helps constitute one's political standing as a citizen, but also compels acknowledgement of such standing by the wider polity, and in so doing reorganizes the polity's self-conception of its fundamental principles.

²⁵ In a polity where resistance against tyranny and oppression is the fundamental principle, it is not possible for oppressors to declare their standing. No form of political action an oppressor engages in (qua oppressor) will qualify as the enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression. But, in a polity with different fundamental principles, it is conceivable that oppressors could declare their standing as citizens through the enactment of a commitment to oppressive principles. (Indeed, one could argue that oppressors (qua oppressors) can declare their standing as citizens in the American polity by enacting other, oppressive principles fundamental to the polity. Since our focus is on the role of declaration in Douglass's antislavery politics, and Douglass doesn't take up this question directly, I won't pursue the point further here.)

A. Fifth of July Speech

On July 5, 1852, Douglass gives a ‘Fourth of July Oration’ at the invitation of the Rochester Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society. He acknowledges that he has been invited to speak about American independence. But while Douglass pays (pointedly ambivalent) homage to the American Founders, he uses the podium to decry American hypocrisy and slavery:

I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.²⁶

What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim.²⁷

As Douglass shames his audience for asking him to celebrate this day, he notes that some would say he should “argue more, and denounce less” in order to promote the aims of antislavery effectively. Douglass refuses to do so: “But, I submit, where all is plain there is nothing to be argued.”²⁸ The moral and political standing of the enslaved is not something “to be settled by the rules of logic and argumentation,” for “[t]he time for such argument has passed.” Instead, what is needed is a tone of “scorching irony.”²⁹

The biting, ironic tone of Douglass’s speech expresses a refusal to argue over his political (and moral) standing in the polity.³⁰ Douglass disrupts the trajectory of reasonable political

²⁶ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 285.

²⁷ Douglass, 288.

²⁸ Douglass, 286.

²⁹ Douglass, 287.

³⁰ It is tempting to discount Douglass’s refusal to argue in the Fifth of July speech— after all, Douglass offers a number of arguments throughout this section of the speech. But it’s important to be attuned to the specific points Douglass argues for: he does provide a series of arguments to establish that is absurd to ask him to justify his moral

discourse; he will not weigh the questions arguments on each side of the ‘debate’ concerning his moral and political standing. At core, Douglass’s use of irony and refusal in the speech cast his claim to citizenship as at the same time “felicitous” but not grounded in “authorized procedures or norms for representing the popular voice.”³¹ This paradoxically felicitous but unauthorized claim to citizenship, in Frank’s terminology, stages a dissensus that unsettles his audience’s assumptions about the boundary and character of their political community.³²

It is precisely through this staging of dissensus that Douglass enacts his standing as a citizen in a way that compels his audience to acknowledge it. In advancing a felicitous but unauthorized claim to citizenship, Douglass is contesting exclusionary understandings of American citizenship that reinforce slavery and white supremacy. In so doing, Douglass enacts a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression; the staging of dissensus itself constitutes Douglass’s standing as a citizen— or, more precisely, is part of a pattern of activity through which Douglass continually reconstitutes his standing as a citizen.

Moreover, Douglass’s staging of dissensus through forceful refusal and biting irony alters the way in which his audience relates to his speech: in virtue of this conflictual stance through which Douglass enacts and manifests his citizenship, his audience is brought to see the speech itself as an *act* of citizenship-constituting resistance, instead of mining it for claims to weigh in making up their minds about Douglass’s claim to citizenship. This shift in orientation, from seeing Douglass’s speech as in the first place an enumeration of claims relevant to public deliberation to a series of citizenship-constituting actions, bears on other modes of rhetorical engagement that Douglass enacts in his speech. In particular, Douglass does engage in reasonable argument on a variety of points, including some closely connected to his moral and political standing. For instance, in a passage we’ll consider below, Douglass argues that the legal

and political standing, but he does not argue for his standing directly.

³¹ Frank, *Constituent Moments*, 210.

³² Frank, 209–15.

code of Virginia, which imposes the death penalty on Black people for 72 crimes, implicitly acknowledges their standing as persons bearing moral responsibility. But, importantly, Douglass does not move from this point to the conclusion that enslaved and free Black people are persons — Douglass moves to the conclusion that the moral standing of Black persons is not genuinely contested: “The manhood of the slave is conceded.” For Douglass, the antebellum legal code of Virginia is not evidence that Black people are persons— let us not confer such dignity upon a slave code— it is instead evidence that there is no good-faith debate to be had over the matter. When we situate arguments like this in the context of a reorientation towards the speech as series of acts, rather than a list of propositions, we see the arguments Douglass advances as enactments of his political standing. The content of these arguments— that there is no interlocutor on the question of Douglass’s moral and political standing worthy of reasonable engagement— helps redirect his audience’s orientation toward the speech as an enactment of, rather than reasonable argument for, Douglass’s standing as a citizen. Douglass thereby transforms his audience’s understanding of what it is to hear a claim to fellow-membership: such claims are not assertions to be weighed on the basis of evidence and deliberation; they are enactments of one’s political standing that compel an audience’s acknowledgment.

In the Fifth of July speech, Douglass aims to crystalize in his audience an understanding of citizenship which he thinks will be plausible and indeed compelling to them. One might worry that Douglass isn’t licensed in taking this potential for a shared understanding of citizenship with audience for granted; in other words, that Douglass’s claim to citizenship will strike his audience as simply unauthorized and infelicitous.³³ Douglass, I think, would address this worry in two steps. First, Douglass would maintain that his audience in fact employs his formal understanding of citizenship as constituted by an enacted commitment to the fundamental principles of a polity. One way in which we come to see others as members of our community is by seeing them

³³ Thanks to Krupa Patel for raising this worry.

contribute in important ways to our community. The fundamental principles of our polity determine what sorts of contributions are important. Douglass will say: Reflect carefully on your experience and you will realize that you see those who contribute to your community in ways that reflect your polity's fundamental principles as citizens. This is just to say that, on reflection, we see those who enact commitments to the principles of the polity as citizens. Declaration directs an audience's attention to this way in which we experience others as fellow citizens.³⁴ But, as I will argue, in directing its audience's attention in this way, declaration transforms this conception of citizenship from simply intelligible to the primary way in which members of a polity understand one another as members of a shared political community.

Second, Douglass will argue that his audience shares his specific conception of American citizenship as constituted by an enacted commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, insofar as they commend the founders. Take the passage on slaves' rights of rebellion' above. Slaveholders do in fact commend the founders. In so doing, they affirm slaves' right of rebellion because, Douglass thinks, the founders really were committed to resisting tyranny and oppression. So Douglass thinks the choice for his audience is between commending the founders, and thus accepting his view of the fundamental principle of the American polity, or condemning the founders and rejecting his view.

What Douglass does in the Fifth of July speech, then, is draw on these aspects of his audience's everyday political life in order to, through a staging of dissensus that enacts a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression, reforge them into a forceful manifestation of his

³⁴ To be clear, it is not that one's perception of another as a citizen *constitutes* the latter's standing as a citizen. One perceives a normative status as something constituted independently of one's perception of the status. It is in this sense that my standing as a citizen is not up to you, or the wider polity in which I am situated.

standing as a fellow citizen.

B. The Fight with Covey

In August 1834, Douglass falls ill while processing wheat on the plantation of the ‘slavebreaker’ Edward Covey.³⁵ Covey, in response, beats Douglass badly; Douglass flees to his owner’s plantation (who had conscripted Douglass out to Covey), asking that he be hired out elsewhere. Douglass’s owner, however, instructs him to return to Covey’s plantation the following day.³⁶

After returning to Covey’s plantation, Douglass is eventually ambushed by Covey while working in the stables. Douglass, in response, springs into resistance, “remember[ing] my pledge to *stand up in my own defense*,” which Douglass made to himself while returning to Covey’s plantation. Ultimately, after a two hour (!) struggle, Covey gives up on his attack, without having “whipped me [Douglass] at all.”³⁷ Douglass asserts that his fight with Covey “was the end of the brutification to which slavery had subjected me.”³⁸

Gooding-Williams characterizes Douglass’s fight with Covey as Douglass’s “first declaration of independence.”³⁹ Douglass presents his fight with Covey as “the beginning of a revolution that aims to reconstitute the American nation” paralleling the role of the Declaration of Independence in (a certain intuitive mythology of) the American Revolution.⁴⁰ In the fight with Covey, as through the Declaration of Independence, Douglass secures a certain (and certainly fragile) degree of autonomy from a tyrant, altering the way in which Covey comports himself in relation to Douglass. The fight with Covey thus gives us a sense of what sort of acknowledgement

³⁵ Slaveowners in eastern Maryland would hire out “disobedient” slaves to Covey cheaply, and in exchange he would discipline them through violent and brutal means.

³⁶ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 138–43.

³⁷ Douglass, 151.

³⁸ Douglass, 152.

³⁹ Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 176. Nothing in my interpretation hangs on this in fact being Douglass’s *first* declaration, although I agree with Gooding-Williams that Douglass invites this claim.

⁴⁰ Gooding-Williams, 180. By an ‘intuitive mythology,’ I mean that the Declaration of Independence is a tractable starting point in the narrative of the American Revolution, although in that document the founders are reacting, and giving shape, to extant revolutionary efforts.

declaration compels, and how it compels such acknowledgement.

Important for our purposes, Douglass describes his experience in standing up for his own defense “as though [Covey and I] stood as equals before the law.”⁴¹ Douglass articulates his own forceful resistance as constituting not only an act of self-defense, but also an expression of a *rightful claim* to self-defense when attacked by another. Douglass sees his resistance as expressing a rightful claim to self-defense, I claim, because he sees it as enacting his political standing as a citizen. In fighting back against Covey, Douglass is not only avoiding physical harm, but “repelling the unjust and cruel aggressions of a tyrant.”⁴² Douglass thus sees himself as engaged in resistance against tyranny and oppression, and thereby a citizen with equal standing before the law, which he asserts by enacting a right to self-defense.

Douglass’s resistance, moreover, brings about a long term change in his relationship with Covey on the plantation. Whereas before the fight, Douglass observes that he “remained with Covey for one year, (I cannot say I *lived* with him),”⁴³ after the fight Douglass remarks that he “lived with Covey,” for Covey “never again laid on me the weight of his finger in anger.”⁴⁴ Douglass, I claim, interprets this change in Covey’s behavior as acknowledgement of Douglass’s right to self-defense, and thereby (partial) acknowledgment of his political standing as a citizen.⁴⁵ Covey acknowledges Douglass insofar as after the fight, Douglass comes to live with Covey. Of course, this also implies that acknowledgement of one’s standing as a citizen does not necessarily consist in consciously affirmed recognition of this standing. Douglass notes that Covey never attacks him again, nor calls the authorities to detain Douglass, at least in part because Covey worries that talk about the fight would harm his reputation as a slavebreaker.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 149.

⁴² Douglass, 151.

⁴³ Douglass, 133. Emphasis his.

⁴⁴ Douglass, 151.

⁴⁵ The acknowledgment that Douglass secures from Covey is plainly partial, as Covey continues to ‘own’ Douglass and exploit his labor.

⁴⁶ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 152.

Covey's acknowledgement is manifest in his behavior, not in his consciously affirmed attitudes. But because Douglass emphasizes the change in his relationship with Covey, however— from remaining to living with— he clearly takes this change in Covey's behavior to have some significance.

The fight with Covey is an instance of political resistance, as it enacts Douglass's standing as a citizen with a right to self-defense. The fight is an act of declaration because it compels acknowledgment of Douglass's standing as a citizen: it alters Douglass's relationship with Covey insofar as the latter refrains from laying a finger on Douglass in anger again, thereby comporting himself in a manner that reflects Douglass's right to self-defense.

3.4 Compelling Acknowledgement

At this point we've seen how two examples of declaration— Douglass's Fifth of July speech and his fight with Covey— establish Douglass's standing as a citizen: they are enactments of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression which compels an audience to acknowledge them as such. In this section, I spell out the sense of 'acknowledgement' that declaration compels, and what it means for declaration to forcefully manifest one's standing as a citizen.

Acknowledgment, in the sense I attribute to Douglass, consists in responsiveness: I acknowledge someone (e.g., a fellow citizen) or something (e.g., the external world) by acting in some way that responds to her or it.⁴⁷ Responsiveness is a capacious category: I respond to you as a citizen, for instance, by acting in some way or another in relation to you qua fellow citizen. Moreover, responsiveness, need not involve conscious avowal of what is being acknowledged, as Douglass's depiction of Covey illustrates. Douglass does not attribute to Covey the thought 'Douglass is a fellow American citizen,' but nevertheless takes the change in Covey's behavior

⁴⁷ Stanley Cavell, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 238–66; Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear," in *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 266–353; Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason : Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003).

to be meaningful for the purposes of antislavery politics. In other words, I acknowledge you as a citizen by treating you as a citizen, well or poorly, and whether or not I consciously cognize it as such.

Douglass articulates this conception of acknowledgment as responsiveness in a passage in his Fifth of July speech, in connection with the antebellum legal code of Virginia:

The slaveholders themselves acknowledge [that the slave is a man] in the enactment of laws for their government. They acknowledge it when they punish disobedience on the part of the slave. There are seventy-two crimes in the state of Virginia which, if committed by a black man... subject him to the punishment of death; while only two of these same crimes will subject a white man to the like punishment. What is this but the acknowledgement that the slave is a moral, intellectual, and responsible being.⁴⁸

Douglass argues that the legal code of Virginia, in subjecting slaves to punishment, acknowledges slaves as “moral, intellectual, and responsible” beings. Implied in Douglass’s remarks is a distinction between punishment and the mere infliction of suffering: punishment responds to (actual or perceived) violations of one’s moral responsibility. An act of punishment is a way of responding to the moral responsibility, and thus moral standing, of the person subject to punishment.⁴⁹

To say that an action responds to the normative standing of another does not mean that the action necessarily responds to her normative standing rightly. Douglass is plainly not claiming that the punishments to which Black people in antebellum Virginia are subjected appropriately reflect the responsibility they bear as moral agents. But even inappropriate punishment responds — wrongly — to the moral standing of the subject of punishment. It is in virtue of this

⁴⁸ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 286.

⁴⁹ Note that here we are discussing moral standing in order to elucidate Douglass’s conception of acknowledgement, as Douglass discusses acknowledgement explicitly in connection with moral standing in this passage.

responsiveness that an action acknowledges the normative status possessed by the target of the action.

One might object at this stage by claiming that the legal code and its authors do not respond to the moral standing of the punished, but rather confer such standing. But it seems quite implausible to attribute to Douglass the view that slaves acquire moral standing in virtue of the way in which they are treated by the legal code. In particular, Douglass clearly holds that, in spite of slaveholders' implicit acknowledgement of slaves' moral standing, slaveholders fail to treat slaves in accord with the moral standing they possess. But if another's standing is brought into being by one's acknowledgement, it is unclear how one could acknowledge another's standing in ways that fail to accord with her standing— that is, to treat her as a moral agent, but treat her *wrongly* as a moral agent. In order to preserve the structure of Douglass's claim— that the actions of slaveholders acknowledge the standing of enslaved and free Black people, but these actions fail to accord with the standing they acknowledge—Douglass must understand acknowledgement as responsive to normative statuses we already possess, rather than as conferring or constituting such statuses.

The fact that Douglass characterizes something as oppressive as the antebellum legal code of Virginia as acknowledging the moral standing of slaves, while still seeking to induce acknowledgment in his own audiences, implies that he must distinguish between better and worse instances of acknowledgment. To the this end, we can evaluatively distinguish cases of acknowledgement as complete or incomplete.⁵⁰ Acknowledgment of someone as possessing a particular normative status (e.g., citizenship) is complete when it satisfies two conditions: the *respect condition* and the *self-conscious* condition.

My acknowledgment of you satisfies the respect condition when the way in which I respond to you appropriately reflects (i.e., respects) your normative standing. For instance, my

⁵⁰ Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear."

acknowledgment of you as a citizen satisfies the respect condition when I treat you as a citizen ought to be treated— say, in accord with the rights of the citizen.

My acknowledgment of you satisfies the self-conscious condition when I recognize the way in which I act in response to you as a reflection of your normative standing. For instance, my acknowledgment of you as a citizen satisfies the self-conscious condition only if I recognize that I am treating you as citizen ought to be treated (or at least how I think a citizen ought to be treated).

If the way in which I respond to is either disrespectful or not self-conscious, then my acknowledgment of you is incomplete. The legal code of Virginia is an instance of incomplete acknowledgment in part because the way it responds to the moral standing of slaves is radically disrespectful— it fails the respect condition. Covey’s acknowledgment of Douglass is incomplete in part because Covey himself does not recognize it as a response to Douglass’s standing as a fellow citizen— it fails the self-conscious condition.⁵¹

While complete— that is, self-consciously respectful— acknowledgment captures a notably more desirable mode of social and political relation than incomplete— that is, not self-conscious or disrespectful— acknowledgment, incomplete acknowledgment nevertheless plays an important role in Douglass’s emancipatory politics. Douglass observes in *Bondage* that changes in patterns of behavior ultimately affect changes in public opinion: “[p]ublic opinion seldom differs very widely from public practice.”⁵² Instances of incomplete acknowledgment are themselves catalysts for complete acknowledgment, and other substantial changes in public opinion, because coming to incomplete acknowledgement involves changes in patterns of practice in daily social life that ultimately shape changes in public opinion.

Declaration induces acknowledgment of the declarer’s normative standing by *manifesting*

⁵¹ Of course, for both of these examples we can also identify ways in which the other condition of complete acknowledgment is violated.

⁵² Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 45.

that standing before an audience. Douglass describes the manifestation of normative standing (e.g., personhood, citizenship) in terms of evincing *dignity*. In his reflections on his fight with Covey, Douglass asserts that “[a] man without force, is without the essential dignity of humanity.”⁵³ Douglass’s assertion can appear puzzling, if one thinks of dignity as an intrinsic marker of one’s humanity. Dignity, on such an understanding, is exactly the sort of thing that we cannot lack. Because Douglass suggests one can lack dignity—in particular, if she is without force—Douglass must be referring to a different normative characteristic of agents. Gooding-Williams, in his reading of this passage, observes that dignity is important for Douglass:

not because a human being cannot be a human being without it, but because he cannot induce respect without it—either the respect of others or self-respect. In short, he cannot achieve his humanity in the eyes of others or in his own eyes. The essential dignity of humanity is an apparent, manifest dignity that human beings require—that all the members of humanity require—to acknowledge one another as human.⁵⁴

What dignity refers to, for Douglass, is the way in which we manifest the fact that we are moral persons and fellow citizens in ways that induce others to act in ways that acknowledge us as such. Declaration is one mode of action through which we evince dignity in this sense.

You bring me to acknowledge you as a citizen by acting in ways that manifest your citizenship. What it is for someone to declare her citizenship is to make it manifest by enacting a commitment to the fundamental principles of the polity before an audience. Douglass, for instance, manifests his citizenship before his audience in the Fifth of July speech by declaiming slavery and white supremacy; he manifests his citizenship in the fight with Covey by overpowering a tyrant. The political dignity that Douglass evinces in these episodes consists, at

⁵³ Douglass, 151.

⁵⁴ Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois*, 181. Gooding-Williams here elides the distinction drawn above between inducing respect and acknowledgement: as we see in Douglass’s remarks concerning Virginia’s antebellum legal code, one can acknowledge another in disrespectful ways. Thanks for José Medina and Akeel Bilgrami for helpful discussion on this point.

core, in his unambiguous enactment of a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression.⁵⁵

Declaration is a distinctively effective means of inducing acknowledgement because it *forcefully* manifests the declarer's citizenship. In the claim cited above, Douglass notes that dignity depends on the exercise of force. Only through the exercise of force, on Douglass's picture, can someone ensure that her audience responds to her as a fellow citizen (or moral person). Acts of declaration *compel* acknowledgement because they are *forceful*: by confronting an audience with his citizenship enacted, Douglass makes his audience respond— consciously or not, respectfully or disrespectfully— to him as a fellow citizen.

It's tempting to think that Douglass conceives of force as physical power or violence, and perhaps forms of rhetoric that echo such power and violence. But the forcefulness of declaration need not be understood narrowly in terms of an elite machismo. The forcefulness of declaration precludes *neutral avoidance*. Typically, I acknowledge you by acting in response your manifested dignity— responsiveness is a matter of doing something. This implies that when I fail to act, I fail to acknowledge you: my lack of action is a lack of responsiveness— it is neutral avoidance.

Acts of declaration are forceful in the sense that they render even such avoidance a mode of responsiveness. Douglass's Fifth of July audience acknowledges Douglass by listening to his speech, receiving Douglass's argument and invective. Covey similarly acknowledges Douglass after the fight by refraining from laying a finger on him in anger. Covey's acknowledgment consists precisely in what he *does not* do to Douglass after the fight. The forcefulness of declaration transforms an audience's inaction into a mode of responsiveness to the declarer's manifested standing: the fact that Douglass is a citizen (and person) cannot be ignored by his

⁵⁵ Here I refer to *political* dignity because we are concerned with the aspect of Douglass's resistance that manifests his standing as an American citizen. This does not compete with an account of the *moral* dignity of Douglass's resistance, which concerns how Douglass's speech and fight manifest his moral personhood for his audience to acknowledge. I focus here on the political dignity Douglass's resistance evinces in order to capture its role in his post-Garrisonian antislavery politics.

audiences in these cases.⁵⁶

If we think of force as precluding neutral avoidance— as preventing an audience from ignoring the manifestation of a person’s normative standing— then we need not characterize declaration as a mode of political action enacted by a ‘manly’ elite. What makes declarations distinctively effective in altering an audience’s understanding of the boundaries of their political community is this capacity to transform inaction into responsiveness, and thereby induce acknowledgment of persons previously marginalized in a polity. While, in the particular contexts Douglass finds himself, physical violence and forceful rhetoric are particularly apt ways of making an audience’s inaction a mode of responsiveness, we need not assume that these varieties of action are the only ways to achieve forcefulness in this sense— there are many ways in which a confrontation with an audience can be effected.

At this stage, one may still worry that the democratic character of declaration is substantially constrained. Douglass’s paradigmatic examples of declaration—his fight with Covey and Fifth of July speech— easily strike us as exceptional moments of antislavery resistance. The exceptional character of these episodes derives in part from the fact that Douglass exercises forms of physical and rhetorical force, in overpowering a slaveholder and seizing the attention of an audience, that are not obviously embodied in the many examples of everyday antislavery resistance that Douglass recounts in *Bondage*. Indeed, in as much as these acts compel acknowledgment by, in Frank’s phrasing, staging dissensus, one might worry that the very idea of staging might seem to imply that some and not others are well-situated to take the stage— that the sphere of political life in which declaration is enacted is inevitably bounded and exclusionary.

But once we see that the engine of declaration is its power to effect acknowledgment—to

⁵⁶ Now, we might want to insist that any case of inaction is necessarily an instance of *incomplete* acknowledgment. But even if this is right, remember that Douglass thinks incomplete acknowledgement helps to ultimately generate complete acknowledgement and other changes in public attitudes.

demand and induce responsiveness to a forcefully manifestation of one's normative standing—we are in a position to characterize many moments of antislavery resistance that Douglass recounts in *Bondage* as instances of acknowledgment. Nelly forcefully resists and scars an overseer assaulting her before her children and the young Douglass; Denby breaks from the attack of an overseer, plant himself in the middle of a creek, and refuses to return at the order of his attacker; Bill and Caroline refuse to obey Covey's orders to assist in restraining Douglass during their fight, Bill declaring to Douglass “My God! Frederick, I aint goin’ to tech ye.”⁵⁷ Nelly, Denby, Bill, and Caroline confront slaveholders with resistance and refusal in ways that compel these audiences to respond.⁵⁸

At the same time, these examples also illustrate the limits of declaration's efficacy securing the concrete aims of emancipatory politics. The acknowledgment that Nelly, Denby, and Caroline induce is unequivocally horrific: Nelly and Caroline are viciously beaten for their resistance, and Denby is shot dead. No single act of declaration guarantees emancipation for anyone, and cost one bears for inducing acknowledgment of her standing can be supremely grave.

The distinctive emancipatory potential of declaration, then, depends on two points. First, no one act of declaration, on Douglass's view, suffices on its own to address the trial of the enslaved. Instead, Douglass sees emancipatory potential in a pattern of enslaved and free Black Americans forcefully manifesting their citizenship in ways that reshape a polity's practices over time. This is inevitably a long-term emancipatory project to which particular acts of declaration contribute.

⁵⁷ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 61–63, 78–79, 150–51.

⁵⁸ We should note the two-fold audience in each of these episodes. In each case, the declarer compels a slaveholder to respond (violently) to their resistance and refusal. But in each case the declarer also resists and refuses before other slaves, who witness and affirm the refusal—a witnessing and affirmation that Douglass reproduces in recounting these episodes in his autobiography. With respect to the first audience in each case, incomplete acknowledgment is at issue; with respect to the second audience, complete acknowledgment is at least a reasonable aim.

Second, Douglass believes—I think reasonably—that an extended program of forceful manifestation of citizenship that induces acknowledgment bears emancipatory potential because of the distinctive political epistemology that it invokes and, through repeated enactment, inculcates in its audience. Declaration’s refusal to convince and persuade works to reorient its audience towards a conception of citizenship as a status that is secured through the enactment of the polity’s fundamental commitments; this reorientation, which is embodied in the practical responsiveness of acknowledgment, refigures the way in which we understand one another as members of a shared political community. On declaration’s political epistemology of acknowledgment, we understand one another as members of a shared political community by comporting ourselves in ways that reflect this fact. In the next section, I explain why a political epistemology of acknowledgment bears distinctive emancipatory potential, in contrast to a position on which citizenship is in the first place a status conferred by a polity.

3.5 A Political Epistemology of Acknowledgment

Through declaration, Douglass aims to transform not only the American polity’s understanding of who its members are, but also its political epistemology— its account of how we understand one another as members of a shared political community. Declaration contests a tempting political epistemology of political citizenship, which consists in two connected claims. First, on this picture Douglass contests, one’s standing as a citizen is *conferred* by the wider polity. Other citizens of the polity know that I am a citizen because they make me a citizen. Second, the wider polity confers citizenship upon someone because they judge her to possess the capacities of the citizen. This judgment consists in an *inference* from particular actions or traits that are taken as indirect evidence that a person possess the capacities requisite for the conferral of citizenship. The epistemic task for emancipatory politics, on a political epistemology of inference, is to provide evidence that members of a marginalized group possess marks and

features requisite for citizenship, in order to persuade the polity to confer citizenship.⁵⁹

Black abolitionists in the 1850s, including Douglass, contest this political epistemology of citizenship because it is unsuitable to the aims of emancipatory politics, and is indeed implicated in the maintenance of pro-slavery and white supremacist ideology. Martin Delany, a Black abolitionist and contemporary of Douglass, targets this epistemology of citizenship in his 1852 pamphlet, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. Delany focuses on following ‘political’ conception of citizenship, which he contrasts with a ‘natural’ birthright conception of citizenship:

The legitimate requirement, politically considered, necessary to the justifiable claims for protection and full enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of an unqualified freeman, in all democratic countries is, that each person so endowed, shall have made contributions and investments in the country.⁶⁰

On the picture Delany sketches, members of a social group justify their claim to citizenship by offering evidence that they as a class have made ‘contributions and investments in the country,’ and thereby demonstrate that they possess the capacity (are ‘so endowed’) as to contribute to the polity. Where the evidence is sufficient, the wider polity ought to confer citizenship upon members of the class.

In *Condition*, as we saw in chapter 1, Delany goes on to show that this model for promoting one’s claim to citizenship is hopelessly ineffective in the American case: enslaved and free Black Americans have satisfied the ‘contribution and investment’ criterion according to any reasonable standard (Delany takes nearly 100 pages of a 200 page pamphlet to demonstrate this), so that:

⁵⁹ Compare with Markell’s characterization of the role of knowledge in a politics of recognition: “struggles for recognition [are] attempts to secure forms of respect and esteem that are grounded in, and expressive of, the accurate knowledge of the particular identities borne by people and social groups.” Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, 39.

⁶⁰ Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Bensenville: Lushena Books, 2014), 48.

If such evidence of industry and interest, as has been exhibited in the various chapters on the different pursuits and engagements of colored Americans, do not entitle them to equal rights and privileges in our common country, then indeed, is there nothing to justify the claims of any portion of the American people to the common inheritance of Liberty.⁶¹

But, Delany goes on to show, such evidence has not sufficed persuade the polity to confer citizenship upon Black Americans; Delany demonstrates this by quoting the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 in full in the pamphlet. Instead, Delany argues, systems of oppression in America have subjected enslaved and free Black people in the US to a “corruption of blood.” This corruption of blood infects the wider polity’s inference from marks and features to the possession of the capacities of the citizen. This is for two reasons. First, systems of oppression like that enacted by the Fugitive Slave Act, impede those subject to them from exercising the capacities at issue, thereby limiting the amount of evidence the wider polity can infer a rightful claim to citizenship on the basis of. Second, and more fundamentally, systems of oppression present those subject to them as morally and politically inferior to the wider polity, and directly implicate the wider polity in treating the oppressed as inferior. To the extent that the wider polity sees and treats those subject to oppression as inferior, on Delany’s account, they will inevitably judge that the oppressed lack the capacities of the citizen, no matter what contrary evidence is put before them. The wider polity will thus never (or never reliably) judge an oppressed class to have a rightful claim to citizenship, and thus will not confer such status upon members of the class. Delany concludes that, since any form of political justification for citizenship must appeal to marks-and-features evidence in this way, interventions by abolitionists in American public discourse to establish the political standing of enslaved and free Black people are hopeless. Delany thus goes on in the pamphlet to advocate for emigrationism as an alternative, more viable, antislavery

⁶¹ Delany, 145.

strategy.⁶²

We should read Douglass's refusal to argue reasonably against pro-slavery and white supremacist ideology in the Fifth of July speech as an endorsement of Delany's critique of 'political' justifications for citizenship. In refusing to argue reasonably, Douglass rejects demands to marshal marks-and-features evidence to justify his claim to political (and moral) standing in the American polity. In so doing Douglass also rejects a picture on which his political (and moral) standing is conferred by the wider polity: he will not marshal for his audience marks-and-features evidence in defense of his standing because his standing is not theirs to confer.

But unlike Delany, Douglass does not advocate for abolitionists to withdraw from the American political sphere. Instead, through the Fifth of July speech itself, Douglass models declaration as an alternative mode of intervention to reasonable argument in public discourse. Douglass therefore must think (or at least think it plausible) that declaration, in contrast to reasonable argument, is a potentially productive form of political argument for antislavery in American public discourse. Part of the reason Douglass thinks this, I claim, is that declaration articulates an alternative conception of how we relate epistemically to the political standing of those around us. Declaration presents citizenship as a status an audience acknowledges through confrontation with its enactment (i.e., through an enactment of principles which is itself constitutive of citizenship).

This might, at first pass, look like a rejection of a political epistemology: rather than promoting knowledge or understanding of persons' claims to citizenship, declaration cracks

⁶² Note that the critique I attribute to Delany is not incompatible with the more straightforward claim that the wider polity will not grant political privileges to an oppressed class because it is in their (actual or perceived) interest not to do so. The criticism I attribute to Delany adds that the very logic of a marks-and-features justification for citizenship ensure that even if the privileged class were to declaim their self-interest, they would nevertheless fail to confer citizenship upon the oppressed. In this way, the logic of marks and features conceptions of citizenship reinforces oppressive ideology.

heads in order to induce behavior and beliefs (i.e., that in declaration we're in the business of causes rather than justifications). But in fact, I think, acknowledgment points to a radically different form of epistemic relation to normative statuses than the marks-and-features model. Normative statuses like citizenship, on this picture, are themselves directly manifest to us in the world. In enacting a commitment to resist tyranny and oppression and directing an audience's attention to it, Douglass's declarations do not provide evidence justifying his claim to citizenship; rather, Douglass's standing as a citizen is directly manifest in these declarations. This is because the enacted commitment to resist tyranny and oppression just is what American citizenship consists in (given Douglass's interpretation of the fundamental principles of the American polity). Thus, since one's standing as a citizen consists in the enactment of commitments, it is not up to the wider polity to confer, or withhold, standing. The role of the audience of declaration, in this regard, is perceptive rather than constructive—the audience acknowledges, rather than confers, standing. One acknowledges a normative status directly manifest in the world through the ways in which one comports oneself in the world. My comprehension of the normative status of another cashes out in terms of what I do, rather than in terms of what I (idly) believe.

This general epistemic model— of truths/facts/features of the world directly accessible to agents— is an instance of the view that Alice Crary calls a “wider conception of objectivity.”⁶³ On the wider conception of objectivity, normative values, traditionally circumscribed to a sphere of subjectivity removed from the world, are instead understood as elements of the world with which we make direct contact in actions that express them.⁶⁴ But the wider conception of objectivity does not simply maintain that additional features of the world, like normative statuses, are further instances of properties discerned by natural science. Rather, the wider

⁶³ Alice Crary, “The Role of Animals in Radical Social Thought: Animalizing Ideologies and the Question of Critique,” 2018.

⁶⁴ John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50.

conception of objectivity articulates a broader understanding of what it is to be in the world (i.e., to be objective) and of what it is to perceive (i.e., see aright) what is in the world. Values, on this picture, are things we make sensible contact with-- perceive— in the world.⁶⁵ Our task in discerning the objective, on the wide conception of objectivity, is not to purge our perspective of those elements which in some sense depend on us (normative statuses make sense only insofar as there are others upon which the statuses impose requirements)— it is rather to properly attune ourselves to those elements of the world which in some sense depend on us. Acts of declaration help attune us to these features of the world by confronting us with their vivid manifestation in a way that induces acknowledgment.

It is worth noting that the sense of acknowledgment operative in this account of declaration is broader than the claim that we directly see values in the world. Acknowledgment is a matter of perception in the sense that it is responsive to a status independently constituted in the world (i.e., constituted by the enacted of commitments). But acknowledgment does not only consist in the perception of enacted commitments— particularly if perception is paradigmatically understood to involve seeing a commitment enacted. Acknowledgment consists in *responsiveness*: I acknowledge another as a citizen by comporting myself in ways that are responsive to her standing as citizen. In particular, I acknowledge another as a citizen in responding to the citizenship-constituting commitments that she enacts. In many cases, my responsiveness will involve, in part, seeing that another has enacted a commitment to the polity. I see the swings of your fists or reassurances to anxious comrades as efforts to resist tyranny and oppression. But the responsiveness that is constitutive of acknowledgment is not exhausted by perception in this sense. Acknowledgment is realized in what we do in relation to one another. I also acknowledge you as a citizen in joining you in a fight against an oppressor or in contributing to your organizing efforts. I may not be able to act effectively in these ways unless I also see you

⁶⁵ Akeel Bilgrami, "The Visibility of Value," n.d.

as engaged in resistance against oppression (or, more generally, see you as enacting some sort of commitment), but idle perception (i.e. perception that does not inform the way I act) strains the sense of ‘responsiveness’ at work in acknowledgment. Given that acknowledgment characterizes the way in which one understands others as bearers of normative status, my understanding of you as the bearer of a normative status, like citizenship, is realized in how I comport myself in relation to you.

If, with Douglass, we think of citizenship as a status constituted independently of a polity’s judgment, we have a model for reforging the boundaries of political community more inclusively, even under conditions of severe oppression. The epistemic task for an emancipatory politics, on a political epistemology of acknowledgment is to induce responsiveness to the citizenship of members of marginalized groups through intervention in the daily social interactions where acknowledgment arises. This requires that we think of citizenship in the first place as a mode of civic activism that forges bonds of solidarity between members of the polity. A viable emancipatory politics, on Douglass’s view, draws on and reinforces this conception of citizenship by intervening in daily social life in ways that promote such activism and thereby induce acknowledgment. Declaration itself is one means by which this change in a polity’s political epistemology is brought about: by effectively inducing acknowledgment in members of a polity, we change not only who they understand as their fellow members, but what they take such understanding to consist in.

3.6 Conclusion

By way of conclusion, I want to return to the role of *My Bondage and My Freedom* itself in addressing the trial of the enslaved. At the start I noted that one of Douglass’s declared purposes in penning *Bondage* is to address the trial of the enslaved by promoting acknowledgment of the political standing of enslaved and free Black people in the US. In light of the above account of

declaration, I suggest that we can read Douglass's second autobiography itself as an instance of declaration.

The episodes of political resistance Douglass recounts in *Bondage* do not supply evidence from which the audience ought to infer that free and enslaved Black people have a rightful claim to American citizenship. *Bondage* consciously breaks with the conventions of earlier slave narratives, which are structured around the introduction of authenticating documents and written testimony from (typically white) abolitionists. This focus on a legalistic conception of justification, on which the veracity of the narrative must be established through authenticating evidence, crystallizes in a genre Robert Stepto calls the "authenticating narrative."⁶⁶ The use of authenticating documents and written testimony for verification casts such narratives as bodies of facts for whites to draw on in public discourse about slavery.⁶⁷

The authenticity of Douglass's autobiographies, by contrast, is exhibited through his exercise of agency, rather than the marks and features evidence of documents and testimony. Douglass's agency manifests not only in the episodes that he recounts in the narrative, but also in his articulation of the narrative itself. As Stepto puts it, Douglass enacts "preeminent authorial control [in] the presentation of his personal history."⁶⁸ Inasmuch as *Bondage* compels Douglass's audience to see him as the author of his own history— both in terms of his resistance against tyranny and oppression and in his presentation of his personal history (the penning and distribution of which is itself an act of resistance)— the autobiography itself induces acknowledgement of Douglass as political (and moral) equal.

However, *Bondage* is not only a declaration of Douglass's individual political (and moral)

⁶⁶ Robert B. Stepto, *From behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 3–31.

⁶⁷ I owe this point to Emmalon Davis.

⁶⁸ Stepto, *From behind the Veil*, 25. Note that Stepto makes this claim about Douglass's first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*. I think, and believe Stepto would agree, that this claim also applies to Douglass's later autobiographies, including *Bondage*.

standing. *Bondage* is suffused with episodes of antislavery resistance executed by others. For instance, in examples discussed above: Nelly resists the attack of a brutal overseer; Denby's refuses to submit to a whipping (for which he is ultimately murdered); Bill and Caroline reject Covey's commands to assist him in his fight with Douglass.⁶⁹ Through the political agency exhibited in these episodes, *Bondage* presents slaves as the authors of their own histories, which Douglass finds himself well-situated to report to other members of the polity. These episodes of resistance manifest slaves' political dignity, because they illustrate ways in which slaves enact a commitment to resist the tyranny and oppression of slaveholders. By evincing dignity in this way, the narrative episodes induce respect and acknowledgment of slaves' political standing as citizens. *Bondage* itself, thus, is an instance in which one can induce acknowledgment of the political standing of *others* through declaration, and in this way expand the polity's understanding of its membership and boundaries. Douglass's narrative confronts his readers' with slaves' citizenship enacted. In so doing, Douglass seeks to reforge a more inclusive American polity on the basis of a political epistemology of acknowledgment.

⁶⁹ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 61–63; 78–79; 150–51.

Chapter 4: Humility and Empathy in Emancipatory Politics

4.1 Introduction

In a recent *New York Review of Books* essay, Zadie Smith asserts that part of “[w]hat all liberation movements want, surely, is comprehension and compassion.”¹ Smith points to the epistemic and affective dimensions involved in making political communities more inclusive and securing a robust sense of social justice for their members. Transforming a political community afflicted with oppression into an emancipated one is in large part a matter of cultivating social bonds that reflect our status as free, equal, but mutually dependent, persons. Cultivating such social bonds depends, in large part, on increasing mutual understanding among a community’s members and in heightening their sense of commitment to one another.

In her essay, Smith suggests that the tradition of narrative fiction illuminates the epistemic and affective dimensions of emancipatory social bonds. In our engagement with narrative fiction, Smith maintains, we pursue an aspiration to know and be known. Smith casts this aspiration as realized in experiences where we inhabit the perspectives of others: “for years now, in the pages of novels, ‘I’ have been both adult and child, male and female, black, brown, and white, gay and straight, funny and tragic, liberal and conservative, religious and godless, not to mention alive and dead;” and in which she finds her own perspective inhabited: “I have closed novels and stared at their back covers for a long moment and felt known in a way I cannot honestly say I have felt known by many real-life interactions with human beings, or even by myself.”² But the normative standard of knowing and being known, Smith cautions, is not aptly cast in terms of *correctness*:

In my capacity as a writing teacher, I’ve noticed, in the classroom, the emergence of a belief that fiction can or should be the product of an absolute form of ‘correctness.’ The

¹ Zadie Smith, “Fascinated to Presume: In Defense of Fiction,” October 24, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/24/zadie-smith-in-defense-of-fiction/>.

² Smith, “Fascinated to Presume.”

student explains that I should believe in her character because this is *exactly* how X type of person would behave. How does she know? Because, as it happens, she herself *is* X type of person. Or she knows because she has spent a great deal of time researching X type of person, and this novel is the consequence of her careful research.... As if fiction could argue itself into a reader's belief system! As if, armed with our collection of facts about what an X type of person feels, is, and does, always and everywhere, a writer could hope to bypass the intimate judgment of a reader, which happens sentence by sentence, moment by moment.

Smith does not deny that issues of inaccuracy, error, or inauthenticity can arise in our efforts to know and be known. But Smith does deny that knowing and being known is fundamentally a matter of acquiring facts about others and relaying facts about oneself, as if mutual understanding and affective connection were purely a function of how much we know about one another.

The connection Smith draws between the social bonds forged through narrative and the social dimension of emancipatory politics resonates with Black abolitionists' use of autobiography in the US prior to the Civil War. As the editor of one antislavery pamphlet in the 1840s states: "Argument provokes argument... reason is met by sophistry, but the narratives of slaves go right to the hearts of men."³ In going 'right to the hearts of men,' abolitionists deployed former slaves' narratives to promote comprehension and compassion in white audiences, in ways that they took to be more efficacious than the marshaling of evidence and reasons.

It is tempting to attribute the distinctive emancipatory potential of former slaves' narratives to their efficacy in promoting empathic understanding in white audiences. Through detailed, first-personal accounts of their experiences, former slaves enabled their audiences to inhabit their

³ Boston *Chronotype*, qtd in William L. Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story : The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1769-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, c1986), 5.

perspectives—the sharing of experiences cultivated shared affect and understanding. As Adam Smith puts it, “[s]ympathy... does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it.”⁴ Narrative’s edge over argument, on this view, is that it supplies audiences with a first-personal perspective to inhabit, in virtue of which these audiences come to know more about the world—in particular, the experience and situation of others situated in the world. On this view, emancipatory social bonds are forged by learning more about one another: we appreciate one another as free, equal, but mutually dependent political actors by feeling what one another feels and understanding one another’s interests.

I argue, however, that the emancipatory potential of former slaves’ narratives is in fact grounded in a more radical refiguring of the epistemic and affective dimensions of emancipatory politics. By the early 1850s, many Black abolitionists understood the efficacy of such narratives to depend on the ways in which Black authors confronted white readers with their agency and authority over the narrative articulation of their own lives. As Williams Andrews puts it, such narratives involved “a complex discursive encounter presided over by a self-determining narrator who makes free with text and reader in the same of truth *to* self,” rather than truth about self.⁵ As with Zadie Smith, this commitment to truth to self is not a wholesale rejection of the value of accuracy in narrating one’s life. But it grounds the emancipatory potential of narrative in the manifestation of the author’s agency, rather than in narrative’s relaying a correct or ‘authentic’ perspective for an audience to inhabit. This manifestation of agency involves a confrontation with one’s reader which, as Andrews observes, “was a good deal less solicitous of the white

⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1761), 7. As a terminological note, the 18th and 19th century authors that we will engage with use the term ‘sympathy’ to refer to the taking up of another person’s perspective— what readers today refer to by ‘empathy.’ There are, of course, important historical nuances in the development of the concept of empathy. My focus in this chapter is to contrast the general epistemic orientation of taking up another’s perspective with the general orientation of responding to another person as a fellow agent. Thus, for our purposes, 18th/19th century uses of ‘sympathy’ and contemporary uses of ‘empathy’ are interchangeable.

⁵ Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 2. His emphasis.

readers's empathy and trust than" narrative strategies that focused on correctness and authenticity.⁶ Instead, this confrontational manifestation of the author's agency aimed to produce, in Andrews words, alienation and disorientation. In other words, I argue, former slaves' narratives confronted white readers with the limits and particularities of their positions. These confrontations, when effective, induced recognition of such limits and particularities— this is to say that these confrontations, when effective, induced *humility* in white readers. Former slaves' narratives thus illustrate an antislavery politics in which humility is integral to the epistemic and affective dimensions of forging emancipatory social bonds and thereby making political communities more inclusive.

A close examination of former slaves' narratives, and their role in antebellum abolitionism in the US, shows that the knowing and being known of emancipated political life is not, in the first place, a matter of seamlessly taking up one another's feelings and interests; instead, it is a matter of inducing responsiveness to one another's agency— and especially the agency of those who are marginalized in oppressive polities. Bonds of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism (i.e., emancipatory social bonds) are forged primarily through an appreciation of others' agency, rather than others' perspectives (construed as objects one might herself take up and inhabit for a time). This is to say that the knowing and being known of emancipated political life is fundamentally a matter of *acknowledgment*: practical responsiveness to one another's agency and normative standing. Empathy does play a role on this view— a full appreciation of what someone is doing depends on an understanding of her perspective on the world— but it is ancillary to humble acknowledgment of others' agency. Acknowledgment, especially in contexts in which privileged political actors must respond to the agency of marginalized political actors, is the epistemic and affective mechanism through which communities reforge themselves more inclusively.

⁶ Andrews, 2. 'Authenticity,' in this context, means that the source of the narrative is its purported author, who in fact speaks from the social position which she purports to.

In this chapter, I will defend the role of humility and acknowledgment in the epistemic and affective dimensions of emancipatory politics by developing the relationship between narrative and political judgment. Political judgment, through which persons decide what courses of action to adopt, with whom they should act, and what risks to take, is one prominent social aspect of political life: we always exercise political judgment in relation to other persons, and thus political judgment is always a locus through which social bonds can be forged or compromised. Political judgment helps to forge emancipatory social bonds when it is responsive to others' agency— this is an integral part of what it is for political judgment to be *responsible*. Where political actors— especially privileged political actors exercising judgment in relation to marginalized political actors— exercise political judgment primarily on the basis of empathy, emphasizing their capacity to inhabit correct and authentic perspectives of the oppressed, they tend to exercise political judgment irresponsibly— in ways that fail to respond to the agency of marginalized political actors. But where political actors exercise political judgment primarily on the basis of humility, emphasizing a recognition of their limits and particularities in relation to those with whom they act in concert, they tend to exercise political judgment responsibly— in ways that respond to the agency of marginalized political actors.⁷ These claims, I will show, are exemplified in antebellum abolitionism in the US, particularly in relation to former slaves' narratives.

In section 4.2, I characterize what I mean by responsibility in political judgment. In section 4.3, I sketch a picture on which cultivating empathy might seem to contribute responsible political judgment. In section 4.4, I challenge this picture by showing how former slaves' narratives were used by white abolitionists to ground political judgments that were not responsible to free and enslaved Black Americans; in such cases these narratives were drawn on

⁷ This implies that responsible political judgment is integral to the kind of activity that Arendt takes as constitutive of political life, action in concert. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

primarily in terms of inducing empathy. In section 4.5, I show that Black abolitionists, by the 1850s, drew on former slaves' narratives to induce humility in white audiences, in order to render the latter's political judgment more responsible. In section 4.6, I explicate the connection between acknowledgment— practical responsiveness to others' agency— and emancipatory social bonds.

4.2 Responsible Political Judgment

Political judgment— through which we decide what values or aims to prioritize, how to act in pursuit of such aims, and with whom to act— is one locus where the epistemic and affective dimensions of political life manifest (i.e., those which concern how we understand and feel one another as fellow members of a community), and where emancipatory social bonds are forged. Frederick Douglass captures the connection between political judgment and emancipatory social bonds in his discussion of a Sabbath school he helped to organize as slave on the plantation of William Freeland in eastern Maryland in 1835, in which he and other slaves taught one another to read. He describes the bonds forged between the participants in the Sabbath school in this way: “I never loved, esteemed, or confided in men, more than I did in these. They were true as steel, and no band of brothers could have been more loving. There were no mean advantages taken of each other, as is sometimes the case where slaves are situated as we were; no tattling; no giving each other bad names to Mr. Freeland; and no elevating one at the expense of the other.”⁸ The participants in the Sabbath school forge bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism with one another. Crucially, Douglass emphasizes that these bonds manifest in the ways in which participants in the Sabbath school decide to act on matters that concern them collectively: “We never undertook to do any thing, of any importance, which was likely to affect each other, without mutual consultation. We were generally a unit, and moved together.”⁹ The

⁸ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 165.

⁹ Douglass, 165.

Sabbath school participants acted as a unit— in ways that reflected commitments of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism— in forming judgments on the basis of mutual consultation. In other words, in exercising political judgment well— in ways that reflect each actor’s agency and effectively coordinates among them— consists in judging in ways that enact bonds of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism.

Good political judgment is guided by two sorts of normative considerations. First, good political judgment is guided by a set of ultimate ends or principles: we have some idea of the kind of world we are trying to bring about, or the concrete change in the world we are trying to effect. Second, good political judgment is responsible to the world and other political actors: in good political judgment we take into account the likely and potential outcomes of a course of action, and how the character and execution of a course of action depends on others’ judgment and agency (political action is something we do in coordination with others).

These two sets of normative considerations correspond, at least roughly, to what Max Weber calls an “ethic of ultimate ends” and an “ethic of responsibility.”¹⁰ For our purposes, what matters is that an integral part of good political judgment is an appreciation of how political action depends on others as fellow agents, without whom the action cannot be performed, and whose judgment and activity will shape the exact character of the action and its effects. Weber captures this point in “Politics as a Vocation” in his discussion of a “committed syndicalist” calling for a strike. The syndicalist, in Weber’s example, is confronted with the fact that this particular strike, in this particular circumstance, is likely to “result in increasing the opportunities of reaction, in increasing the oppression of [her] class, and obstructing its assent.”¹¹ In response to this fact the syndicalist responds that “[i]f an action of good intent leads to bad results, then,

¹⁰ Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 77–128. Nothing central to my argument hangs on whether this gloss of good political judgment captures Weber’s discussion of the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility exactly. I take this to be an intuitive picture of good political judgment that echoed in Weber’s own discussion.

¹¹ Weber, 121.

in the actor's eyes, not [she] but the world, or the stupidity of other men, or God's will who made them thus, is responsible for the evil."¹² She fails to act according to an ethic of responsibility because she fails to fully acknowledge that the course of action she calls for, and the end she wills, depends— both in its achievement and specific character— on the agency of others. What acknowledgment we do find in her reaction expresses contempt: for her fellows too 'stupid' to act in their ultimate interests, for a world uncondusive to end she aims to bring about, and perhaps even the very fact that what she wills in political life depends on the world and on others.

In claiming that responsible political judgment is attuned to the limits of political actors, Weber is not, I think, expressing a crude pessimism about the possibilities of political action. After all, Weber concludes that the person who has the calling for politics is one who *persists* in advancing her political ideals in spite of a world that sometimes appears to her as "too stupid or too base."¹³ Complex (and sometimes irresolute) political actors acting in a complex (and sometimes irrational) world will inevitably frustrate political ideals. The political actor whose judgment is informed by an ethic of responsibility acknowledges the ways in which the world might frustrate her judgment, and nevertheless resolves to stand by her judgment. I think we should read Weber as suggesting that one can stand by her political judgment *responsibly* only if she acknowledges the ways in which the world (and other political actors) might frustrate her judgment. For instance, the politically responsible syndicalist might, in the face of risks to her cause, nevertheless call for a strike; but she will do so while acknowledging that the aim of her judgment might be frustrated (for instance) by workers who must balance their aspirations for emancipation with their need to sustain their families. The politically responsible syndicalist is able to look her fellow workers in the eye, acknowledge the risk they will undertake together,

¹² Weber, 121.

¹³ Weber, 128.

and nevertheless stand resolute in the course of action she calls for.

Thus, if political judgment must be responsible in order to be good, and if responsible political judgment is responsive to the political agency of other persons, then good political actors must cultivate and maintain an appreciation of the political agency of other persons.¹⁴ Appreciating others' agency involves both an understanding of their experiences and preferences, and recognition the fact that they are agents with the capacity to act with others in pursuit of preferences in light of their experiences. In other words, forging the epistemic and affective dimensions of political communities with emancipatory potential (i.e., those whose members relate on the basis of bonds of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism) depends on cultivating both empathetic understanding of one another's perspectives and humble recognition of one another's agency. Responsible political judgment is an expression of, and itself reinforces, emancipatory social bonds among the agents who exercise such judgment in relation to one another.¹⁵ Part of living well together is judging in ways responsible to one another.

How we exercise political judgment responsibly in relation to one another is an especially urgent question for political actors engaged in emancipatory politics— that is, political actors seeking to combat forms of oppression in communities in which they are situated. Such actors aim, in part, to forge emancipatory social bonds among members of their communities, which

¹⁴ I should underscore that the main argument of this chapter depends only on this conditional claim. My primary aim is to demonstrate that political judgment is not made responsible by cultivating empathetic understanding of others' interests and capacities; political judgment is instead made responsible through acknowledgment of one another as free, equal, but mutually dependent political actors. It is still possible, for all that I say in this section, for someone to reject responsibility as an aspect of good political judgment in order to preserve an integral role for empathy. The remarks in the following paragraphs are meant to make plausible the idea that responsibility is an aspect of good political judgment, but all one needs to accept for the main thesis of this chapter is the conditional claim: if good political judgment is responsible, then empathy without humility cannot make our political judgment good.

¹⁵ This implies that understanding how political actors exercise political judgment responsibly both captures (1) one aspect of what it is to live in a political community grounded in relations of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism, and (2) one way in which political actors can themselves act to forge such communities.

involves exercising political judgment well.¹⁶ But in communities afflicted by oppression, it is especially challenging to forge such bonds: conditions of oppression inhibit our ability to understand, rely on, and act in concert with one another, instead disposing us to act in ways that reinforce hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability (among others). Thus, those engaged in emancipatory politics need a particularly robust story about how to cultivate the bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism through which we know and are known in community with one another. Part of this robust story involves explaining how we exercise political judgment well—and thus how we exercise it responsibly—in relation to one another.

One important part of this story concerns how privileged political actors exercise political judgment responsibly in relation to marginalized political actors. Political actors in positions of privilege (i.e., those who are not subject to, and perhaps benefit from, particular forms of oppression) are especially likely to have attenuated epistemic and affective connections to marginalized political actors, precisely because of the oppressive social structures in which they are embedded. So it's especially (although by no means exclusively!) important to understand how privileged political actors can exercise political judgment in ways that reflect the free, equal, but mutually dependent status of marginalized political actors: what it means for privileged political actors to know marginalized political actors, and what it means for marginalized political actors to be known, in ways that express the free, equal, and mutually dependent status of all¹⁷.

¹⁶ This is for both instrumental and constitutive reasons. Political actors who relate to one another on terms of trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism are able to act effectively in relation to one another; to 'move together as a unit,' as Douglass observes. But emancipated political life itself also consists, in part, in standing in relations that reflect our status as free, equal, but mutually dependent members of a shared community.

¹⁷ This formulation itself gestures to part of the challenge: characterizing the role of privileged political actors as knowing and the role of marginalized political actors as being known suggests that there is something for the former to do and the latter to be subject to. However, as will become clear in the way in which I develop humility as an integral attitude to exercising political judgment responsibly, the picture I endorse centers the political agency of marginalized political actors, not as objects of understanding for privileged political actors, but as fellow agents to whom privileged actors must be fully responsive in their judgment.

In order to exercise political judgment in ways that are responsible to marginalized political actors, privileged political actors must cultivate an appreciation of the former's agency. This appreciation involves both an understanding of marginalized political actors' experiences and interests, and recognition of their agential capacities. But there are two different ways of characterizing the cultivation of such understanding. On the first, cultivating such understanding is a matter of *learning more* about others—the knowing and being known of emancipated political life is a matter of *knowing the facts* about others' experiences, interests, and capacities, and having others know such things about oneself. This approach to cultivating appreciation of others' agency is expressed in a strong emphasis on the role of *empathy*: we draw on facts about others' experiences, interests, and feelings in order to imaginatively inhabit their perspectives. We appreciate others' agency from the inside, on this picture.

On the second, cultivating such understanding is a matter of being responsive to others—the knowing and being known of emancipated political life is a matter of *acknowledging* (i.e., being responsive to) others' experiences, interests, and capacities, and having others acknowledge such things in relation to oneself. This approach to cultivating appreciation of others' agency is expressed in a strong emphasis on the role of *humility*: through recognition of the particularities and limits (epistemic, affective, and agential) of our own social position and agency, we orient ourselves to others as free, equal, but mutually dependent persons who act in concert with others in pursuit of interests. We appreciate others' agency from the outside, on this picture.

4.3 The Case for Empathy

Antebellum abolitionists saw part of their project in terms of addressing an epistemic and affective gap between white Americans and Black Americans. In particular, abolitionists thought that advancing the aims of antislavery dependent on addressing white Americans' failure to appreciate the situation of Black Americans under conditions of slavery and white supremacy.

William Lloyd Garrison describes this condition of white Americans in the introduction to Frederick Douglass's first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*:

So profoundly ignorant of the nature of slavery are many persons, that they are stubbornly incredulous whenever they read or listen to any recital of the cruelties which are daily inflicted on its victims. They do not deny that the slaves are held as property; but that terrible fact seems to convey to their minds no idea of injustice, exposure to outrage, or savage barbarity. Tell them of cruel scourgings, of mutilations and brandings, of scenes of pollution and blood, of the banishment of all light and knowledge, and they affect to be greatly indignant at such enormous exaggerations, such wholesale misstatements, such abominable libels on the character of the southern planters! As if all these direful outrages were not the natural results of slavery! As if it were less cruel to reduce a human being to the condition of a thing, than to give him a severe flagellation, or to deprive him of necessary food and clothing! As if whips, chains, thumb-screws, paddles, bloodhounds, overseers, drivers, patrols, were not all indispensable to keep the slaves down, and to give protection to their ruthless oppressors! As if, when the marriage institution is abolished, concubinage, adultery, and incest, must not necessarily abound; when all the rights of humanity are annihilated, any barrier remains to protect the victim from the fury of the spoiler; when absolute power is assumed over life and liberty, it will not be wielded with destructive sway! Skeptics of this character abound in society. In some few instances, their incredulity arises from a want of reflection; but, generally, it indicates a hatred of the light, a desire to shield slavery from the assaults of its foes, a contempt of the colored race, whether bond or free.¹⁸

The profound ignorance of white Americans, on Garrison's characterization, is a matter not only

¹⁸ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1845, x-xi.

of empirical ignorance of the material conditions to which enslaved Black people in the US are subjected, but also insensitivity to the moral character of these conditions. White Americans fail to understand the forms of violence to which enslaved Black people are subjected, and even when they possess some factual understanding of the conditions of slavery, they fail to appreciate the cruelty and brutality of these conditions. Garrison describes white Americans' empirical and moral ignorance of slavery as a matter of incredulity and skepticism: when confronted with the empirical and moral character of slavery, they cast doubt on these facts, either rejecting the empirical descriptions outright or obscuring their moral horror by insisting that these conditions are 'natural,' or that those who are subjected to them are property rather than persons. In essence, Garrison sees one important challenge for the antislavery movement to address as combatting white ignorance, which he understands as an epistemic and affective gap between white Americans' understanding of the empirical and moral character of slavery and the empirical and moral facts as they are.¹⁹

Martin Delany similarly identifies an epistemic and affective gap between the conditions of slavery and the understanding of white Americans. In *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, he observes:

One part of the American people, though living in near proximity and together, are quite unacquainted with the other; and one of the great objects of the author is, to make each acquainted. Except the character of an individual is known, there can be no just appreciation of his worth; and as with individuals, so it is with classes.²⁰

Delany here emphasizes that white Americans are not only ignorant of the empirical and moral

¹⁹ Linda Martín Alcoff, "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Nancy Tuana and Shannon Sullivan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 39–58; Charles Mills, "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. Nancy Tuana and Shannon Sullivan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 11–38.

²⁰ Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (Bensenville: Lushena Books, 2014), 9.

character of slavery, but the character of Black Americans subjected to it. He envisions one of the aims of his pamphlet as addressing this ignorance, attuning white Americans to the character of enslaved and free Black Americans, and their contributions to the nation.²¹

Delany observes, moreover, that this ignorance afflicts not only white Americans actively or passively implicated in the maintenance of slavery, but also those actively involved in the antislavery cause:

The colored people are not yet known, even to their most professed friends among the white Americans; for the reason, that politicians, religionists, colonizationists, and abolitionists, have each and all, at different times, presumed to *think* for, dictate to, and *know* better what suited colored people, than they knew for themselves; and consequently, there has been no other knowledge of them obtained, than that which has been obtained through these mediums.²²

Delany emphasizes that white Americans' ignorance affects the political judgments they make on issues concerning the situation of enslaved and free Black Americans— this applies not only to politicians, religious figures, and proponents of colonization, but even abolitionists. White abolitionists exercise political judgment in a paternalistic fashion: they take themselves to know better “what suited colored people.” By exercising judgment in this way, white abolitionists failed to judge in ways responsive to the political agency of enslaved and free Black people. Ironically, this presumption is grounded, on Delany's view, precisely in white abolitionists' ignorance of Black Americans' situation and character.

This is precisely what we find in, for instance, Gerrit Smith's “Address to the Slaves of the

²¹ Ultimately, Delany is pessimistic about the viability of this project. In Chapter 16 of the pamphlet, Delany shows that white Americans have been utterly unresponsive to the manifest contributions and character of Black Americans, as illustrated through the enactment of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. In light of this, Delany calls for an emigrationist antislavery strategy. But this emigrationist strategy is premised in part, for Delany, on the non-viability of addressing white Americans' ignorance and unresponsiveness.

²² Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, 9.

United States,” given at the 1842 Convention of Liberty Party Abolitionists and published in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*.²³ At first, Smith seems to articulate a promising approach for abolitionists. He criticizes strategies that have abolitionists focus on persuading slaveholders:

Why do abolitionists concede, that their labors for the slave must be expended directly upon his master; and that they are to seek to improve the condition of the one, only through favorable changes wrought in the mind of the other?²⁴

Instead, Smith maintains that an effective abolitionist strategy organizes directly in support of slaves’ resistance efforts:

Let abolitionists fully and solemnly utter the doctrine, that they are bound to enter into and maintain all practicable communications with the slave; and the candid and intelligent will not only respond to it, but, ere they are aware, they will have been carried along, by its trains of consequences and influences, to the conviction, that the abolitionist has a perfect moral right to go into the South, and use his intelligence to promote the escape of ignorant and imbruted slaves from their prison-house.

Smith’s emphasis on the importance of ‘practicable communications’ reflects, in part, white abolitionists’ commitment that effective antislavery organizing requires an empathic appreciation of the situations and perspectives of enslaved Black people, so that abolitionists efforts are guided in ways that support the agency of slaves. But while Smith advocates for antislavery strategies which support the agency of slaves, his characterization of slaves as “ignorant and imbruted” ought to give us pause. This characterization is directly linked to Smith’s conception of how white abolitionists ought to support the political agency of slaves: the white abolitionist ought to “use his intelligence to promote the escape” of slaves. This line suggests that the white abolitionist’s intervention is to *supplement a lack* of political agency on the part of slaves who

²³ The newspaper of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

²⁴ Gerrit Smith, “Address to the Slaves of the United States, by the Convention of the Liberty Party Abolitionists,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 24, 1842.

are *incapable* of organizing adequate antislavery resistance in the absence of the support of abolitionists.

This attitude towards slaves as persons lacking a fully developed political agency is underscored in the remarks Smith makes directed to “the colored people of the South” in his address. He urges slaves “against violent attempts to recover your freedom” while “call[ing] on every slave, who has the reasonable prospect of being able to run away from slavery, to make the experiment.” In the course of such escapes, moreover, Smith— speaking for the “we” of white abolitionists— “entreat you not to steal,” although he says that this does not “forbid your innocent yieldings to necessity.”

Even if one endorses the principles that Smith articulates in his address (either as morally appropriate or politically prudent), I think we should be troubled by the conception of political relations between white abolitionists and slaves Smith enacts. Smith hopes that the address will make its way into the hands of some enslaved people in the south, as he remarks in the address that “we shall get as many copies of this address as we can, into the hands of your white friends in the slave States. To these, as also to the few (alas! How few!) of the colored people of the South who, some by permission, and some by stealth, have obtained the art of reading, we look to acquaint you with its contents.” But, from the content of his address, it is clear that what Smith hopes will make it to the ears of his envisioned audience are *instructions* about how slaves ought to comport themselves in pursuit of freedom. The apparent function of white abolitionists, as embodied in Smith’s address, is to exercise responsible political judgment on behalf of slaves, and thereby discipline slaves’ conduct in pursuit of freedom. While Smith’s political judgment is responsive to Weber’s ethic of responsibility— as Smith is advocating for and against courses of action in light of their potential consequences— the disciplinary relationship that Smith embodies in relation to the slaves he addresses reproduces a racist hierarchy in his abolitionist

politics: it is white abolitionists who are best situated to judge what forms of antislavery resistance are appropriate and most effective, on behalf of Black slaves engaged in such resistance.

Moreover, while Smith directs his “Address” to slaves in the South, his immediate audience is a group of (predominately white) abolitionists at the Liberty Party Convention. The primary message for Smith’s immediate audience doesn’t concern the content of Smith’s instructions—his audience at the Convention will not be conducting escape attempts themselves—but rather the political relationship between abolitionists and slaves that Smith’s instructions enact. For Smith’s immediate audience, the primary claim is that abolitionists ought, like Smith in this address, make responsible political judgments on behalf of slaves engaged in resistance, and try to bring the conduct of resisting slaves in line with their judgment. What is most salient for Smith’s immediate audience is the political relationship that his address models, rather than the specific instructions it provides.²⁵

The attitude Smith takes towards enslaved Black people engaged in antislavery resistance is an instance of what Martin Delany identifies as the cause of abolitionist organizations’ inefficacy in advancing the aims of the antislavery movement: “We [i.e., enslaved and free Black people in the US] are... still occupying a miserable position in the community, wherever we live.”²⁶ In diagnosing the inefficacy of abolitionist organizations in advancing the aims of anti-slavery, Delany describes white abolitionists as motivated not only by a desire to eliminate the institution of slavery, but also by an earnest belief in that they have incurred “bounden duty to make full amends for the injustice thus inflicted on an unoffending people.”²⁷ But in spite of the laudable

²⁵ I argue in chapter 1 that Douglass similarly uses his Fifth of July speech to model a mode of political relation. The primary message for his immediate audience, again a group of predominately white abolitionists, is not that he is a member of their moral and political community, but rather that they ought to relate to Douglass through the perception of this plain fact (instead of by inferring it on the basis of marks and features evidence.)

²⁶ Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*, 28.

²⁷ Delany, 23.

intentions of these abolitionists, Delany urges his audience to examine “our condition even amongst our Anti-Slavery friends.”²⁸ Such an examination, Delany claims, reveals that:

[W]e find ourselves occupying the very same position in relation to our Anti-Slavery friends, as we do in relation to the pro-slavery part of the community— a mere secondary, underling position, in all our relations to them, and any thing more than this, is not a matter of course affair— it comes not by established anti-slavery custom or right, but like that which emanates from the proslavery portion of the community, by mere sufferance.²⁹

Moreover, Delany observes, while white abolitionists affirm the principle “that the colored people were susceptible of all that the whites were, and that all was required was to give them a fair opportunity, and they would prove their capacity,” nevertheless in practice it is “urged that colored men are incapable as yet to fill” positions of authority in abolitionist organizations. Such claims, Delany maintains, reveal “that the cause has fallen short” in its emancipatory aspirations, because abolitionist organizations reproduce the very forms of racial oppression and racist ideology that they seek to combat.³⁰ This reproduction of racist hierarchies in the abolitionist movement manifests in political judgments like Smith’s that fail to appreciate the agency of enslaved and free Black political actors resisting slavery.

Both the aim and the efficacy of the antislavery movement, in the eyes of abolitionists themselves, depended in part on rendering the political judgment of white Americans (both those already invested in the abolitionist movement and those not) responsive to the agency of enslaved and free Black Americans. Both Black and white abolitionists identified one root cause of white Americans’ irresponsible political judgment as an epistemic and affective gap between the empirical and moral character of slavery and white Americans’ understanding of it.

Many abolitionists understood the bridging of this epistemic and affective gap— of

²⁸ Delany, 24.

²⁹ Delany, 26.

³⁰ Delany, 26.

cultivating emancipatory conditions of knowing and being known— in terms of privileged political actors learning more facts about the situation and agency of marginalized persons. Indeed, Delany himself adopts this model in *Condition*, providing a hundred pages of examples of Black Americans' contributions to the polity as evidence of their political agency and claim to citizenship. But, as Garrison and Delany themselves observe, the enumeration of facts per se was often ineffective in bridging this epistemic and affective gap, because of the skeptical recalcitrance of white people: they would discount empirical evidence and obscure the moral character of slavery. A more robust intervention was required to address the robust forms of white ignorance that rendered white abolitionists' judgments irresponsible to the agency of Black political actors.

For many abolitionists, this more robust intervention depended on narrative— especially narratives of former slaves' lives— to articulate a perspective for white readers to inhabit. Douglass himself adopts this strategy in his first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. Douglass himself identifies the epistemic and affective gap Garrison and Delany describe in connection with his experience after having escaped slavery:

The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this-- "Trust no man!" I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man a cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances.³¹

Here Douglass urges that white readers can only appreciate his experience of distrust by— if not experiencing themselves— imaginatively projecting themselves into his circumstances.

Douglass's *Narrative* itself is meant to ground such imaginative projection, as William Andrews observes:

In this statement Douglass, for the first time in Afro-American autobiography, declared

³¹ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 144.

a new and crucial role for the imagination as a mode of mediation, not distortion and deception, in black-white discourse. He was pointing toward an unprecedented answer to the central rhetorical problem of the slave narrative-- how to build a bridge of sympathetic identification between the diametrical viewpoints of the northern white reader and the southern black fugitive. In the passage under consideration here, Douglass implies that such a bridge could not be extended from the pilings of fact set down by the black narrator. It had to be suspended from imaginative supports that connected each opposing shore of the discourse. That is, Douglass was calling for a genuine discursive relationship of equals in the slave narrative, one based on an active, flexible engagement of the white reader with the black text free from preconceived roles, instituted agendas, and programmed responses. As long as the black narrator played the suppliant role of purveyor of facts for the consumption of the preeminent reader, full appreciation and understanding of the slave narrative could not be attained. *Imaginative self-projection of the reader into the text had to be the basic preparatory condition for the kind of understanding that Douglass wanted whites to derive from his story, the understanding of the individual emotional significance of the facts of a fugitive slave's life.*³²

On Andrews' reading of the *Narrative*, Douglass sees his first-person narrative articulation of his experiences as providing a narrative perspective for white readers to inhabit by imaginatively projecting themselves into Douglass's situation. This imaginative projection provides readers with an empirical and affective understanding of Douglass's life as a fugitive slave which, Andrews claims, puts readers in a 'genuine discursive relationship' with Douglass as author of his life's narrative. Imaginative projection is thus cast as a mode of appreciating Douglass's moral and political agency, as an author whose perspective on his own life articulates the

³² Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 137. My emphasis

empirical and moral character of his situation in pursuit of aims to which his readers ought to be responsive (as fellow members of his political community).

This picture, on which privileged political actors' imaginative projection into the situation of marginalized persons bridges the epistemic and affective gap in ways that cultivate appreciation of the latter's agency, takes on full realization in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In the preface to her novel, Stowe asserts that "[t]he poet, the painter, and the artist, now seek out and embellish the common and gentler humanities of life, and, under the allurements of fiction, breathe a humanizing and subduing influence, favorable to the development of the great principles of Christian brotherhood."³³ In the context of the antebellum US, Stowe sees authors (both novelists and former slaves recounting their lives) as exerting a humanizing influence on whites through imaginative projection: "The object of these sketches is to awaken sympathy and feeling for the African race, as they exist among us; to show their wrongs and sorrows, under a system so necessarily cruel and unjust as to defeat and do away the good effects of all that can be attempted for them, by their best friends, under it."³⁴ Stowe casts *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, through its rich narrative details, as laying the groundwork for white readers' imaginative projection into the lives of the enslaved Black people she writes about. By inhabiting this perspective, Stowe believes, white readers will be brought to appreciate that the conditions of slavery are incompatible with enslaved Black people's standing as free, equal, but mutually dependent persons, and thus brought to affirm antislavery in a way responsive to the agency of Black Americans.

The general picture, then, is as follows: by supplying the empirical and moral facts of slavery in a way that enables white readers to imaginatively project into the position of enslaved and free Black people, these narratives aimed to render whites people's political judgment responsive to

³³ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Chicago, 1914 [1852]), 45.

³⁴ Stowe, 46. Stowe's use of 'sympathy' is roughly equivalent to our use of 'empathy.' See note 4.

the agency of enslaved and free Black people. By reading these narratives, whites were meant to cultivate an appreciation of enslaved and free Black Americans' standing as free, equal, but mutually dependent moral and political actors. In other words, these narratives addressed the epistemic and affective gap that was both instrumentally and constitutively part of the problem antislavery aimed to address by cultivating empathy with Black people in the US.

Crucially, abolitionists who sought to address this epistemic and affective gap by means of empathy-cultivating narrative typically believed that their narratives were effective only if they were 'authentic.' Stowe urges throughout the preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that the details of her narrative, in spite of its being a work of fiction, are 'authentic,' and she eventually defends this claim in a second book, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. More generally, as Nolan Bennett observes, the traditional function of former slaves' narratives was to "reorient white readers' moral compasses" by providing "empirical proof" concerning the conditions of slavery.³⁵ In other words, these narratives sought to persuade white audiences to judge that slavery was wrong and urgent action was needed by presenting the experiences of slaves for these audiences: a narrative was understood to articulate a perspective on the world for the reader to inhabit. As Bennett observes, because former slaves' narratives were treated as "empirical proof," it was urgent—in the eyes of white abolitionists—to authenticate them as accurate testimony. Robert Stepto observes that this demand crystalizes into a genre he labels "authenticating narrative," in which white abolitionists would pen prefaces affirming the accuracy of the narrative, and in which the narrative itself would focus on providing verifiable details.³⁶

It is plausible to think that there is a productive connection between the authenticity of a narrative in this sense and its efficacy in cultivating empathy: if the aim of a narrative is to bring

³⁵ Nolan Bennett, "To Narrate and Denounce: Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Personal Narrative," *Political Theory* 44, no. 2 (2016): 245.

³⁶ Robert B. Stepto, *From behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991).

reader to appreciate the perspective of a person or group, the narrative ought to accurately depict the person or group's perspective. But, as I will argue in the next section, this commitment to 'authenticity' in fact grounded an ineliminably paternalistic attitude in white readers, which frequently rendered the political judgments they'd make on the basis these narratives unresponsive to the agency of enslaved and free Black people.

4.4 Critique of Empathy

This demand for authentication— so that white audiences could be sure they were empathizing with a 'genuine' perspective— ends up, in many important cases, re-inscribing the very sorts of oppressive, racist hierarchies that the narratives are meant to combat. Whites' appeals to authenticity in antislavery narratives are persistently bound up with paternalism and unresponsiveness to the agency of Black political actors. Ultimately, I argue in this section, this is because the aspiration to empathize with an 'authentic' perspective invokes a political epistemology on which we reduce one another to bodies of preferences and facts. Responsiveness to agency is incompatible with a picture on which the known and being known of emancipated political life consists in learning more facts about one another; this incompatibility emerges starkly in the political judgments of white abolitionists grounded in empathetic appreciation of the situation of enslaved Black people.

In April 1863, Harriet Beecher Stowe publishes an article in *The Atlantic* about a series of exchanges with Sojourner Truth at while Truth was lodging at Stowe's house.³⁷ The article recounts compelling episodes of Truth's antislavery resistance, such as her struggle to recover her son from Alabama, and captures Truth's prophetic fire.³⁸

But the article also caricatures Truth. Stowe characterizes Truth's singing voice as having "the strong barbaric accent of the native African." She describes Truth as embodying "the fervor

³⁷ Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Sojourner Truth, The Libyan Sibyl," *The Atlantic*, April 9, 1863, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1863/04/sojourner-truth-the-libyan-sibyl/308775/>.

³⁸ Cornel West, *Cornel West on Black Prophetic Fire* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014).

of Ethiopia, wild, savage, hunted... but burning after God in her tropic heart.” And most strikingly, Stowe depicts Truth as speaking with a stereotypical southern accent (e.g., "Well, honey, de Lord bless ye! I jes' thought I'd like to come an' have a look at ye. You's heerd o' me, I reckon?"), whereas in fact Truth was born into slavery in New York and grew up speaking Dutch.

Stowe, it seems, invokes these racist tropes in order to authenticate the narrative for a white audience—to make Truth’s words ‘ring true’ to them. But, in addition to the inconsistency in ‘authenticating’ Truth by appeal to falsehoods (concerning her diction), Stowe’s depiction of Truth undercuts her agency. Truth is depicted as an agent determined by her white audience’s essentializing and racist assumptions about enslaved Black people. Truth, in Stowe’s article, is reduced to a persona composed of racist tropes for white readers to inhabit. Moreover, Truth’s agency is undercut because Stowe, as the author of the article, sets the terms of the narrative. While Stowe presents the article as about Truth and her situated perspective on the world, the perspective a white audience is invited to inhabit is ultimately Stowe’s, as Truth’s host and interlocutor.

At this stage, it would be natural to point out that Stowe’s article does not by itself serve as an obvious indictment of empathy’s role in emancipatory politics. Stowe neither puts her audience in a position to empathize with Truth’s actual perspective nor appreciate Truth’s agency. One could maintain, in this case, that it is precisely the inauthenticity of Stowe’s portrayal of Truth that undermines its efficacy in bridging epistemic and affective gaps for white readers.

There are two ways in which Stowe’s article fails to present Truth’s perspective authentically. First, Stowe fails to accurately represent Truth, as when she represents Truth with a stereotypical southern accent. Second, by depicting Truth through a series of essentializing and racist assumptions about enslaved Black people, Stowe fails to present her readers with Truth’s own

voice— Truth does not (directly or indirectly) articulate her own perspective for her audience. Thus, there are two ways in which ‘authentic’ empathizing (i.e., empathizing with an ‘authentic’ perspective) might help a privileged audience to address epistemic and affective deficits toward marginalized persons or groups. Authentic empathizing might depend on accurately representing the perspective an audience is to empathize with, or it might depend on an agent articulating her own perspective.

But when we look to the role of narrative in antebellum abolitionist politics, we find that neither sense of authenticity suffices to address whites’ epistemic and affective deficits towards enslaved and free Black people, because both senses of ‘authentic’ empathizing ground paternalistic judgments by white abolitionists. This is because, I claim, the very idea of empathizing with an authentic perspective expresses a picture of political agency as reducible to interests and capacities, where the task of politics is to maximize the satisfaction of interests by optimizing the exercise of political actors’ capacities. Where political actors’ capacities are uneven, or perceived to be uneven, those privileged with (apparently) greater capacities will tend to exercise political judgment in ways unresponsive to the agency of those with (apparently) lesser capacities.

Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is infamous for the stereotypic depictions of enslaved Black people that it invokes (and indeed plays a substantial role in producing). But the novel does also present at least some rich and complex perspectives for readers to inhabit. For instance, Stowe depicts George Harris’s animus towards his owner and slavery generally as grounded in merit:

'My master! and who made him my master? That's what I think of-- what right has he to me? I'm a man as much as he is. I'm a better man than he is. I know more about business than he does; I am a better manager than he is; I can read better than he can; I can write a better hand-- and I've learned it all myself, and no thanks to him-- I've

learned it in spite of him; and now what right has he to make a dray-horse of me? to take me from things I can do, and do better than he can, and put me to work that any horse can do? He tries to do it; he says he'll bring me down and humble me, and he puts me to just the hardest, meanest, and dirtiest work, on purpose!"³⁹

Harris, at the outset of the novel, is moved to resist his condition as a slave because he sees it as incompatible with an understanding of social relations as justified by merit and capacity. Harris's normative orientation toward the world helps the reader to inhabit his perspective, because it enables the reader to explain his actions and imagine alternative ways he plausibly might act. Harris's normative orientation guides the reader's imaginative projection into his perspective.

But although Stowe, at least at times, offers her readers normatively rich, and thus plausibly accurate, perspectives to inhabit, she herself understands characterizes the empathetic understanding generated in paternalistic terms. Through artistic projects like hers, Stowe writes in the preface to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "[T]he heart of the dominant race, who have been her conquerors, her hard masters, has at length been turned toward [the African race] in mercy; and it has been seen how far nobler it is in nations to protect the feeble than to oppress them."⁴⁰ Empathetic understanding, Stowe claims, turns the hearts of white readers toward a commitment to protect, rather than oppress, enslaved and free Black people in the US. We see that this commitment to protect amounts to paternalistic unresponsiveness to the agency of enslaved and free Black people in Stowe's own political judgment in the period. In a May 1853 letter to Douglass, Martin Delany criticizes Stowe's support for white-led colonization projects in the novel, as well as her plan for an industrial college for Black Americans headed exclusively by white instructors. On the former, Delany maintains that such colonization projects aim to ensure that Black people who emigrate remain "subservient to... white men's power." On the latter,

³⁹ Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 69.

⁴⁰ Stowe, 46.

Delany observes an educational institution which embodies such racial hierarchies “creates the impression that colored persons are incapable of teaching, and only suited to *subordinate* positions.” Ultimately, Delany maintains that Stowe’s judgment in these matters fails to abide by the principle that “no enterprise, institution, or anything else, should be commenced *for us*, or our general benefit, without *first consulting us*.” By failing to abide by this principle, Stowe, in her political judgment “is treating us as slaves, and presupposing us all to be ignorant.”⁴¹ The empathetic understanding that Stowe achieves, in her ability to articulate normatively rich perspectives for enslaved Black people, does not render her own political judgment responsible to the agency of Black political actors, much less that of her readers.

Indeed, Stowe’s empathetic understanding seems to exacerbate her paternalistic judgment. It is important to note that in his letter, Delany oversimplifies the situation concerning Stowe’s planned industrial college: Stowe plans this industrial college in part based on advice from Douglass in a March 1853 letter. But Stowe engages with Douglass as an expert on what is in the best interest of Black Americans.⁴² This is evidenced in Douglass’s own concession that “I leave the organization and administration [of the college] to the superior wisdom of yourself and the friends who second your noble efforts” because “[i]t is the peculiarity of your favored race that they can always do what they think necessary to be done. I can safely trust all details to yourself, and the wise and good people whom you represent in the interest you take in my oppressed fellow countrymen.”⁴³ Douglass’s advice functions as testimony which informs Stowe’s judgment about how to act in the best interests of Black Americans. While the support she provides is likely valuable to the cause, as Douglass himself underscores in his response to Delany’s letter, its value is not grounded in robust responsiveness to the agency of enslaved and

⁴¹ Martin Delany, “Mrs. Stowe’s Position,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, May 6, 1853. Emphasis his

⁴² Frederick Douglass, “To Harriet Beecher Stowe, March 8, 1853,” in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip Foner and Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 213–19.

⁴³ Douglass, 217.

free Black people in the US. Stowe judges and acts to supplement perceived incapacities of Black Americans for the sake of what she takes to be their best interest. The fact that Stowe's judgment is informed by Douglass qua expert on the condition of Black Americans simply reveals that Stowe's orientation is toward the perceived interest of marginalized political actors, rather than toward their agency: the accuracy of Stowe's empathetic understanding does not render her political judgment responsible.

If accuracy in empathetic understanding does not render political judgment responsible, a proponent of authentic empathy might instead hold that empathetic understanding renders political judgment responsible when the perspective is articulated by the right source. If I come to understand your perspective through your own articulation of it, one might think, I am well-positioned to appreciate your standing as a free, equal, but mutually dependent agent, and in particular to exercise political judgment in ways responsive to your agency. But Douglass's account of his work with the Garrisonians in *My Bondage and My Freedom* shows that his own articulation of his perspective for white audiences, for the sake of empathetic understanding, undercut appreciation of his agency.

In the early 1840s, the Garrisonians deploy Douglass on the anti-slavery talking circuit—lectures for the public organized by abolitionists seeking to persuade the public to endorse anti-slavery. Douglass, at these events, is meant to provide a narrative of his experiences as a slave as part of the Garrisonians' anti-slavery argument. But Douglass recounts that his role among the Garrisonians was severely circumscribed. Douglass is “generally introduced as a “*chattel*”— a “*thing*”— a piece of southern “*property*”— the chairman assuring the audience that *it* could speak.”⁴⁴ This might again appear to be a problem concerning a lack of empathy; indeed, a radical lack of empathy, as Douglass is introduced as a ‘thing’ lacking a perspective of his own. But Douglass observes that his telling of his own story was itself bound up with his

⁴⁴ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 220.

objectification before these audiences. Douglass notes that he was instructed by one of the Garrisonians to “Give us the facts... we will take care of the philosophy.”⁴⁵ With this instruction, the Garrisonians rendered Douglass a mere vehicle for providing testimony to their audience (at least to the extent that Douglass cooperated with the Garrisonians). The white Garrisonians position themselves to draw on Douglass’s testimony in order to make arguments and offer political judgments for their audience to endorse. The division of political labor the Garrisonians demarcate between Black and white abolitionists— between supplying the narrative and making the argument— renders Douglass a mere body of testimony, a perspective for white audiences to inhabit and make political judgments on the basis of. It is precisely because Douglass’s role is circumscribed to a presentation of his perspective for white audiences to take up that he is reduced by the Garrisonians to a mere body of testimony, rather than a free and equal political actor. The objectification of Douglass as a body of testimony for white audiences to inhabit suggests that the political judgments white abolitionists make on the basis of empathic connections will not be adequately responsive to the political agency of enslaved and free Black people.

Authentic empathy, understood either in terms of empathizing with an accurate perspective or in terms of empathizing with the perspective articulated by an agent herself, does not render political judgment responsible. The inefficacy of empathy in making us responsive to the agency of others is grounded in a disconnect between the knowing and being known of empathetic understanding, and what it is to know others and be known as free, equal, but mutually dependent agents. When we inhabit someone else’s perspective, we are acquainted with the way the world appears to her. In particular, we are acquainted with her best interests: what she values and what is valuable for her. Thus a reader of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* comes to appreciate George Harris’s value of merit-based recognition; a member of Douglass’s audience come to appreciate

⁴⁵ Douglass, 220.

(for instance) the way in which he values freedom as non-domination (freedom not just from the mere incidents of slavery, but slavery itself). But to appreciate *what* another person values is not to appreciate her as an agent who acts in pursuit of what she values.

This disconnect manifests in political judgment in the following way. If I appreciate what is in someone's best interests, I can, with some degree of reliability, judge what is good for her in particular circumstances. At the same time, people are sometimes not in the best position to judge what is in their own best interests— sometimes we make mistakes in judging what is good for ourselves. Moreover, when someone is subject to oppression, one is sometimes constrained— both epistemically and practically— in judging and pursuing what is in her own best interest.

Privileged political actors who empathize with oppressed political actors think—perhaps even correctly—that they can judge what is in the latter's best interests. Moreover, they may— perhaps even justifiably— think that oppressed political actors are not reliable judges of their own best interests. If all that one seeks in political judgment is to judge and act in someone's best interests— which is all that empathy alone equips us to judge on the basis of— privileged political actors will think that they ought to exercise political judgment on behalf of oppressed political actors, because they are better positioned to exercise such judgment.

But a judgment made on someone else's behalf in this way effaces, rather than responds to, her agency. Such judgments are not responsible to marginalized political actors. To put the point provocatively: when I make a judgment that affects you because I have, and you lack, an appreciation of your own best interests, I express contempt for your political agency. Such judgment expresses a desire not merely to influence, but to override the political agency of others. It is a desire to exercise one's own political judgment on a frictionless plane.

This critique does not demonstrate that those engaged in emancipatory politics always ought to prioritize responsibility over other values (e.g., maximization of interests) in political

judgment.⁴⁶ Instead, this critique demonstrates that, contrary to the understanding of many antebellum white abolitionists, cultivating empathy is not a reliable means for making the political judgment of privileged political actors responsible to the agency of marginalized political actors. This is because the aspiration to empathize with an authentic perspective invokes a picture of political judgment as a matter of maximizing the satisfaction of interests through the optimal utilization of capacities. On this picture, we cannot make intelligible the idea that it is intrinsically valuable for me to exercise my agency (in concert with others) in pursuit of my interests. The critique itself does not justify this value, but shows that if we want to make room for it, we need a different picture of political judgment, and thus a different story about how we bridge epistemic and affective gaps among members of a polity.⁴⁷

4.5 Humility and Acknowledgment

In the context of emancipatory politics, the political judgment of privileged political actors can fail to be responsible by failing to acknowledge the agency of persons and groups subject to oppression. Because these failures of political judgment stem from an epistemic and affective gap between privileged and marginalized political actors, it is intuitive to think that we make privileged actors' political judgments responsible to marginalized actors by bridging this gap. But we've seen that efforts at bridging this gap through the cultivation of empathy are liable to be counterproductive. The irony of this critique is that learning more about other persons and groups can inhibit our acknowledgment of their agency— at least when it is not tempered by an appreciation of one's own situatedness.

⁴⁶ This is implied by Douglass's response to Delany's May 1853 letter concerning Stowe. Douglass urges that Stowe's efforts contribute instrumentally to the antislavery cause, and ought to be valued as such: "Whoever will bring a straw's weight of influence to break the chains of our brother bondmen, or whisper one word of encouragement and sympathy to our proscribed race in the North, shall be welcomed by us to that philanthropic field of labor." Frederick Douglass, "The Letter of M.R. Delany," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 6, 1853.

⁴⁷ That said, I think that there is a compelling case that responsiveness to agency is an integral value in emancipatory politics, especially when one understands the task of emancipatory politics as reforging political communities more inclusively through the exercise of political agency in ways that forges social bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism. I leave this argument for future work.

Rectifying the irresponsibility of privileged political actors' judgment in the context of emancipatory politics requires, I claim, that we cash out the role of humility in acknowledging one another's agency. Appreciating others as free, equal, but mutually dependent agents is something that we achieve through an appreciation of the limits of our own agency and our own situatedness.

Cavell, in "The Avoidance of Love," observes that acknowledgment of another is, at the same time, acknowledgement of one's own particular and limited position in the world. Acknowledgement "requires self-revelation" which confirms one's "separateness... from others."⁴⁸ This self-revelation is produced by a confrontation with another person, through which we appreciate what she thinks, feels, and does as her thoughts, feelings and actions— as things we can relate to, but cannot possess ourselves. In appreciating another's thoughts, feelings, and actions as her, we come to acknowledge her as a free and equal agent. But, crucially, this acknowledgment of another cannot be achieved except through an inward turn— self-revelation of one's own situatedness and limits— prompted by a confrontation with her agency.

It might seem puzzling that acknowledging another as a fellow agent involves a turn towards oneself. But this is in fact an ordinary feature of social life. Iris Murdoch illustrates this point in chapter one of *The Sovereignty of Good* in her example of a mother who views her daughter-in-law contemptuously (although she does not express this view in her behavior). Murdoch describes a shift in the mother's perspective on her daughter-in-law, in which she comes to see her no longer as "pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque" and so on, but now as "spontaneous... gay... delightfully youthful." What brings on this change in the mother's perspective is that the mother comes to recognize ("tells herself"): "I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous.

⁴⁸ Stanley Cavell, "The Avoidance of Love: A Reading of King Lear," in *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 338.

Let me look again.”⁴⁹ Murdoch describes how the mother directs “careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her.”⁵⁰ The mother’s change in perspective concerning her daughter involves a confrontation through which the mother makes an inward turn, through which she comes to appreciate her situatedness and limits (in this case expressed largely by a recognition of faults and biases, but it need not take this shape in all cases). In other words, the mother comes to see her daughter-in-law more clearly for who she is by taking on an attitude of humility.⁵¹

Some antebellum Black abolitionists, I claim, sought to catalyze this inward turn through humility-inducing confrontations with white readers in their narratives. Frederick Douglass engages in such confrontations with white readers in pivotal moments in his second autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom*.

In perhaps the starkest example in the text, Douglass does not describe his successful escape in detail. This is in part, as Douglass explicitly states, so that he does not give away means that other slaves can use to escape themselves: “Such is my detestation of slavery, that I would keep the merciless slaveholder profoundly ignorant of the means of flight adopted by the slave.”⁵² But Douglass also urges that anti-slavery readers are often themselves responsible to the anti-slavery cause to the extent that they remain in targeted ignorance concerning the details of successful efforts at escape from slavery: “By stringing together a train of events and circumstances, even if I were not very explicit, the means of escape might be ascertained, and, possibly, those means be rendered, thereafter, no longer available to the liberty-seeking children of bondage I have left behind me. No antislavery man can wish me to do anything favoring such results.”⁵³ The tendency of abolitionists to publish such accounts, Douglass claims, constitutes unresponsiveness

⁴⁹ Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2001), 17–18.

⁵⁰ Murdoch, 18.

⁵¹ Importantly, for Murdoch, this change in perspective is not a reinterpretation of indeterminate/brute behavior. Rather it is something like a coming to appreciate her daughter-in-law for ‘who she really is’ (as we could imagine the mother herself putting it).

⁵² Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 197.

⁵³ Douglass, 195.

to the interests and agency of enslaved people: “In publishing such accounts, the anti-slavery man addresses the slaveholder, *not the slave*; he stimulates the former to greater watchfulness, and adds to his facilities for capturing his slave. We owe something to the slaves, south of Mason and Dixon’s line, as well as to those north of it; and, in discharging the duty of aiding the latter, on their way to freedom, we should be careful to do nothing which would be likely to hinder the former, in making their escape from slavery.”⁵⁴ In deciding to publish accounts of successful escape attempts, the judgment of abolitionists is irresponsible to enslaved people— responsible political judgment in these circumstances requires restraining the desire to disseminate and consume riveting stories of escape. But appreciation of what responsible political judgment demands in these circumstances involves humble recognition of one’s situatedness— that, for most white anti-slavery readers, their ignorance in particular matters is a contribution to the cause to which they are committed. Douglass’s explicit refusal to provide the details of his successful escape induces his readers to an appreciation of the interests and agency of enslaved people through an inward turn concerning his readers’ position in the movement and its primary aims— that is, by inducing humility in his readers about the importance of their curiosity and understanding concerning particular matters in the context of the wider aims of their movement.

But Douglass does not only cast the importance of humility in straightforwardly strategic terms. In his concluding remarks on his fight with the ‘slavebreaker’ Covey, Douglass distances his (typical) reader, stating: “He only can understand the effect of this combat on my spirit, who has himself incurred something, hazarded something, in repelling the unjust and cruel aggressions of a tyrant.”⁵⁵ Whereas Douglass’s vivid depiction of the fight invites the reader to take up his perspective, Douglass asserts at the moment the reader would have taken herself to have achieved this empathetic connection that she is not in a position to do so. In the following

⁵⁴ Douglass, 196–97. Emphasis his.

⁵⁵ Douglass, 151.

lines he goes on to strengthen the claim: one must hazard their life and no longer be “afraid to die” in order to fully appreciate Douglass’s situation.⁵⁶ Even in one of the episodes that most intuitively invites empathetic identification with Douglass, in *Bondage* Douglass reminds his readers of their limits (unless, of course, they themselves have risked their lives in struggle against tyranny).⁵⁷ The limit Douglass confronts his readers with prompts an inward turn in which they recognize Douglass’s standing as a separate political actor through the fact that he has hazarded his own life in struggle against tyranny and oppression.⁵⁸

These confrontations, in which Douglass distances himself from his (typical) reader in a way that effects an inward turn and a humble appreciation of their situatedness with respect to Douglass himself and the antislavery movement more generally, contribute to one of his central narrative aims. Andrews observes that throughout Douglass’s antebellum narrative writings, he seeks to overcome white readers’ disinterested perspective, on which their judgment about slavery is informed by a set of un-perspectival facts: “Douglass did not want to indulge his reader in a servile way [i.e. supplying them with a mere set of facts]; he wanted his reader to learn something about his or her responsibility to the text,” and, through this, to learn something about the nature of his or her responsibility to enslave and free Black Americans as free and equal, but mutually dependent, political actors.⁵⁹ In the *Narrative*, Douglass thinks that this disinterest can be overcome through imaginative self-projection and empathy.⁶⁰

But in *Bondage*, I claim, Douglass thinks that the right kind of interested perspective (i.e., one that renders white people’s political judgment responsible to enslaved and free Black

⁵⁶ Douglass, 152.

⁵⁷ We should also be careful about overstating the strength of this condition. Risking one’s life in political struggle need not consist in an intention to sacrifice oneself, nor in even in a plan that one cognizes as involving substantial risk. Sometimes we find our lives at risk in what we think are mundane political actions (e.g. the peaceful demonstration at which the police fly off the handle). But appreciation of this fact requires an inward turn that is indicative of humility on the model we’ve sketched in this section.

⁵⁸ So, even if a reader does find herself similarly situated, she nevertheless comes to appreciate Douglass’s hazarding of his life as his own exercise of political agency.

⁵⁹ Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, 137.

⁶⁰ Andrews, 135–37.

Americans) must be shaped by humility. The right kind of interested perspective, on this picture, is mediated by a humble appreciation of the limits of one's agency and position with respect to others. By inducing humility in his white readers, Douglass orients them toward the political agency of free and enslaved Black people resisting slavery.

But whereas the role of humility in the shift toward the right kind of interested perspective is implicit in Douglass's post-Garrisonian thought, Harriet Jacobs explicitly theorizes it in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The epigraph to the narrative, which Jacobs attributes to "a woman of North Carolina," identifies an epistemic and affective gap as one barrier to whites' involvement in the antislavery movement: "Northerners know nothing at all about Slavery. They think it is perpetual bondage only. They have no conception of the depth of *degradation* involved in that world, SLAVERY; if they had, they would never cease their efforts until so horrible a system was overthrown." The aim of Jacobs' narrative is to address this epistemic and affective gap, especially attuning white women to the condition of enslaved Black women:

I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two million of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is. Only by experience can any one realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations.⁶¹

Jacobs intends for her narrative to cultivate understanding and compassion in her readers, which will spark concrete support for the antislavery cause. But as the final line itself signals, there is an intrinsic challenge to this project: the epistemic and affective gap that Jacobs intends to address is itself a product of white Northern women's lack of experience of slavery's conditions. Jacobs' narrative, and former slaves' narratives more generally in this period, are meant to rectify white women's lack of experience and thereby spur them to antislavery action.

⁶¹ Harriet A. Jacobs and Lydia Maria Francis Child, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, 1860, 6.

It is intuitive to think that narrative serves this role by functioning as a *substitute* for experience. Jacobs invites this reading by casting her narrative as testimony through which white readers gain greater understanding and affective appreciation for the condition of enslaved Black women. Jacobs' story articulates a perspective for readers to inhabit through imaginative projection, and thereby empathetically stands in for an experience of the conditions of slavery

But in *Incidents*, Jacobs at times despairs at the possibility of forging an antislavery movement through empathetic understanding. While describing the role of sexual violence in the tyranny and oppression to which slaves are subjected, Jacobs laments that:

The degradation, the wrongs, the vices, that grow out of slavery, are more than I can describe. They are greater than you would willingly believe. Surely, if you credited one half the truths that are told you concerning the helpless millions suffering in this cruel bondage, you at the north would not help to tighten the yoke. You surely would refuse to do for the master, on your own soil, the mean and cruel work which trained bloodhounds and the lowest class of whites do for him at the south.⁶²

While Jacobs begins by noting the limits of her capacities in capturing the wrongs and horrors of slavery, she quickly observes that even if she were able to adequately articulate these wrongs and horrors (indeed, as any reader of *Incidents* might judge), white northerners will not take Jacobs at her word, for the details of slavery are 'greater than you would willingly believe.' In attempting to bridge this epistemic and affective gap for white northerners concerning the conditions of slavery through narrative, Jacobs runs up against testimonial injustice—her readers will not come to inhabit her experience because they do not believe her narrative.⁶³

Jacobs develops this problem in describing the funeral of her Aunt Nancy:

Northern travellers, passing though the place, might have described this tribute of

⁶² Jacobs and Child, 45.

⁶³ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

respect to the humble dead as a beautiful feature in the 'patriarchal institution;' a touching proof of the attachment between slaveholders and their servants; and tender-hearted Mrs. Flint would have confirmed this impression, with handkerchief at her eyes. *We* could have told them a different story. We could have given them a chapter of wrongs and sufferings, that would have touched their hearts, if they *had* any hearts to feel for the colored people. We could have told them how the poor old slave-mother had toiled, year after year, to earn eight hundred dollars to buy her son Phillip's right to his own earnings; and how that same Phillip paid the expenses of the funeral, which they regarded as doing so much credit to the master. We could also have told them of a poor, blighted young creature, shut up in a living grave for years, to avoid the tortures that would be inflicted on her, if she ventured to come out and look on the face of her departed friend.⁶⁴

Jacobs imagines white northerners misapprehending the character and context of Aunt Nancy's funeral because they would fail to consult, or consider the perspective of, enslaved people in the community. Instead, they would allow the outward grandeur of the funeral to simply confirm their understanding of slavery as a 'patriarchal institution' which is ultimately to the benefit of the enslaved. While any enslaved person in the community could readily dispel such misconceptions, Jacobs observes that they simply would not be consulted by northern travelers—they would be subjected to 'testimonial quieting.'⁶⁵

In passages like these, Jacobs despairs at the possibility of moving white northerners to action against slavery, because narratives like hers are ineffective at bridging the epistemic and affective gap that leaves whites apathy about the condition of enslaved Black people. She finds that enslaved Black people are not taken as sources of testimony by white northerners, and that

⁶⁴ Jacobs and Child, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, 222–23.

⁶⁵ Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hyppatia* 26, no. 2 (2011): 236–57.

even when the opportunity to supply testimony arises, their testimony is not afforded adequate credence. In light of these passages, it is tempting to read Jacobs' remark in the preface that "only experience" can capture the wrongs and horror of slavery to mean that it is not otherwise possible to appreciate the conditions of slavery, because mechanisms of epistemic oppression decisively compromise the privileged's capacity to inhabit the perspective of the marginalized. Narrative cannot serve as an adequate substitute for experience.

But if this were Jacobs' position, the existence of *Incidents* itself would be puzzling. The fact that Jacobs crafted this narrative and addressed it to white readers implies that she thinks there is some role for narrative in addressing the epistemic and affective gap between white and Blacks in the antislavery movement. The interpretive key, I think, is to note that Jacobs directs this despair at the possibility of white northerners inhabiting the perspective of enslaved Black women *to* her white readers. Her expressions of despair are a way in which Jacobs refuses to engage with her audience exclusively on the terrain of testimony and narrative.

Jacobs, I claim, understands such refusals as integral to bridging the epistemic and affective gap. These refusals are expressions of Jacobs' authorial agency that induce humility in her privileged readers. For instance, in recounting the relationship she started with the attorney Mr. Sands in order to deflect the advances of her owner Dr. Flint, Jacobs states:

Pity me, and pardon me, O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject to the will of another. You never exhausted your ingenuity in avoiding the snares, and eluding the power of a hated tyrant, you never shuddered at the sound of his footsteps, and trembled within the hearing of his voice. I know I did wrong. No one can feel it more sensibly than I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day. Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I

feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others.⁶⁶

At first pass, in this passage Jacobs seems to beseech herself in a subservient manner to her reader. She asks for pity and pardon, expresses recognition that she acted wrongly, and suggests that her actions might be judged by a different standard than in other circumstances. It is true that Jacobs at times invites her reader to take on a paternalistic attitude (or perhaps simply acknowledges her reader's disposition to such an attitude).⁶⁷ But there is another important strand in this passage. Jacobs confronts her audience with their inability to fully appreciate her position as an enslaved woman facing persistent harassment from her owner. In light of this limit, Jacobs implies that her reader is in no position to judge her actions in this circumstance: Jacobs emphatically consults her own authority as author of her own narrative, not the standards or judgment of her readers. In this passage, Jacobs subverts her audience's paternalistic disposition to render judgment; Jacobs' claim that "No one can feel it more sensibly than I do" is not, ultimately, the expression of an internalization of her reader's moral standards, but rather an expression of her autonomous moral agency. In other words, Jacobs recognizes her reader's disposition to render judgment on her actions, but ultimately refuses to acknowledge their judgment as applicable or appropriate, because they cannot appreciate what it is like to confront such choices as a slave. Jacobs' critique of her reader's disposition is not that they ought to apply a different normative standard in judging her actions, but that her actions are not theirs to judge.

Jacobs holds that her white readers are not in a position to render judgment on her actions because they do not fully understand her situation as an enslaved Black woman. But for Jacobs, this is not a problem to be solved by suppling narrative details. Instead, it is a point that she confronts her readers with by withholding such detail at pivotal moments, in order to bring her readers to acknowledge their limits and situatedness. Jacobs' narrative aim is not to enable her

⁶⁶ Jacobs and Child, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, 86.

⁶⁷ Jacobs and Child, 45, 113.

reader to take up her perspective so as to make judgments informed by it, but rather to appreciate her perspective as her own, and Jacobs herself as a fellow agent to whom her reader ought to be responsible in exercising political judgment.

Jacobs' explicit refusals to supply her reader with details thus induces humility. This humility is, in the first place, an inward turn through which her readers appreciate their situatedness by confronting the limits of their understanding of other persons' situations. This appreciation manifests, for Jacobs, in her readers' withholding of judgment concerning the ways in which Jacobs herself navigated her situation in slavery.

But the humility that Jacobs aims to induce is not quietistic; it does not prescribe that white Northerners ought to wholly refrain from judgment or action. Jacobs, after all, is seeking to spur her readers to action against slavery and white supremacy. Jacobs, moreover, understands white Northerners' inaction against slavery and white supremacy as largely the product of an epistemic and affective gap in which white Northerners fail to appreciate the wrongs and horrors to which enslaved Black people are subjected. Humility, on Jacobs' picture, is integral to the orientation white Northerners must adopt in order to exercise political judgment in ways that are responsible to enslaved Black people. Exercising political judgment responsibly is not simply a matter of discerning what the correct decision is in each case. Rather, exercising political judgment responsibly is largely a matter of understanding where one's judgment is called for, and in what ways. We appreciate the agency of other persons with whom we are engaged in shared projects—not simply by discerning what is best from their perspective, but by acting in ways that the capacity for political judgment that they themselves possess.

The fact that Jacobs offers a rich narrative of her experience in slavery does also imply that empathy plays an important role in emancipatory politics: inhabiting the perspective of another can inform our judgment in important ways, and motivate us to action. But this understanding is

productive for emancipatory aims only when it is shaped by a humble orientation towards one's relation to other persons as free, equal, but mutually dependent political agents. Where empathy is tempered by humility, we make our political judgment responsible to one another by attuning ourselves to our limits and situatedness with respect to one another.

The shift in orientation that Douglass and Jacobs' confrontations with the reader effect is, importantly, an epistemic shift. In tempering empathetic understanding with humble appreciation of other persons' agency, we move from a picture on which the knowing and being known of emancipatory politics is grounded fundamentally in the acquisition of facts about one another to a picture on such mutual understanding is fundamentally grounded in acknowledgment of one another as free and equal but mutually dependent actors in political life.

4.6 Acknowledgment and Emancipatory Social Bonds

By way of conclusion, let me preempt one possible misinterpretation of my thesis. My claim in this chapter is not that we ought only to exercise humility, and never empathy, in emancipatory politics. Empathy informs political judgment because it helps us to understand what fellow members of our community value. Humility alone, moreover, leads to untempered subservience to others, as Douglass himself observes: "I have met many religious colored people, at the south, who are under the delusion that God requires them to submit to slavery, and to wear their chains with meekness and humility."⁶⁸ In order to exercise political judgment well, we must both appreciate other persons as agents who act in pursuit of what they value, and understand what is valued—both by ourselves and other members of our community. Humility shapes our political judgment so that it is responsible to others as fellow agents; empathy informs our political judgment so that it is responsive to what other members of our community value.

But the relationship between humility and empathy is not merely additive; it is not that humility provides one ingredient for good political judgment, and empathy a wholly independent

⁶⁸ Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, 101.

one. Rather, in adopting a humble orientation towards others as free, equal, but mutually dependent agents, we transform our understanding of how persons relate to their interests and values as political agents. Absent humility, we are tempted to think that there is a straightforward fact of the matter about what a person values (although this fact may change over time). Absent humility, the challenge appears to be to discover what is in a person's best interests, either by relying upon her own introspection or other external means. But casting the challenge in this way offers only a very weak connection between what a person values and her distinctive relationship to her values as her own: at best, it just so happens that each of us is typically best situated to know what she herself values. It is precisely this weak connection, on which what one values, or what is in one's interest, is simply a fact of the matter in need of discovery, that leads privileged political actors to exercise judgment paternalistically on behalf of marginalized political actors. Informed by empathy, privileged political actors think they are better situated to understand what is in the best interest of marginalized political actors—privileged political actors operating on the basis of empathy simply see this as an atypical case.

In adopting an attitude of humility towards others as free, equal, but mutually dependent agents, we are equipped to recognize a thicker connection between a person and her values, on which a person's exercise of her own agency plays an integral role in shaping what she values (what is in her own best interest). This connection is manifest in Douglass's own plantation politics. While enslaved on the Freeland plantation, Douglass organizes his first attempt at escape from slavery. In this effort, Douglass works to persuade his comrades to adopt escape as their aim: "I did my *very best* to imbue the minds of my dear friends with my own views and feelings."⁶⁹ And indeed Douglass sees his intervention as necessary for cultivating a commitment to attempt escape: "Not one of them was self-moved in the matter. They all wanted to be free; but the serious thought of running away, had not entered into their minds, until I won them to the

⁶⁹ Douglass, 168.

undertaking.”⁷⁰ But, crucially, Douglass characterizes his efforts as a victory (he ‘won’ them over); he goes on in the same passage to characterize himself as an “instigator.” Douglass’s aim in these organizing conversations is not to channel his own will through his co-conspirators actions, but to animate their wills in pursuit of a commitment to freedom that they themselves come to adopt. Indeed, the forcefulness of Douglass’s persuasion implies a humble appreciation of the efforts required to stir others to action on the basis of their own political judgment: Douglass moves, rather than manipulates, his co-conspirators to action. The picture of winning over his peers, instigating them to political action, expresses an appreciation of their standing as distinct political actors who exercise their own judgment and agency in action in concert with Douglass. In taking a humble orientation towards his co-conspirators, Douglass sees them as agents with whom he must cultivate bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism. This centrally involves a humble recognition that what is in the best interest of his co-conspirators cannot simply be discovered (so that Douglass could discern it for them), but that it must be expressed through his co-conspirators’ exercise of their own judgment and agency.

Advocacy for humility in political life thus does not entail advocacy for docility or quietism. A humble acknowledgment of others as free and equal political agents motivates robust political engagement, in order to animate others to action on the basis of what they come to judge as in their own interest. The known and being known of emancipated political life, on this picture, is not a matter of discovering what we value and bringing it about in the world. It is instead a matter of forging bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism in part by forming judgments of shared interests in concert with, rather than on behalf of, one another. This is not to say that anything goes in judging what is in one’s own interest: good political judgment must be responsive not only to one’s agency, but also to other persons and the world. It is to say that we forge what matters in political life in dialogue and struggle with others. Humble

⁷⁰ Douglass, 171.

recognition of the limits of one's own agency is, in this way, hopeful recognition of our collective power to remake ourselves, and in so doing, our shared world.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have drawn on Frederick Douglass's antebellum political thought to develop a radical republican account of political membership, on which we make ourselves members of a political community by enacting its fundamental values in ways that forge social bonds with others. In polities with emancipatory potential, the bonds forged through the enactment of such values reflect the fact that members are free, equal, but mutually dependent political agents. These emancipatory social bonds are shaped by values including love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism.

This account of political membership was motivated by the observation that efforts to persuade exclusionary polities to confer membership on the basis of reasonable argument are counterproductive. Such efforts are grounded in what I've labeled a political epistemology of inference, on which polities inquire into whether persons have a rightful claim to have membership conferred upon them. In exclusionary polities, this inquiry is inevitably compromised by oppressive ideology and institutions.

The emancipatory potential of Douglass's radical republican conception of citizenship is grounded in its alternative political epistemology of acknowledgment, on which our understanding of one another as members of a shared political community is realized in the ways in which we comport ourselves in relation to one another in daily social life. To understand one another as fellow citizens, on this picture, is in the first place to treat one another as fellow citizens. This picture implies that effective emancipatory efforts at making political communities more inclusive enlarge our understanding of who fellow members of our community are by intervening in our daily patterns of interaction.

Acknowledgment is an epistemic orientation suited to (re)forging inclusive political communities because it orients us towards one another as free, equal, but mutually dependent

agents. This is in part because acknowledging one another through political judgment requires humility— an appreciation of the limits of one’s own agency that attunes oneself to the agency of others. The known and being known of an emancipated political community, on this account, is not a matter of each member fully apprehending the interests and capacities of all fellow members, so that the one can competently exercise judgment on behalf of the whole. (This would be to assimilate political judgment to technical knowledge.) Instead, the mutual understanding of an emancipated political community consists in responsiveness to other persons as agents with the capacity to adopt commitments and pursue values in concert with one another. The epistemic task of emancipated political life is not simply to understand what people value and how to bring it about, but to engage with other persons as agents who forge and pursue values with one another.

One main upshot of this account is that daily social interactions play an integral role both in constituting political community and members’ understanding of it. This helps us, I think, to locate the value in quotidian forms of political interaction. Take, for example, canvassing for a political candidate. Typically, when volunteers participate in a canvas, they are first briefly trained by an organizer on the basics of canvassing and the main points of the candidate’s platform. Often, a well-meaning volunteer will ask a question like the following: “I was looking on the candidate’s website, and saw an apparent inconsistency between points 7 and 8 in their platform on (e.g.) civil asset forfeiture. What should I do if the voter brings up this apparent inconsistency?” Inevitably, the organizer will smile, cogently address the question, but then reply “If this comes up in your canvassing conversations more than once, take a minute to recalibrate, because you’re doing something wrong. Focus on being warm and polite, and hitting our main talking points.”

I don’t think in this exchanges like this the organizer is expressing contempt for voters’

intelligence or interest in important policy issues. Rather, the organizer is trying to re-orient the well-meaning volunteer: much of the work of canvassing (and other forms of quotidian political activity) is done not through the evincing and weighing of reasons in abstraction, but through conversations that forge bonds of trust, commitment, and solidarity. Giving arguments is one way of forging such trust: it expresses respect for the voter's capacity for judgment. But when we fixate on the minute details of policy disputes, we invoke a picture of deliberative democracy utterly detached from concrete social relations. The account of membership and acknowledgment I provide here offers a picture of quotidian political life as generating and maintaining these concrete social relations: in our doorknocking, phonebanking, protesting, and support work we forge social bonds with other persons in ways that shape and reshape both the membership and the values of political communities. Politics is a fundamentally social activity, and acknowledgment is an epistemic relation that helps us keep this in view in our theorizing.

These same observations about the value of quotidian political activity also point to ways in which political actors systematically excluded from formal political institutions nevertheless possess robust agency to forge and reforge more inclusive political communities. The fabric of political life, on this picture, is our daily modes of interaction with one another, and the rich normative framework (e.g. collective interests) that such interaction forges. This project implies that we should assign special value to emancipatory projects that foster these daily interactions between persons. Canvassing, protesting, teaching one another to wash the pepper spray out of our eyes and track each other in jail, to feed one another, to advise and act in solidarity, are not mere instruments for securing emancipatory aims. They are themselves integral to the constitution of emancipated political communities. But the modes of interaction which are integral to political life, on this picture, are within the power of people subject to severe forms of oppression, as Douglass's plantation politics illustrates. On the account I have developed, the

everyday resistance that persons subject to oppression engage in is not a matter of ground-clearing or surviving until an opportunity for ‘real’ political action arises; such resistance is an essential part of what it is to bring emancipated political communities into being.

In closing, let me note two topics from this dissertation that I intend to pursue in future work. The first concerns Douglass’s radical republican conception of citizenship. Douglass’s conception of citizenship seems to have substantial emancipatory promise: it is the groundwork for an account on which everyday resistance by peoples subject to oppression is itself constitutive of their standing as full citizens in a polity. Douglass’s conception of citizenship, moreover, resonates with other republican accounts of political community in the 19th century. For instance, labor republicans in the US maintained that demands for political liberty and standing are relevant in the workplace, because the workplace is an aspect of political life. In South America, Simón Bolívar connects political membership to the cultivation of civic virtue.

But both of these conceptions of political membership are implicated in ultimately exclusionary political projects: labor republicans become implicated in anti-immigration efforts in the early 20th century, and Bolívar sees the task of anti-imperial struggle as a fundamentally vanguardist project in which an elite cultivates civic virtue in a backwards people. This is part of a more general problem concerning republican conceptions of citizenship: the idea that what makes someone a citizen is that she contribute to a polity in a particular way is demanding, and this demandingness can always be marshaled to exclude persons for failing to make the appropriate sort of contribute to the polity.

Douglass’s account plausibly bears distinctive emancipatory potential, because he thinks that resistance against tyranny and oppression constitutes persons as citizens by generating emancipatory social bonds of trust, loyalty, and solidarity. Douglass’s conception of citizenship, unlike other republican conceptions, emphasizes the ways in which members of a political

community are dependent on one another. Forging political community is not primarily a matter of negotiating individuals' sovereignty and accounting for their distinctive contributions to a polity, but rather a matter of strengthening the ways in which we rely on one another and the degree to which we act in concert. In this way, Douglass's conception of citizenship appears to avoid the exclusionary character that afflicts other republican conceptions, which see the constitution of political community primarily as securing the sovereignty of individuals.

There is reason to worry, however, that Douglass's conception of political membership grounded in social bonds falls prey to the same exclusionary consequences as classical republican positions. After the Civil War, Douglass draws on this conception of citizenship to argue that the Americas constitute a unified political community, to the extent that peoples across the Americas are engaged in resistance against tyranny and oppression; but he uses this conclusion to justify US interventions in Latin America, drawing the criticism of Latin American republicans like Jose Martí. Moreover, legal thought around the Chinese Exclusion Act in the late 19th century draws on a similar conception of citizenship as grounded in social belonging to undermine the legal and political standing of Chinese immigrants. From these examples, one might reasonably worry that Douglass's radical republican conception of citizenship does not ultimately bear the emancipatory potential that it promises.

In future work, I intend to situate Douglass's conception of citizenship in the context of 19th century republican thought in the Americas. The aim of this historical inquiry is to assess whether Douglass's conception of citizenship in fact bears distinctive emancipatory potential in expanding the boundaries of political community.

The second topic concerns the nature of political judgment. In chapter 4, I assume that we exercise political judgment well only if we do so in ways that are responsible to other persons as free, equal, but mutually dependent political actors. In future work, I aim to defend this

assumption.

One aspect of this defense will be epistemic. The problem that I point to at the outset of chapter 4, that in political communities afflicted by oppression there are epistemic and affective gaps between different groups of political actors that must be bridged, bears affinities to a traditional Cartesian skeptical problem concerning our knowledge of the external world. In both cases, it appears that there is a gap that needs to be bridged by developing reliable means of inquiry. Drawing on the work of Stanley Cavell, I intend argue that acknowledgment picks out a distinct epistemic orientation that enables us to reimagine what it means to resolve these skeptical problems. While nothing in this project will hang on defending acknowledgment as a solution to traditional Cartesian skepticism, the analogy will help illuminate how acknowledgment addresses the political case: the task of acknowledging other persons as political agents is not a matter of learning more facts about one another's interests, but responding to one another as free, equal, but mutually dependent agents. When we exercise political judgment responsibly, we acknowledge one another in this way. The task in this aspect of the project, as I currently understand it, is to more fully develop the sense in which acknowledgment is a mode of understanding which acquaints us with others as fellow agents, and the sense in which exercising political judgment responsibly is a mode of acknowledgment. If acknowledgment is epistemically valuable— because it helps us to resolve the problem of known and being known in political communities— and if responsibility in political judgment is a way of acknowledging others, then we have a reason to value responsibility in political judgment.

A second aspect of this defense concerns the role of political judgment in forming political communities. Political judgment is one form of quotidian political interaction through which we forge the social fabric of political life. Where we exercise political judgment responsibly, we

generate emancipatory social bonds. Responsibility in judgment is neither a matter of mere deference to others, nor is it a matter of simply discerning what is best from others' perspectives. In political life, we exercise judgment in ways that affect others, and even in ways that are meant to represent others' interests. The task in this part of the project, as I currently understand it, is to explain how we can exercise political judgment in ways that forge bonds of love, trust, loyalty, solidarity, and non-paternalism.

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