

AFRICAN-AMERICAN ABOLITIONISM AS A HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE

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The resolution of the slavery issue in the United States may have had more to do with economic development and political power than a shift in public morality, but there can be no question that abolitionist discourse played a major role in the expansion of America's republican vision in the nineteenth century. The debate over slavery occurred about a century before our modern human rights discourse emerged, but the central issues in the dispute anticipated, in many ways, contemporary discussions of human rights. At the heart of the matter was the question of who was to be included in the new society. Both sides, pro-slavery and anti-slavery, engaged the issue in terms of the natural rights which provided the ideological foundation of the American revolution. The question of citizenship depended on a more basic inquiry: who was fully human?

Early in the nineteenth century, public discourse was infused by the ideology of republicanism. Memories of the revolution were still fresh in the minds of citizens of the young nation. Politics reflected the novelty of the American experiment in democratic governance. In this context, reform movements had a powerful vocabulary with which to frame their moral claims. But the terms of American republicanism were subject to debate. The meaning of the revolutionary rhetoric was being pushed and pulled in many different ways by the middle of the nineteenth century. In addition to abolitionism, the early women's rights and labor movements sought to use republican assertions to gain new political and social rights. American political discourse may have had a common language, but the meanings of key terms were far from consensual.

The notion of human rights is grounded in the universalist claim to human dignity. All persons, by virtue of a humanity that cannot be abrogated, have an

inherent right to live in a dignified manner, free from undue suffering. This claim to dignity implies a set of rights to resources and practices that enable such dignified living. These rights give persons the standing to make claims upon their community where conditions do not permit the possession of necessary resources or the opportunity to participate in essential practices. The humanity of persons making the claims is all that is required to establish their validity.

The political sense of 'rights' draws on the double meaning of the term. On the one hand, rights suggests 'righteousness,' that certain conditions or practices are morally superior to other conditions practices. The term also implies an obligation. For every rights-holder there is a party obligated to fulfill (or provide the means to fulfill) those claims. The domain of human rights is social, so the obligated party is the community, including the formal apparatus of the state.

Modern human rights discourse emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. The initial concern was to establish an international norm against genocide. The discourse gradually expanded to include basic material conditions necessary to avoid terrible human suffering, political and civil rights, and eventually, cultural rights as well. The international human rights movement took action where national political systems were unable to provide the sufficient conditions for fully dignified living. (Indeed, where nation-states are able to accommodate claims-making within established social institutions, local movements are usually concerned with these rights as civil or legal rather than as human rights.)

Racism and Exclusive Humanity

The crux of American racial ideology, developed from the colonial period onward, was an assertion of a limited definition of 'humanness,' one that would protect and promote the material and symbolic privileges of Anglo-Saxon peoples. Whereas the earliest expressions of the notion of a racial hierarchy were descriptive, the sort of ethnocentrism that would judge one's own culture as superior to that of others, the meanings of race were immediately and inextricably

tied up in the brutal practices of European colonialism, and eventually the discourse on race emerged as a explicit articulation of racial superiority. The differences among races were, at the same time, the cause of and justification for the inequality of the colonialist relationship.

Leading intellectuals across the spectrum from the arts to the sciences participated in the development of an ideology of racial superiority that restricted membership in humanity to "whites." In this way, the treatment of African-Americans could be explained as the inevitable outcome of nature, just as mankind rules over the animal kingdom. It also insulated the potentially revolutionary republican rhetoric from challenging established race relations. The intellectual and legal culmination of this ideology was articulated in the *Dred Scott* decision, restricting citizenship to whites and asserting that African-Americans had "no rights which the white man is bound to respect" (quoted in Feagin 2001:83).

This racial ideology was put to work in the service of chattel slavery as organized abolitionism began to challenge the security of Southern property rights and established forms of segregation. The pro-slavery argument changed the valence of race differences from merely natural inequalities or "necessary evils" to a positive good. Thus, the defenders of chattel slavery could position themselves as generous liberals, spreading Anglo-Saxon responsibility for civilizing the "savage races." This reversal would make it even more difficult for abolitionists to use the republican rhetoric to criticize the ideology of racial superiority. It was the "white man's burden" to spread Christianity, and, so the logic goes, chattel slavery is the most excellent form of social relations between whites and Africans.

The Abolitionist Jeremiad as a Human Rights Rhetoric

American culture has been strongly influenced by the belief that the nation is special, called to redeem the world by the example of its perfection. This mixture of national pride and millennial eschatology is the foundation of one of America's most powerful rhetorics: the jeremiad. The sense that America is chosen but has

not yet achieved its promise gives the jeremiad its unique character. It is an expression of indignation in the style of the Judeo-Christian Prophets. At the same time, it is an optimistic assertion of national identity. Its power derives from this dual nature: critical but hopeful (Howard-Pitney 1990).

The jeremiad is a religious rhetoric. It is, first and foremost, a prophecy of ultimate salvation. It makes its appearance, however, in times of decline. Present sinfulness is the occasion for a reconfirmation of the nation's special mission. In both sinfulness and redemption, the people are connected with their deity. In a country steeped in millennial Protestantism, this self-identity was the basis of civil religion and much of public life. For African-Americans, the dynamic of sin and redemption had an obvious attraction. Appealing to the idea of Americans as a chosen people played into the vanity of the white majority at the same time as it pricked their collective conscience (Moses 1982).

Howard-Pitney (1990) points out that deliverance motif was central to American African-Americans' religious consciousness. The Exodus story, as a slave narrative, was an ideal vehicle for the Abolitionist critique. African-Americans saw their suffering and deliverance as a key to the redemption of the nation (Sweet 1976). In the Abolitionist jeremiad, the prophetic defense of the oppressed was woven into the story of America's eschatological fate.

The jeremiad is also a form of social critique. It is the nation, not the individual, being called to account. Originating in Puritan New England in the seventeenth century, the jeremiad was used to motivate the colonists to adhere to the strict morality of the original settlers. But, it developed into a potent political tool, deployed first by the Patriots and then the Abolitionists. According to Moses (1982), the Abolitionist jeremiad was the original form of African-American nationalism. White audiences could understand--though not necessarily accept--a social critique expressed in these terms.

Race in Antebellum New York

Northern states began the process of emancipation in the last decades of the eighteenth century. New York lagged behind New England and Pennsylvania, in part, because slavery was more vital to the Empire State economy. New York passed a conservative gradual emancipation law in 1799, and then revised it in 1817 to end slavery in the state by 1827.

New York had the largest African-American population in the antebellum North. At the time that emancipation laws were being passed, the state was home to more than 40,000 African-Americans, including more than 15,000 slaves (Berlin 1998). Almost as soon as Northern states decided on emancipation, lawmakers, in defining the meaning of the rights conferred by the Constitution, repeatedly confirmed the widely held belief that the two populations, African-American and white, should not mix. African-Americans were prohibited from serving on juries or testifying in courts, from owning guns, from serving in the military, and, in most states, from voting. States feared that unless African-Americans' rights were restricted, they would attract a large population of freemen and fugitive slaves from neighboring areas. This led to a kind of competition to deprive African-Americans of civil rights (Tocqueville 1969). Legal restrictions and white prejudice ensured that the economic prospects of Northern African-Americans were as limited as their political status (Litwack 1961).

In the early national period, through the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the meaning of liberty was explicitly linked to expanding notion of citizenship. In the decades after the Revolution, citizenship tended to be defined as a right of property-holders. By the beginning of Abolitionism, though, citizenship was generally understood to be based on a community of shared identity. Most whites could not conceive of sharing their community with anyone who was not of European, Protestant heritage. From the debate over Missouri in the 20s, to the *Dred Scott* decision, in 1857, Northern politics validated the prevailing view that the rights and privileges of citizenship were limited to whites. The popularity of

colonization, as a way to protect American liberty for whites, is easily understood in this context. African-Americans would never be accepted into the American mainstream; if they were to be freemen, they would have to live elsewhere (Condit and Lucaites 1991; Litwack 1961).

African-Americans recognized the persistence and virulence of American race prejudice, but rejected the idea of colonization. Instead, they sought to be admitted as equals into the American polity. New York remained a popular place for free African-Americans to get on with the business of living. There were modest opportunities for earning a livelihood, and a large enough population in many places to form the bonds of community. African-American culture thrived in New York City, as well as the other large population centers in the state (Franklin and Moss 1994).

African-American leaders disputed the “self-evident truths” of nineteenth century racial ideology, demanding that the nation live up to its republican identity. They consented to the basic terms of American civic culture by seeking to be included in it. African-Americans in New York refused to be excluded from the American experience. At the same time, reflected critically on their own communities for failing to achieve, despite onerous circumstances, a status that would prove their worth to the majority.

African-American Abolitionism

American abolitionism was two distinct movements. One consisted of prominent white Protestant leaders and a mass of white activists and supporters. The other included an elite of African-American ministers and editors and a majority of poor freemen and escaped slaves. The two were often in unison, but because white abolitionists were not free from popular assumptions about racial differences, they tended to think of African-Americans as dutiful followers, not leaders (Foner 1980).

African-American abolitionists sustained a more radical critique of American

society than their white colleagues. The same forces that generated a conservative outlook with regard to reform among Northern whites produced militancy among African-Americans. Protestant revivalism has been identified as a source of the emergence of immediatism in American anti-slavery agitation (Barnes 1964). African-American churches were steeped in millennial perfectionism. Whites were more likely to have faith in the inevitability of progress; African-Americans had little reason to believe that American racism would end of its own accord. Whites worried that abolition would invite a more general attack on the institution of private property, but African-Americans, who owned little capital and did not expect to in the future, would not have feared this as an outcome of anti-slavery activism. Because nineteenth century African-American institutions were not invested in the status quo, they were more likely to breed radicalization. (Levesque 1970).

Perhaps the most extreme note sounded by the African-American abolitionists was a call to self-defense by any means necessary. The early years of the movement were dominated by William Lloyd Garrison's philosophy of nonviolence, and both white and African-American leaders were far more likely to favor "moral suasion." But, beginning in the middle of the 1840s, some African-American leaders began to develop a rhetorical strategy for framing the call to violent resistance (Ripley 1991). Controversy erupted at the National Convention of Colored Citizens, in 1843, when Henry Highland Garnet called for the violent overthrow of American slavery. The convention narrowly rejected his resolution, but as the situation of slaves and free African-Americans worsened in the following years, Garnet's speech became increasingly popular (Shiffrin 1971). By 1854, African-American conventions went so far as to endorse the principle of "Liberty or Death!" (Franklin and Moss 1994).

The argument connecting anti-slavery and racial equality was not well received in the North. Economic and social competition prevented whites from thoughtfully considering the issue of civil rights. For much of the time the second

party system was functioning, Democrats controlled the national government on the basis of the alliance between Northern white workers and Southern planters. The party of Jackson made citizenship for white working men seem inescapably linked to a defense of plantation slavery. In the decade before the Civil War, this union broke down, as workers perceived the expansion of slavery into the territories as a direct threat to their well-being. Territorial expansion was a promise of economic independence in the eyes of wage laborers. The Free Soil movement was founded on the equation “free soil = free labor = free men,” the logic of which necessitated the exclusion of African-Americans. Representative David Wilmot, whose Proviso was the touchstone of political contention in the 50s, explained the logic of his proposal: “I plead the cause and the rights of white freemen. I would preserve to free white labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and color, can live without the disgrace which association with negro slavery brings upon free labor” (Litwack 1961:47). When they perceived it was in their interests, white workers could oppose slavery as an un-American system of coercion, but without endorsing the abolitionist argument that “all men were created equal” (Roediger 1991; Saxton 1990; Wilentz 1984).

The use of the concept of free labor was increasingly common in the antebellum period, particularly to emphasize the difference between North and South. Free labor, through its binary opposition of slavery/freedom, disguised the extent to which workers in the North were subjected to legal and economic coercion, on the one hand, and social inequality, on the other. For African-Americans, the difference between slavery and wage labor was paramount. They had to use whatever rhetorical tools were available to oppose slavery. If they had suggested, following some of the radical union leaders, that the condition of slaves and wage workers were similarly unfree, it seems unlikely that the cause of anti-slavery would have benefited. A total rejection of Northern society would have doomed the effort to free their Southern brethren.

It is into this complex system of interpretations of freedom, independence, citizenship and race that the African-American abolitionists interjected their moral claims to humanity and justice. Their “fighting words” were made of the same discursive material as other popular forms of political speech. Partisan politics, journalism, fiction, sermons and lectures all made use of the styles and voices of republicanism, political economy and evangelical revivalism. The African-American abolitionists were speaking in ways that their contemporaries could understand. It was not simply a pragmatic decision. These discursive fields form the context in which nineteenth century social movements diagnosed society, planned their reforms, and motivated participants to labor, sometimes at significant personal costs. African-American abolitionists used newspapers, in particular, to achieve these goals.

African-American Abolitionist Newspapers

By the time Abolitionism emerged as a social movement in the 1830s, America was already a land of newspapers and pamphlets. The political use of print had been demonstrated by the Patriots during the Revolutionary period (Bailyn 1992). American abolitionists also witnessed the effective use of newspapers as a means of influencing public opinion by the actions of their English colleagues, whose press campaigns began in the 1780s.

African-American newspapers span the abolitionist period. The earliest was *Freedom's Journal*, which ran from 1827-30. The presses continued until the Civil War, with *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (1851-1863) and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* (1840-1860). Some, including *Douglass' Paper* and the *Standard*, ran for a considerable time. Others, such as *The Rights of All* (1829), the *American Anti-Slavery Reporter* (1833-34), the *Mirror of Liberty* (1838), and *The Weekly Anglo-African Magazine* (1859), were short-lived (Franklin and Moss 1994; Litwack 1961).

Tension within the anti-slavery community sometimes arose because white leaders, such as Garrison, felt that the African-American papers were diminishing

the readership of the established journals. They failed to understand why northern African-Americans wanted to express their outrage and their hopes in their own voices. This is exactly the special mission that African-American editors set for themselves. The African-American press played a key role in the development of African-American culture. Newspapers were an important medium for the expression of the social and political aspirations of free African-Americans in the North (Hutton 1992; Tripp 1992).

METHOD

A sample of texts written by Blacks in each of five newspapers (*The Weekly Advocate*, *The Colored American*, *The North Star*, *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper*, and *The Weekly Anglo-African*) published in New York State between 1827 and 1860 was drawn from published collections (Ripley 1985; Douglass and Blassingame 1979) and available microfilm reels at the New York Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Table I lists extant African-American abolitionist newspapers in New York State, and indicates those selected into the sample. The authorship criterion was verified by comparison to a list of African-American abolitionists compiled from the notes and commentaries provided by Ripley (1985). Because of editorial and/or organizational continuity, texts were pooled for *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*, and for the two Douglass newspapers.

Texts were not selected on the basis of content. Rather, convenience samples were taken by mining *The Black Abolitionist Papers* (Ripley 1985) and *The Frederick Douglass Papers* (Douglass and Blassingame 1979) for all texts that were presented or published in New York. Those from the five newspapers in the sample were retained. Additional texts were added from available microfilm reels for *The Weekly Advocate*, *The Colored American*, and *The Weekly Anglo-African*. The primary concern in this sampling strategy was that a sufficient amount of text could be found for a variety of New York newspapers, in an exploratory attempt to

describe the structure of African-American abolitionist discourse. The present analysis is based on 136 paragraphs (about 20,000 words) from *The Colored American/The Weekly Advocate*, 79 paragraphs (about 12,000 words) from the Douglass papers, and 42 paragraphs (about 4,500 words) from *The Weekly Anglo-African*. In all, 257 paragraphs (more than 36,000 words) of African-American abolitionist text were examined.

The present study used a sample of 179 paragraphs (about 14,000 words) from *The Working Man's Advocate*--a nineteenth-century New York labor newspaper--as a point of comparison with non-abolitionist discourse in terms of the socio-cognitive network. This was done to check the validity of the theme and vocabulary coding. To the extent that the differences between the Abolitionist texts and the labor texts can be meaningfully explained, the computerized coding algorithms are supported.

In the present study, computerized content coding using *SemioCode* (Shortell 2002) generated frequencies and co-occurrences for a set of sixteen themes (JUSTICE, LIBERTY, RIGHTS, UPLIFT, AMERICA, SLAVERY, GOD, BROTHERHOOD, COLOR, PROPERTY, LABOR, CHARACTER, SUFFERING, NATURE, POLITICS, and, LAW) and a set of six vocabularies (REPUBLICAN, SLAVERY, ECONOMY, RACE, PROPHETIC, and EVANGELICAL). The socio-cognitive network was mapped using odds ratios to characterize probabilistic relations among elements. Odds ratios are a measure of association in contingency tables; instead of measuring the degree to which proportions of one variable vary by the other, as is the case with the standard Chi-square test, odds express the likelihood that a random case is in one category of a variable rather than any other. Odds ratios show if the odds for a category vary by values of the other variable (Rudas 1998; Knoke and Burke 1980).

In addition, the present study used multidimensional scaling (MDS) to illustrate the structure of the socio-cognitive network. The ALSCAL algorithm was employed to calculate solutions separately for each newspaper, and for the

discourse as a whole (Everitt and Dunn 1992). In the MDS results, smaller number indicate greater association between themes. Since the solutions are not metric across newspapers, the average distance between all pairs themes (120) is given. The solution for all texts must be interpreted with caution; it can be taken as only an approximation of the general African-American abolitionist discourse. The goodness of fit measure (stress) indicates that the three dimensional solution accounts for only a fair amount of the variation in the original distance matrix. In order to test hypotheses about the structure of the discourse, more texts need to be analyzed.

The paragraph was employed as coding unit in all analyses (Popping 2000). In written English, the paragraph is the basic syntactic container for the argument. In this regard, as a coding unit, it falls between the “utterance” and the “text” in the formal units of Leech’s and Svartvik’s (1994) communicative grammar. Researchers studying concepts generally use the sentence as the coding unit. In this study, though, concepts are regarded as the building-blocks of arguments; as a result, the paragraph was chosen as coding unit throughout.

Themes were operationalized as sets of keywords. Because the present study is exploratory, any instance of any of the keywords for a theme triggered the coding switch in the software (i.e., the theme was coded as present in that paragraph). Further work will need to be done to determine the optimal level of breadth and depth for this kind of theme coding, but this algorithm probably mimics the typical human coding.

Vocabularies represent groups of themes that define the more general character of the discursive field as a kind of sociological--rather than literary--genre (see Steinberg 1998). In this way, they represent aspects that transcend the specific subject matter of any particular discourse. It is expected that these vocabularies would be found, with lesser or greater frequency, in other nineteenth-century American discourses. The present study uses SLAVERY as both a theme and a vocabulary; although this introduces a certain confusion into the discussion, it is

necessary because the subject matter plays a role at both levels of abstraction.

The network of meanings thus laid out will permit the investigation of argument construction, which is vital to the understanding of the claims-making/collective identity interaction. While this study cannot hope to fully depict the African-American abolitionists' rhetoric, it identifies some of the discourse's central features. Rhetoric analysis consists of coding for tone, mode and basis.

The codes for tone (ANGER, JOY, SADNESS, and IRONY) were designed to capture the strategic use of emotion. Given that the focus of the present study is on discourse as a collective practice, the psychological state of the author is not a target of analysis. Rather, content coding aims to capture the use of emotion as one oratorical option among others. Abolitionist discourse could have included very little strategic use of emotions—if, for example, the principal argument against slavery were that it was economically inefficient—so that the prevalence of different tones suggests something important about the kinds of arguments thought of as most efficacious, in terms of claims-making as well as collective identity.

The present study defines mode as a dimension of rhetoric loosely based on Leech's (1983) theory of pragmatics. Illocutionary action depicts the interpersonal relational activity of arguments. The assertions put forward by the African-American abolitionists can be thought of as adhering to particular kinds of social goals. Arguments have social effects that follow, in part, from the intent of the author and his or her place in particular social networks. Because meaning isn't always easy to control, though, the success of the illocutionary action is not simply a matter of semantics. Arguments work, in the sociological sense, in part because of the ways they are understood: as describing the social world, as explaining, or, evaluating it.

The most common illocutionary action in written English is the ASSERTIVE. The intent of this mode is to state the facts about the subject matter at hand. In contrast, the EXPLANATORY mode includes assertions that are designed to educate. In this mode, arguments make connections that reflect an editorial

viewpoint, as it were. These two modes can be contrasted, generally speaking, as regarding the “what” question and the “why” question of a communication, respectively. Finally, the EVALUATIVE mode includes arguments whose primary purpose is to judge, to place the facts in a moral problematic. Unlike the other two modes, the EVALUATIVE has to do more with value (i.e., good/bad, beautiful/ugly, right/wrong, etc.) rather than with verisimilitude.

Finally, paragraphs were coded in terms of basis (SIMILARITY or DIFFERENCE). With this dimension, the goal was to capture the types of comparison employed in the logic of the abolitionist arguments. When two concepts are linked, there is always an implicit or explicit basis for the connection. The categories used in the present study for logical basis are by no means exhaustive, but it seemed that equality ($X = Y$) and inequality ($X \neq Y$) were likely to be the most common types.

Paragraphs containing at least two instances of the vocabularies were coded for rhetoric by four trained readers. Disagreements were resolved by discussion until a majority agreed on the same code. If no consensus could be reached, the paragraph was coded as neutral on that aspect.

Finally, in order to place the African-American abolitionists discourse along the power dimension, the present research operationalized key modes of two of Thompson’s (1990) ideological dimensions most germane to the nineteenth century discussion of race: NATURALIZATION and DIFFERENTIATION. Coding attempted to identify claims in the abolitionist texts that were used to dispute the justification of racial inequality as natural and inevitable (naturalization, a mode of reification), and arguments in favor of the significance of racial differences (differentiation, a mode of fragmentation). According to Thompson’s formulation, ideological communication follows relations of domination. In the present case, the pro-slavery arguments would be ideological, and therefore, the anti-slavery arguments counter-ideological.

Ideological mode was coded for according to these definitions. Due to time

constraints, a random sample of paragraphs from the Douglass papers was selected for coding. Again, four trained coders were used and disagreements were resolved by discussion.

RESULTS

Table 2 shows the prevalence of themes in each sample and for the discourse as a whole (i.e., all the African-American abolitionist texts taken together), with a sample of texts from a non-Abolitionist paper for comparison. It is clear that themes especially connected with the claims-making/identity dynamic are most common. Among the primary claims themes are LIBERTY, RIGHTS, and LAW, occurring in each abolitionist sample in more than ten percent of the paragraphs. The identity themes abound: AMERICA, SLAVERY, BROTHERHOOD, COLOR, CHARACTER, and SUFFERING, generally occurring in more than 15 percent of the paragraphs in *The Colored American* and the Douglass papers, and somewhat less in *The Weekly Anglo-African*.

It would be a mistake, of course, to assume that themes are enlisted to do work of only one kind. The fact that these themes occur so notably confirms that claims-making and identity construction are at the heart of the anti-slavery discourse. The cluster of claims-making/identity arguments suggested by the present analysis of the discursive structure, presented below, illustrates the utility of the network approach.

The thematic profile of the Douglass papers corresponds to what is typically thought of as abolitionist discourse. The themes of LIBERTY, SLAVERY, and SUFFERING are all more common in the Douglass papers than *The Colored American* or *The Weekly Anglo-African*. In addition, POLITICS and AMERICA are also more common in the Douglass papers. *The Colored American* shows some similarity to the Douglass papers—compare RIGHTS, BROTHERHOOD, COLOR, and CHARACTER—though the typical abolitionist themes are somewhat less common. *The Colored American* displays what might be called self-help orientation, with

UPLIFT one of its most prominent themes. *The Anglo-African* is clearly most distinctive. The themes of JUSTICE, COLOR, and LAW are more common here than in the other abolitionist samples, which is probably a result both of its cultural bent and its publication in the years immediately preceding the Civil War. It appeared at a time when dissolution appeared inevitable and emancipation a more realistic possibility; it was more concerned, therefore, with securing the full status of citizenship.

Comparing the abolitionist discourse with that from the labor newspaper, *The Working Man's Advocate*, similarities and differences are evident. Both kinds of discourse are affiliated with social movements; as a result, RIGHTS is common in both samples. The same is true with LIBERTY and AMERICA. On the other hand, the differences between the two types of discourse are striking. The abolitionist texts are more likely to use SLAVERY, of course, but are also more likely to employ a self-help/moral exhortation style, as evidenced by the greater prevalence of UPLIFT, CHARACTER and GOD. Discussion of race, indicated by COLOR, is also more common in the abolitionists texts than in the labor discourse. Labor themes, such as LABOR and PROPERTY, are more common in *The Working Man's Advocate* sample.

The prevalence of vocabularies by sample and for the abolitionist discourse as a whole is shown in Table 3. As was expected, the REPUBLICAN vocabulary was most prominent. Although it does not dominate the discourse, it clearly establishes that this reform movement incorporated many of the basic elements of the public discourse of the day. In the thirty years that abolitionism existed as a formal movement, reformers of all kinds called on the founding documents of the nation to justify their labor.

What is surprising, perhaps, is the prevalence of the PROPHETIC vocabulary, especially relative to the EVANGELICAL. To suggest that African-American abolitionist discourse is prophetic is not to say that it was merely persuasive or even inspiring. Rather, that the discourse is prophetic refers to

specific strategic qualities about the construction of claims-making arguments. The use of this rhetoric results in a particular subject position for African-Americans, that of the suffering figure avenged by God's wrath as depicted in the books of the Hebrew Prophets, and repeated in so much American religious discourse. Prophetic rhetoric links the suffering of the oppressed with eschatological concerns and makes social justice a theological problem.

The REPUBLICAN, SLAVERY and PROPHETIC vocabularies are most common in the Douglass papers. *The Colored American* is somewhat similar to the Douglass papers, and *The Anglo-African* appears to employ other vocabularies altogether. These differences are probably best explained on the basis of the dates of publication of the papers in each sample. Because the Douglass papers were published in the 40s and 50s--the prime period of the movement--this sample shows the typical qualities expected in anti-slavery discourse.

Table 4 shows the odds of various themes in combination with SLAVERY for the abolitionist samples. The table gives odds and odds ratios. 'Odds of First' indicates the odds of the first theme in the pair being present in a paragraph. 'Odds of Second' indicates the odds of the second theme being present. These are simply another way to express prevalence. 'Odds Ratio' denotes the odds of the second theme being present in paragraphs where the first is present compared to being present in paragraphs where the first theme is absent. Values near 1.0 indicate independence; small or large values signify inverse and positive contingency, respectively.

In general, the odds suggest that SLAVERY and these selected themes tended to co-occur. In only one particular instance, SLAVERY-CHARACTER in the Douglass papers, was there a inverse contingency. The depiction of probabilistic relationships demonstrates that these associations were not absolute. In contrast to the frames approach, so typical of social movements scholarship, the present analysis suggests the strategic construction of arguments based on shifting meanings in the socio-cognitive network. These contingencies clearly indicate nonrandom

associations, and show that arguments were deliberate rather than formulaic. As the network approach stresses, concepts are flexible, moving between poles of general use and specific deployment, and between the poles of idiosyncratic meaning and social consensus (Carley 1997). It is not the case, for example, that every time SLAVERY appears, so does LIBERTY. Sometimes the combination is needed for a particular argument, and sometimes it is not. The meaning of the two themes cannot be fixed in permanent relation to the other.

Although odds illustrate the dynamic quality of the socio-cognitive network, this indeterminacy should not be confused for a lack of sensibility. The claims and identity arguments in African-American abolitionist discourse were built on strategic combinations based on the flexible meaning of slavery and American social and political life. The tactical pairing of SLAVERY and LIBERTY, SUFFERING, POLITICS, or CHARACTER was necessary to accomplish the specific goals of the movement.

Table 5 displays the odds of various themes in combination with COLOR in the abolitionist samples. This pattern of contingencies illustrates the manner in which the abolitionist discourse constructed the collective identity of African-Americans in the nineteenth century. Most important in this regard is the co-occurrence of COLOR with RIGHTS and COLOR with SUFFERING. These contingencies are consistent with the strategic use of the jeremiad. It depicts African-Americans as the suffering victim of national sinfulness, with whom God has sided, and in whose name God promises retribution. Unless African-Americans were given their due rights, the nation would be punished.

Table 6 displays the partial thematic structure for SLAVERY. This theme appears to be more tightly integrated in the Douglass papers than in *The Colored American* or *The Anglo-African*, as indicated by the generally smaller distances between SLAVERY and other themes. An important thematic cluster is seen in the Douglass papers, consisting of SLAVERY-LIBERTY-SUFFERING-POLITICS—what might be considered the definitive constellation of abolitionist discourse. This is the

discursive intersection of political and prophetic speech, and, perhaps, a structural indicator of the abolitionist jeremiad. *The Colored American* shows some affinity to this structure; *The Anglo-African* is most distinctive in this regard.

Results of the rhetoric coding are given in Table 7. Coders were able to achieve sufficient agreement only on ANGER, so only these results are presented. Because there were too few paragraphs with multiple vocabularies in *The Anglo-African*, only *The Colored American* and the Douglass papers are included separately. Both papers use ANGER about equally often. *The Colored American* uses the declarative and explanatory modes with about the same frequency, substantially more often than it uses the evaluative mode. The Douglass papers, in contrast, use the evaluative mode almost as much as the declarative.

In an attempt to find another empirical indicator of the jeremiad, we calculated the odds ratios for SLAVERY with anger and SLAVERY with evaluation (not shown in Table 7). SLAVERY is more likely to be used with anger or evaluation in *The Colored American* than in the Douglass papers. The second-order odds ratio, indicating a three-way contingency, is 2.67 for the Douglass papers. When texts from both papers are pooled, the second-order odds ratio falls to 0.91, suggesting that the three-way contingency is stronger for the Douglass papers than for *The Colored American*.

As shown in Table 7, arguments based on difference were more common than arguments based on similarity. This may be a function of the prevalence of the differentiation mode in the pro-slavery discourse, and more generally, the popularity of racist assertions in nineteenth century public speech. The extent to which the African-American abolitionists had to argue against efforts to fragment the collective identity may account for this tendency.

In Table 8, the results of the ideology coding are shown. The Douglass papers stand out as most likely to employ counter-ideological arguments. Odds ratios indicate that the two modes are contingent in each sample. The odds of differentiation being present in paragraphs where naturalization is present,

compared to paragraphs where naturalization is absent, are 9.59 for *The Colored American*, 1.90 for the Douglass papers, and 4.27 for *The Anglo-African* (not shown in Table 7). Because the number of paragraphs in which the modes are present is quite small, these odds are, at best, general indicators of contingency. It is impossible to make comparisons between them.

Naturalization is more likely to occur in paragraphs where the REPUBLICAN vocabulary is present than absent in the Douglass papers and *The Anglo-African*, but not *The Colored American*. Differentiation was contingent with REPUBLICAN in the Douglass papers and *The Colored American*.

Naturalization is also more likely to occur with SLAVERY than without it in both the Douglass papers and *The Colored American*. Differentiation was more likely in paragraphs containing the SLAVERY vocabulary in *The Colored American*, but not in the Douglass papers.

The odds of naturalization being present in paragraphs with the PROPHETIC vocabulary were higher in the Douglass papers and *The Anglo-African* than in *The Colored American*. In the latter, naturalization was somewhat more likely to occur in paragraphs without PROPHETIC. The same pattern obtains for differentiation. In *The Colored American*, differentiation appears to be independent of the use of PROPHETIC.

DISCUSSION

African-American abolitionists generated a coherent, positive identity in the process of reporting on slavery and exhorting the nation to righteousness. In many ways, African-American abolitionist texts are similar to other mid-nineteenth century political discourses. The discursive repertoire of abolitionism was anchored by the republican field. Counter-ideological arguments are common, indicating that assumptions about race were being acknowledged as well as contested. Though the discourse of African-American abolitionism is a social critique, it also contains a positive assertion of what free African-Americans would become. As important as

the theme of SLAVERY was to the discourse, so too were COLOR and BROTHERHOOD.

The Douglass papers stand out as exemplary of African-American abolitionist discourse. Our content coding consistently showed the key features of political anti-slavery argumentation to be most common in the Douglass papers. Discussion of slavery dominates the pages of the Douglass papers much more than the others (more than three times as frequent than in *The Colored American* and more than six times as common than in *The Anglo-African*). The REPUBLICAN vocabulary is substantially more common. The thematic constellation of SLAVERY-LIBERTY-SUFFERING-POLITICS appears more clearly in the structure of the Douglass papers. The PROPHETIC vocabulary was more frequent. The evaluative mode was more likely to be used. These features lend the Douglass papers their distinctive rhetorical profile, and suggest an approximate empirical indicator of the abolitionist jeremiad.

The Colored American is similar to the Douglass papers in many ways. It shows, however, fewer of the features of the abolitionist jeremiad. Instead, a greater emphasis is placed on the theme of UPLIFT. Samuel Cornish's paper had to deal with the issue of colonization more than the others, and though this could be considered a part of the SLAVERY vocabulary, we did not include it in the coding. In terms of thematic structure, *The Colored American* is nearer to the Douglass papers than *The Anglo-African*. In its rhetorical profile, the paper is very similar to the Douglass papers; it is less evaluative, but more didactic. On the whole, the paper is probably closer to the exemplary anti-slavery voice than our results suggest.

In contrast to the kinship between the Douglass papers and *The Colored American*, *The Anglo-African* stands apart with its distinctive characteristics. The paper was not an abolitionist forum as much as it was a cultural medium with an anti-slavery perspective. Our coding of themes and vocabularies, focused on what we anticipated were the key elements of African-American abolitionism, showed

The Anglo-African consistently different from the other texts. Our results clearly show that the subject matter of this paper was often outside the scope of our coding: the REPUBLICAN vocabulary occurred in only about 11 percent of the paragraphs we studied, and SLAVERY in only about four percent.

To the extent that these antebellum African-American newspapers constitute parts of the same discourse, our results suggest that the discourse included a good deal of variation. The “discursive turn” in social movements theory, as articulated by Steinberg (1998, 1999), provides a framework for making sense of this diversity. In contrast to a “frame,” which connotes a static, finished entity, a “discursive field” evokes change and experimentation. Some of the key features of African-American abolitionist discourse were intentional. The emphasis on themes like BLACK and BROTHERHOOD, and the turning of republican ideas on the basis of race, were deliberate strategies in the effort to articulate a positive identity.

The use of the jeremiad also indicates a purposive attempt to voice the abolitionist critique in familiar terms. The rhetoric and subject matter of commonplace public discourse were appropriated for the purpose of rallying Northern opinion against slavery. Anger and judgment were effective tools in the public square.

The African-American abolitionists’ “fighting words” challenged white America to fulfill its promise as “the shining city on the hill.” They argued that African-Americans played a critical role in the salvation drama of the American experiment; redemption will come, they contended, only when African-Americans have been granted liberty and equality. At the same time, through their discourse, African-American abolitionists constructed a positive identity for African-Americans and tried to make this collective sense of self the basis for political solidarity.

The abolitionists' attempt to expand the American definition of humanity to include Africans (and, indirectly, other non-white peoples) runs along two tracks simultaneously. First, the abolitionist discourse is squarely in the republican tradition that dominated American politics even through the nineteenth century. In

this regard, the African-American abolitionists employed a strategy similar to contemporaneous social movements.

The second line of rhetorical attack was distinctive to abolitionism. African-American abolitionists skillfully embraced the jeremiad and used it to provide the emotional energy needed to power the expansion of the public notions of humanity and citizenship. The abolitionists human rights argument was a radical one in its context. The long history of racism in America hardened most Americans' sense of identity, even in the North. Whites simply could not imagine a common humanity with Africans or Native Americans or Asians. History suggested their 'otherness' was too great.

Indeed, although chattel slavery was abolished as a result, in part, of the efforts of African-American abolitionists, the rhetoric of republicanism and the jeremiad did not succeed in redefining the white majority's understanding of humanity. In the aftermath of the Civil War African-Americans were recognized as members of the human race and granted some political and civil rights. The pressure of racism, however, was too great. By the end of the century, the notion of humanity and citizenship had contracted again. The dignity which all persons are due was withdrawn and African-Americans were reclassified as something less than human.

The discursive foundation for the human rights argument, though, had been laid. It was well-crafted and would be the base upon which the modern civil rights movement would be built. Finally, the African-American abolitionists' argument would win the day, a century later.

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Table 1. Extant Black Abolitionist Newspapers in New York

Newspaper	Dates of Publication
<i>Freedom's Journal</i>	1827-1829
<i>Rights of All</i>	1829
<i>The Weekly Advocate</i> *	1837
<i>The Colored American</i> *	1837-1841
<i>The Mirror of Liberty</i>	1838-1840
<i>The Northern Star and Freeman's Advocate</i>	1842
<i>The Ram's Horn</i>	1846-1848
<i>The North Star</i> *	1847-1851
<i>Frederick Douglass' Paper</i> *	1851-1859
<i>Douglass' Monthly</i>	1859-1860
<i>The Weekly Anglo-African</i> *	1859-1860
<i>The Anglo-African Magazine</i>	1859-1861

Source: Hutton 1993.

Note: Asterisk indicates newspaper included in sample.

Table 2. Prevalence of Themes by Sample (percent)

Theme	Abolitionist Texts				Working Man's Advocate
	All Ab. Texts	WA/CA	Douglass Papers	Anglo-African	
JUSTICE	8.6	5.9	8.9	16.7	3.4
LIBERTY	26.4	20.6	39.2	21.4	19.8
RIGHTS	20.6	22.1	21.5	14.3	28.2
UPLIFT	17.9	22.8	10.1	16.7	5.1
AMERICA	25.3	21.3	32.9	23.8	26.0
SLAVERY	23.7	14.7	48.1	7.1	11.3
GOD	14.8	14.0	21.6	4.8	4.0
BROTHER.	31.5	32.4	29.1	33.3	18.6
COLOR	24.1	20.6	22.8	38.1	2.8
PROPERTY	3.5	5.2	1.3	2.4	18.6
LABOR	11.7	11.0	15.2	7.1	19.2
CHARACTER	21.0	21.3	24.1	14.3	13.0
SUFFERING	21.0	17.7	30.4	14.3	10.7
NATURE	5.8	8.1	1.3	7.1	8.5
POLITICS	18.7	16.9	27.9	7.1	23.2
LAW	11.3	10.3	10.1	16.7	-
Paragraphs	257	136	79	42	179

Note: 'All Ab. Texts' includes all texts from the three Abolitionist samples. 'WA/CA' includes *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*. 'Douglass Papers' includes *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Percentages represent the relative frequency of paragraphs in which the theme is present. A dash indicates the value could not be calculated.

Table 3. Prevalence of Vocabularies by Sample (percent)

Vocabulary	Abolitionist Texts				Working Man's Advocate
	All Ab. Texts	WA/CA	Douglass Papers	Anglo-African	
REPUBLICAN	29.2	25.7	44.8	11.4	54.2
SLAVERY	22.8	14.0	48.1	3.8	11.3
ECONOMY	2.7	2.9	3.8	0.0	38.4
RACE	5.4	1.5	10.1	8.9	4.0
PROPHETIC	26.2	23.5	35.4	17.7	21.5
EVANGELICAL	7.0	9.6	6.3	0.0	11.3
Paragraphs	257	136	79	42	179

Note: 'All Ab. Texts' includes all texts from the three Abolitionist samples. 'WA/CA' includes *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*. 'Douglass Papers' includes *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Percentages represent the relative frequency of paragraphs in which the vocabulary is present.

Table 4. Odds for SLAVERY and Selected Themes by Sample

Themes	Sample	Odds of First	Odds of Second	Odds Ratio
SLAVERY & LIBERTY	WA/CA	0.17 (20)	0.26 (28)	3.20 (8)
	Douglass Papers	0.93 (38)	0.65 (31)	2.42 (19)
	Anglo- African	0.08 (3)	0.27 (9)	-
SLAVERY & POLITICS	WA/CA	0.17 (20)	0.21 (23)	-
	Douglass Papers	0.93 (38)	0.39 (22)	5.83 (17)
	Anglo- African	0.08 (3)	0.08 (3)	-
SLAVERY & CHARACTER	WA/CA	0.17 (20)	0.27 (29)	5.11 (10)
	Douglass Papers	0.93 (38)	0.32 (19)	0.77 (8)
	Anglo- African	0.08 (3)	0.17 (6)	-

SLAVERY & SUFFERING	WA/CA	0.17 (20)	0.21 (24)	2.33 (6)
	Douglass Papers	0.93 (38)	0.44 (24)	2.32 (15)
	Anglo- African	0.08 (3)	0.17 (6)	-

Note: 'WA/CA' includes *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*. 'Douglass Papers' includes *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Number of paragraphs given in parentheses. A dash indicates that the value could not be calculated.

Table 5. Odds for COLOR and Selected Themes by Sample

Themes	Sample	Odds of First	Odds of Second	Odds Ratio
COLOR & RIGHTS	WA/CA	0.26 (28)	0.28 (30)	2.62 (11)
	Douglass Papers	0.30 (18)	0.27 (17)	1.57 (5)
	Anglo- African	0.62 (16)	0.17 (6)	4.00 (4)
COLOR & UPLIFT	WA/CA	0.26 (28)	0.30 (31)	0.66 (5)
	Douglass Papers	0.30 (18)	0.11 (8)	7.44 (5)
	Anglo- African	0.62 (16)	0.20 (7)	-
COLOR & SUFFERING	WA/CA	0.26 (28)	0.21 (24)	1.19 (8)
	Douglass Papers	0.30 (18)	0.44 (24)	3.07 (9)
	Anglo- African	0.62 (16)	0.17 (6)	4.00 (4)

COLOR & BROTHER	WA/CA	0.26 (28)	0.48 (44)	2.00 (14)
	Douglass Papers	0.30 (18)	0.41 (23)	2.45 (8)
	Anglo- African	0.62 (16)	0.50 (14)	0.86 (5)

Note: 'WA/CA' includes *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*. 'Douglass Papers' includes *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Number of paragraphs given in parentheses. 'Odds of First' indicates the odds of the first theme in the pair being present in a paragraph. 'Odds of Second' indicates the odds of the second theme being present. 'Odds Ratio' denotes the odds of the second theme being present in paragraphs where the first is present compared to being present in paragraphs where the first is absent. Values near 1.0 indicate independence; small or large values signify contingency. A dash indicates that the value could not be calculated.

**Table 6. Partial Thematic Structure for SLAVERY by Sample
(Euclidian distance)**

SLAVERY and	All Texts	WA/CA	Sample	
			Douglass Papers	Anglo-African
LIBERTY	1.4	2.0	1.0	2.3
RIGHTS	0.9	1.5	1.7	4.2
AMERICA	0.8	0.2	0.9	2.1
COLOR	1.0	2.4	1.2	3.3
SUFFERING	0.8	1.0	0.6	2.6
POLITICS	1.2	2.3	0.3	3.3
Theme Average ^a	1.8	2.1	1.7	2.9
Grand Average ^b	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.3
Stress ^c	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.21

Notes: 'WA/CA' includes *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*. 'Douglass Papers' includes *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Distances are calculated from ALSCAL solutions for three dimensions. Smaller distances indicate stronger association.

^a Average distance for theme across its 15 pairs.

^b Average distance for all 120 pairs.

^c Goodness-of-fit indicator for ALSCAL solution. Lower values indicate that more of the variation in the original co-occurrence matrix is accounted for by the coordinate solution.

Table 7. Prevalence of Rhetoric Characteristics by Sample (percent)

Rhetoric Characteristic	Sample	
	WA/CA	Douglass Papers
Angry	23.3	27.8
Declarative	36.7	34.3
Explanatory	40.0	22.9
Evaluative	13.3	31.4
Similarity	23.2	14.3
Difference	50.0	48.6
Paragraphs	30	36

Note: 'WA/CA' includes *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*. 'Douglass Papers' includes *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. There were too few paragraphs from *The Anglo-African* to code, so it was omitted.

Table 8. Prevalence and Selected Contingencies of Ideological Dimensions by Sample

Ideological Dimension	Sample		
	WA/CA	Douglass Papers	Anglo-African
NATURALIZATION	11.8%	33.3%	16.7%
<u>Odds with:</u>			
REPUBLICAN	0.99	1.40	1.12
SLAVERY	1.07	1.63	-
PROPHETIC	0.93	1.67	1.20
DIFFERENTIATION	11.8%	25.0%	11.9%
<u>Odds with:</u>			
REPUBLICAN	1.79	2.83	-
SLAVERY	1.43	1.08	1.18
PROPHETIC	1.02	1.83	1.76
Paragraphs	136	36	42

Note: 'WA/CA' includes *The Weekly Advocate* and *The Colored American*. 'Douglass Papers' includes *The North Star* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. The odds ratio denotes the likelihood of the vocabulary being present in paragraphs where the counter-ideological argument is present compared to being present in paragraphs where the counter-ideological argument is absent. Values near 1.0 indicate independence; small or large values signify contingency. A dash indicates that the value could not be calculated.

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