Excursions for the Sake of the Slave: Julia Griffiths' "Letters from the Old World" in Frederick Douglass' Newspapers

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Abstract

This research examines "Letters from the Old World," a series of at least 87 columns by Julia Griffiths, an Englishwoman who worked closely with ex-slave turned newspaper editor Frederick Douglass. It is argued that the "Letters," appearing from 1855 to 1863 and detailing Griffiths' antislavery travels throughout the United Kingdom, helped establish and maintain a transatlantic network of antislavery women in an era when the public sphere nominally was closed to women.

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In the years leading up to America's Civil War, abolitionists deployed a variety of print products to wage war on slavery. Books, most famously Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, pamphlets and tracts, and newspapers helped set the agenda, provided the arguments for ending slavery, and created forums for competing ideas among antislavery activists.[1]

A special example of this abolitionist print culture began appearing in escaped-slave-turned-editor Frederick Douglass' newspapers in 1855. For nearly the next eight years and over more than 85 issues, columns written as "Letters from the Old World" provided American abolitionists reports of what was going on in the United Kingdom and gave British abolitionists a reflection of their efforts on behalf of American slaves. The columns, written by Douglass' close associate Julia Griffiths, appropriated the epistolary form that was a staple of newspaper content from earliest days and blended it with women's travel writing, which was gaining popularity as wealthy, educated, and independent women set off to explore the world. The result was a nearly monthly narrative

[1] There is abundant literature on Stowe and her best-known novel, with more sparked by the 200th anniversary of her birth (June 14, 1811) and the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, which President Abraham Lincoln purportedly credited Stowe with starting. Among recent treatments, see Barbara Hochman, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Reading Revolution: Race, Literacy, Childhood, and Fiction, 1851-1911* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011); David S. Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword: Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Battle for America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011). Perhaps the most famous – and incendiary – abolitionist pamphlet was David Walker's "An Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, To Those of the United States of America" (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995). For studies of Southern reaction, see, for instance, Hasan Crockett, "The Incendiary Pamphlet: David Walker's Appeal in Georgia," *Journal of Negro History* 86, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 305-318; Glenn M. McNair, "The Elijah Burritt Affair: David Walker's Appeal and Partisan Journalism in Antebellum Milledgeville," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 448-478; William H. Pease and Jane H. Pease, "Walker's Appeal Comes to Charleston: A Note and Documents," *Journal of Negro History* 59, no. 3 (July 1974): 287-292. A useful summary of the abolitionist newspaper press can be found in Ford Risley, *Abolition and the Press: The Moral Struggle Against Slavery* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

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that presented a tourist's look at Britain's abolitionist landscape, infused with a steady drumbeat of antislavery rhetoric.

This study examines "Letters from the Old World," the column Griffiths wrote from 1855 to 1863. It argues that Griffiths adapted and blended several discrete journalistic forms of the period to create unique content that contributed to establishing and maintaining antislavery networks – virtual communities – that spanned the Atlantic.

Although known to some historians who have studied Douglass and his circle, Griffiths has generally slipped from antislavery historiography.[2] In particular, much less has been written of her life and work after she left the United States in 1855, although arguably some of her most important contributions awaited her arrival in Liverpool harbor. This study begins to recover that history.

This research is important because it illuminates the ability and means of a single individual, Griffiths, to influence the creation and maintenance of a transatlantic antislavery network. The examination is important, too, for the new light it sheds on a literary form that some scholars have dismissed as trivial. A more nuanced examination from a cultural history perspective reveals Griffiths' writing contributed to identity and communication among abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic. The cohesion of the

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[2] For historiography and Douglass biographies that feature Griffiths, see Frank E. Fee Jr., "To No One More Indebted: Frederick Douglass and Julia Griffiths, 1849-63," *Journalism History* 37, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 12-26; Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Early Years, 1817-1849* (New York: International Publishers, 1950); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984); William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991); Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglass* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1948; New York: Da Capo Press, 1997). For fiction that includes Griffiths, see Edmund Fuller, *A Star Pointed North* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946); Jewell Parker Rhodes, *Douglass' Women* (New York: Atria Books, 2002). One of the best treatments of Douglass and Griffiths in Rochester is Erwin Palmer's "A Partnership in the Abolition Movement," *University of Rochester Library Bulletin* XXVI, no. 1 and 2 (Autumn-Winter 1970-1971), little circulated in its day but now available online at http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?page=3476. Palmer did not, however, develop Griffiths' larger, if unintended, importance to the nascent women's movements of the mid-to-late nineteenth century.

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community's British members helped counter those countrymen who were urging their political leaders to intervene directly on behalf of the South in the Civil War.[3]

Literature Review

Communication and Community

Emerging in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the premise that communication creates and maintains a sense of community and unity across people with no direct, physical relationships has gained power in media history and among historians and other scholars in general. Virtual or, as Benedict Anderson wrote, "imagined communities,"[4] are now studied in a variety of disciplines and at levels ranging from Anderson's nation building to social networking groups.[5] One of the key questions in such studies is: How do such communities come to be, remain intact, or fracture?

In defining communication as "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed,"[6] media scholar James Carey identified the agency of journalism in community building. Likewise, Anderson acknowledged the newspaper as a powerful force in creating community:

> The significance of this mass ceremony [reading a morning newspaper] – Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers – is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being

[3] For a detailed examination of Britain's relations with the warring states, see Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: An Epic History of Two Nations Divided* (London: Allen Lane, 2010). See also, R.J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

[4] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

[5] See, for instance, Barry Wellman, Janet Salaff, Dimitrina Dimitrova, Laura Garton, Milena Gulia, and Caroline Haythornthwaite, "Computer Networks as Social Networks: Collaborative Work, Telework, and Virtual Community," *Annual Review of Sociology* 22 (1996): 213-238.

[6] James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

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> replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?[7]

Historian David Paul Nord expanded on the power of newspapers to create virtual communities of readers, saying, "Communities are built, maintained, and wrecked in communication."[8] Historian Jeffrey Pasley identified the centrality of the so-called partisan press of the Early Republic as it brought under the umbrella of nascent political parties widely scattered people who lacked traditional ties and, incidentally, experience in organized politics.[9] And as Nord has pointed out, in the antislavery fight, "The printing press was an instrument not solely for propaganda and agitation. Perhaps more important, it was also a builder of community among the already converted. … The abolitionist movement became a kind of religious congregation in the 1830s, with its members scattered across the land, linked together through letters, traveling agents and lecturers, pamphlets and, perhaps especially, newspapers."[10]

Epistolary Conventions

Newspapers in America owed their birth to letters and many of the first newspaper publishers were also postmasters, privy to and extracting news from correspondence – including other newspapers – coming through their offices.[11] Indeed, it was Boston's postmaster who published America's first successful newspaper, the aptly named *Boston*

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[7] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

[8] David Paul Nord, *Communities of Journalism: A History of American Newspapers and Their Readers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 2.

[9] Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

[10] Nord, *Communities*, 97.

[11] See, for instance, Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

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News-Letter in 1704.[12] As newspapers developed into information sites and forums for debate, often the content came as – or was presented as – correspondence from local individuals writing directly to the newspaper for publication.

Notable serialized political essays, in the manner of letters but often over pen names, shaped the discourse and set the agenda for public discussion. Colonial papers eagerly republished John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon's "Cato Letters" on liberty and government that appeared in London newspapers in the 1720s.[13] The Peter Zenger trial in 1735 similarly resulted from publication of a series of excerpts from the "Cato Letters" and essays that were critical of the colonial government.[14] From December 1767 to February 1768, Philadelphia lawyer John Dickenson's "Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer," speaking out for colonial rights, appeared in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle & Universal Advertiser* and were widely republished through the Colonial exchange press.[15] In the earliest days of the Republic, the "Federalist Papers" were similarly serialized in the *New York Independent Journal* by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay under the pseudonym "Publius."[16] Opposition to the *Federalist* position appeared in similar epistolary form as "Letters from the Federal Farmer" by Virginian Richard Henry Lee.[17]

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[12] Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History: 1690-1960*, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

[13] Nord, *Communities*, 70.

[14] Nord, *Communities*, 66.

[15] See, for instance, Sidney Kobre, *Development of American Journalism* (Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown, 1969).

[16] See, for instance, Kobre, *Development*, 106. Available in a variety of print sources, the *Federalist Papers* are also available online at the Library of Congress. Accessed November 21, 2011, at http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_01.html.

[17] Kobre, *Development*, 106.

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Writing and Travel

As the nineteenth century unfolded, the fruits of the Industrial Revolution combined to stimulate travel among Europeans and Americans. Steamships and locomotives greatly added to public mobility as greater wealth and leisure time shared by more and more people facilitated the travel boom.[18] For women, this mobility literally opened new horizons as they "left home to take up occupations then available to them – working as servants, maids, nannies, and teachers – or to accompany husbands who were missionaries or who served in business or governmental capacities."[19] Yet in the first half of the century, the unaccompanied woman was rare and flouted social mores about women's roles and abilities, what historian Susan L. Roberson called "the cult of domesticity."[20] Nevertheless, as literary scholar Cheryl J. Fish has pointed out, "there were always women who stood outside … [traditional roles] and expectations of the status quo, women whose narratives of their journeys added up to something larger than a mere chronicle of another excursion."[21]

Just as men did, many of the women kept diaries and wrote and published accounts of their travels. Among them were women who became prominent figures in the reform movements, such as abolitionists Stowe, Bostonian Maria Weston Chapman, and Briton

[18] See, for instance, Cheryl J. Fish, *Black and White Women's Travel Narratives: Antebellum Explorations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004); Shirley Foster, "American Women Travellers to Europe in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," British Association for American Studies Pamphlet No. 27 (1994). Accessed November 28, 2011, at http://www.baas.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=234%3Ashirley-foster-american-women-travellers-to-europe-in-the-nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-centuries&catid=18&Itemid=11.

[19] Fish, *Black and White*, 1.

[20] Foster, "American Women Travellers"; Susan L. Roberson, *Antebellum American Writers and the Road: American Mobilities* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 124.

[21] Fish, *Black and White*, 1.

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Harriet Martineau.[22] In their narratives, these women had to negotiate the gender constraints of their day, and, despite obstacles to women writers, they often were able to couch their work in gender-approved roles. Fish, for instance, noted that "certain motivations for travel in the nineteenth century were admissible to women – the search for improved health, for instance, or devotion to a self-sacrificing mission – as they reinforced the traveler's identity as a proper lady."[23]

The fascination of the Old World with the New and vice versa was complex and powerful. As historian Shirley Foster put it, "For Americans, the Old World was the goal of longings and anticipations, a place of pre-existent familiarity, known through literature and art, and constructed in advance through the romantic imagination which came prepared to discover what it had already formulated and often idealised [sic]. It was both the site of forgotten origins and a land of magic and mystery, representing something which the States could never replicate."[24]

For Europeans, there was a fascination with the strange new lands of endless forests, towering mountains, broad plains, and ample waterways that captured Alexis de Tocqueville's imagination. For others, like de Tocqueville, the magnet was to study first-hand the United States' experiment with democracy and the novelty of the "equality of conditions" that he saw.[25]

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[22] For instance, Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Co., 1854). Accessed November 28, 2011, at http://www.archive.org/stream/sunnymemoriesoff01stow#page/n11/mode/2up; Maria Weston Chapman, *Haiti* (Atlanta, GA: Lewis H. Beck Center for Electronic Collections & Services, 1996); Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838).

[23] Fish, *Black and White*, 3.

[24] Foster, "American Women Travellers."

[25] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (New York: Perennial Classics, 2000).

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Social reformers, too, found travel important to their causes. American abolitionists in particular traveled in some numbers to Great Britain from the 1840s until the American Civil War in bids for British moral and financial support in the antislavery campaigns.[26] Such travelers brought the stark realities of American slavery to a nation that had outlawed slave trade in 1806 and abolished slavery in 1834. In return, thousands of dollars in British cash and goods to be sold at antislavery bazaars flowed across to America.

Several scholars have pointed out that the travelogues produced by women in the antebellum era contributed to creating and maintaining networks of like-minded women. Leona S. Martin depicted three Latin American women who worked to unite their nations through literature, traveling, and community. Traveling between Latin American countries and the United States, these women maintained reliable relations and communication with each nation and thus built community while also advocating women's rights.[27] Through their travels and countless publications, they were able to stand up for their rights and overcome social barriers. In addition, as Roberson pointed out, women used their travel writing to redefine social aspects of their lives and to repudiate female limitations.[28]

<u>Women in the Public Sphere</u>

In their antislavery work, women also were quietly pushing back against prescribed gender roles, and the body of scholarship on women's entry into the public sphere through abolitionism has grown in recent years. Often, through participation in antislavery bazaars,

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[26] See, for instance, R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

[27] Leona S. Martin, "Nation Building, International Travel, and the Construction of the Nineteenth-Century Pan-Hispanic Women's Network," *Hispania* 87, no. 3 (September 2004): 439-446, at 441.

[28] Roberson, *Antebellum*, 81.

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for instance, these women applied traditional benevolent fundraising to promote political activism and outcomes otherwise forbidden to them at the ballot box.

Historians Ronald and Mary Zboray have shown, for instance, that antebellum New England women actively consumed political content in their newspapers.[29] A number of scholars have examined how in hosting fairs and fundraising for political action such as abolition, women were able to support their causes under the guise of charitable feminine roles without opposition or criticism.[30] As the Zborays found, "domesticity did not preclude all political activity, particularly in the form of women's petitions and membership in abolitionist, religious, and benevolent societies."[31]

Method

For this study, private correspondence and surviving "Letters from the Old World" in copies of *Frederick Douglass' Paper* and *Douglass' Monthly* from 1855 to 1863 were examined on microfilm, in special collections, and in the Accessible Archives and ProQuest databases.

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[29] Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Political News and Female Readership in Antebellum Boston and Its Region," *Journalism History* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 2-14.

[30] Fairs and bazaars were popular – and socially acceptable – sites of women's activism in antebellum America, raising thousands of dollars for various causes, including abolition. See, for instance, Michael Bennett, *Democratic Discourses: The Radical Abolition Movement and Antebellum American Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Lawrence B. Glickman, "'Buy for the Sake of the Slave': Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism," *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (December, 2004): 889-912; Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); Beverly Gordon, "Playing at Being Powerless: New England Ladies Fairs," *Massachusetts Review* 27, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 144-160; Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); Julie Roy Jeffrey, "Permeable Boundaries: Abolitionist Women and Separate Spheres," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 79-93; Sandra Harbert Petrulionis, "'Swelling That Great Tide of Humanity': The Concord, Massachusetts, Female Anti-Slavery Society," *New England Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (September 2001): 385-418; Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. VanHorne, ed., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

[31] Zboray and Zboray, "Political News," 3.

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Background

Little is known of Griffiths' early life, but from her erudition, travel, and political and social connections, it is clear that her birth May 29, 1811, in London[32] was to a well-to-do family.[33] A fragment of a family history written years later by her sister Eliza Griffiths Dick recounted that Julia "was naturally clever and she polished very well. Her musical powers were considerable. Schools and masters, and traveling were used to bring the young lady forward."[34] In one of her "Letters from the Old World," Griffiths wrote of having previously traveled to Paris, Munich, and Nuremberg, and she appeared to have at least a passing familiarity with the classics and a host of European painters.[35] For nearly the last twenty years of her life, she would run a school in St. Neots, Cambridgeshire, England.[36]

Her family opposed slavery, and Griffiths' mother was a friend of leading British abolitionist William Wilberforce.[37] Griffiths had met Douglass during his 1845-47 travels in the United Kingdom, and she was of the circle of women who spearheaded the fundraising to buy his freedom and then enable him to found the *North Star*. In 1849, with Douglass' finances in tatters and control of his newspaper slipping from his grasp, Griffiths sailed to the United States in March and moved in with the Douglass family in

[32] National Archives, London, England. 1871 England Census, South Ward, Gateshead, p. 41. Accessed through Ancestry.co.uk, March 26, 2005.

[33] Julia, the eldest child of Thomas and Charlotte Powis Griffiths, was adopted at age 4 by her childless aunt and uncle, Joseph and Mary Powis Griffiths. Her birth father was a stationer. Her adoptive father had inherited the business of his father, an architect, builder, and owner of a timber yard in London. Genealogy in the personal collection of Jenny Cliff, Wanganui, New Zealand.

[34] Eliza Griffiths Dick, "The Griffiths Family – Written by Mrs. John Dick (nee Griffiths) in the Year 1876," personal collection of Jenny Cliff, Wanganui, New Zealand. Eliza Griffiths had accompanied her sister to Rochester in 1849 and, with her, lived for a time in the Douglass household.

[35] Julia G. Crofts, (nee Griffiths), "Letters from the Old World – No. LXV," *Douglass' Monthly*, June 1859. [Hereinafter, "Crofts, 'Letters.'"]

[36] C.F. Tebbutt, *St. Neots: The History of a Huntingdonshire Town* (London: Phillimore, 1978).

[37] "Frederick Douglass' Paper," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, London, April 1, 1857.

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Rochester, New York. Over the next six years, she helped Douglass edit the newspaper, traveled with him on speaking tours, and helped put his newspaper on reasonably firm financial footing. Griffiths also reorganized the antislavery women of Rochester, becoming founding secretary of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society.[38] Her acquaintances and correspondents included most of the principal antislavery activists on both sides of the Atlantic, including Senator and former New York governor William H. Seward, antislavery philanthropist Lewis Tappan, and New York *Tribune* editor Horace Greely.

When she sailed for England in 1855 to raise funds for Douglass, they both expected the visit would be brief and that she would return to Rochester, although she never did. In her first installment of "Letters from the Old World," Griffiths referred to her "temporary absence from Rochester."[39] Douglass, too, had reported in his newspaper that Griffiths' absence would be temporary,[40] and Griffiths had told Douglass' benefactor Seward that she would be gone only for "four or five months."[41]

<u>A Column Takes Form</u>

Griffiths sailed on June 18, 1855, and by July 2 was at work on the first of at least 87 "Letters from the Old World" that would be published in Douglass' newspapers. By July 13, with her ship under tow in Liverpool harbor, she was rushing to finish, "as the steamer leaves for the United States to-morrow, [sic] I must e'en [sic] close this before I reach dry land, or it will miss the post and be delayed five or eight days."[42]

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[38] Fee, "To No One More Indebted," 17; Hewitt, *Women's Activism*, 167.

[39] Griffiths, "Letters – No. I," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Rochester, New York, August 10, 1855. [Hereinafter, "Griffiths, 'Letters.'"]

[40] Frederick Douglass, "Personal," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, June 15, 1855.

[41] Julia Griffiths to William H. Seward, June 5, 1855. William Henry Seward Papers, Box 7, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Rush Rhees Library, University of Rochester.

[42] Griffiths, "Letters – No. I."

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From the outset, her plural in the title suggests Griffiths knew this would be a series. "Letters" continued to flow from the United Kingdom even after Griffiths' marriage to the Rev. Dr. Henry Only Crofts in 1859, a marriage that made her an instant stepmother to the widower Crofts' three daughters.[43]

Griffiths' "Letters" appeared regularly in the weekly *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and when he began publishing *Douglass' Monthly* in 1859, the columns were added to that publication as well.

The first "Letters" filled two and one-third columns on page three of *Douglass' Paper*. Amid reflections on the vagaries of sailing the Atlantic and on her fellow passengers and some of the ship's officers, Griffiths did not forget her antislavery message. She briefly described her fellow passengers in the first cabin but except for slight mentions of the captain, ship's doctor, first mate, and "an exceedingly kind stewardess," made no mention of others who might have been on board. She and her 11 companions "are composed of many nations and we speak several languages; English, Irish, Scotch, Southerners, Yankees, and Swedes are all here."[44]

Of the Southerners, Griffiths particularly noted a Louisianan who presented himself as a kindly and enlightened slave owner who "expressed himself more in sorrow than in anger about 'the books that have been written to give false impressions on the subject.'" Griffiths' account did not indicate she had argued slavery with the man, but, when "I told him that FREDERICK DOUGLASS was an intimate friend of mine. – After that announcement

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[43] Fee, "To No One More Indebted."
[44] Griffiths, "Letters – No. I."

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we spoke but little. – He felt, doubtless, that though he might gainsay 'Uncle Tom,' as a mere *fiction*, FREDERICK DOUGLASS was a *fact* undeniable."[45]

Griffiths summed up her observations in a breathless, 200-word sentence that concluded that only when Northerners stood up to the South on the issue of abolition, "will they be free from the sin of Slavery, and exempt from participation in those awful denunciations, which a God of Justice has pronounced against *all oppressors*."[46] It was a theme to which she would return to over the years.

Although she began with the salutation "My Dear Friend," it was clear in the first installment of her series that though adopting an epistolary form, Griffiths was not writing to Douglass alone. The column was labeled "For Frederick Douglass' Paper," and in numbering the column, she signaled that this would not be the last attempt to maintain "my connection with my many kind friends, through the columns of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*."[47] Subsequently, she would write that the column was for her "friends (and I write for none others)."[48] Some columns clearly were meant for this larger audience, while others, particularly some of the later letters, sound as if she were oblivious to the other eyes that saw her intense, personal communication to Douglass. In a reference to her stepdaughter, 12-year-old Martha Crofts, she assured Douglass in her column that "Our little 'Birdie' every evening prays for 'Uncle Frederick' – so you are not forgotten in any quarter."[49]

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[45] Ibid. Small-caps and italics in original.
[46] Ibid. Italics in original.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Griffiths, "Letters – No. VII," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 16, 1855.
[49] Julia G. Crofts [nee Griffiths], "Letters – No. LXXII," *Douglass' Monthly*, February 1861.

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"You Will Be Desirous to Know"

Judging by the date her first column was posted to a steamer bound for America, it could be three to four weeks between the time Griffiths mailed her column and its appearance in Douglass' newspapers.[50] Douglass usually was prompt in publishing each installment, but for what he presumed was an eager readership, explanations were in order when a letter arrived "too late for insertion in our present issue. It shall appear in our next number."[51]

Although frequently opening with self-deprecating comments describing her column as "scribbles,"[52] Griffiths wrote with a sense of an assured readership on both sides of the Atlantic and unquestioning belief in Douglass' esteem. "Sure I am that you will be desirous to know how it fares with me on the waters of the wide Atlantic," she wrote from mid-ocean.[53] That self-assurance never wavered. In an uncharacteristic plural salutation in 1860 – "My Dear Friends" – the letter opened, "I doubt not but it will prove interesting to you, to learn something concerning our recent Anti-Slavery Bazaar."[54]

For his part, Douglass frequently promoted the columns, as in 1855: "These 'Letters from the Old World' are extensively read and highly appreciated by the readers of

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[50] A column dated August 23, 1855, and sent on a steamer sailing September 1 was published September 21. Griffiths, "Letters – No. IV," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 21, 1855.

[51] Frederick Douglass, "Letters from the Old World," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Rochester, N.Y., August 24, 1855.

[52] Griffiths, "Letters – No. LXIII," *Douglass' Monthly*, March 1859.

[53] Griffiths, "Letters – No. I."

[54] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXX," *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1860. Punctuation and capitalization in the original. Crofts broadened the salutation because in this letter she was not writing to Douglass in Rochester. He was in England, staying with the Crofts. See also R.J.M. Blackett, "Cracks in the Antislavery Wall: Frederick Douglass' Second Visit to England (1859-1860) and the Coming of the Civil War," in ed. Alan J. Rice and Martin Crawford, *Liberating Sojourn: Frederick Douglass & Transatlantic Reform* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

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our paper generally. Miss Griffiths cannot write too often."[55] In 1859, he wrote, "There is no pen more devoted to the slave than hers. … This cause she is ever true, whether in England or in America, whether applauded or persecuted."[56]

Griffiths' style was generally brisk, upbeat, and straightforward, capturing the mundane as well as important events and personages in her travels. She would write serious, almost preachy, ruminations on slavery, but at other times was light and coquettish. "Oh! What cozy, chatty, pleasant tea we had on that first afternoon," she wrote of her reception by Liverpool friends.[57] Her early letters featured literary devices – snippets of poetry, French and Latin phrases, interior monologue – that conveyed a sense that Griffiths was enjoying the experience of writing. In the 1860s, however, her tone often was more straightforward and serious, sometimes somber. Where earlier sightseeing produced light flights of fancy, an 1861 trip to Nottingham mentioned the Robin Hood myths but focused more directly on Lord Byron's tomb.[58]

Each column could bring a long list of British notables she had met along with traveling Americans. In fact, Griffiths' "Letters" often were packed with names of influential antislavery figures with whom she socialized. Sometimes she wrote in awe. The Rev. Samuel Ringgold Ward, like Douglass an escaped slave who became an abolitionist speaker and editor, was "an intellectual giant," who "has done more to refute the charge of the negroes' inferiority than any other man, who has visited England, from the United

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[55] Frederick Douglass, "We Lay Before Our Readers," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 12, 1855.

[56] Frederick Douglass, "Letters from the Old World," *Douglass' Monthly*, February 1859.

[57] Griffiths, "Letters – No. II," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 17, 1855.

[58] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXIII," *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1861.

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States during the last eight years."[59] (Douglass, of course, had *left* the United Kingdom eight years earlier.) Joseph Sturge, she declared, was "good and *truly* great. … I cannot believe that any person could be long unhappy who lived within reach of his beaming smile and kindly voice."[60] Her pantheon included Sturge, Ward, the earls of Shaftsbury and Carlisle, and members of Parliament Richard Cobden and John Bright. Her American friend Gerrit Smith, the wealthy philanthropist who was Douglass' principal benefactor, was the model by which these others were measured. Lord Shaftsbury, in fact, she dubbed "*the English Gerrit Smith*."[61]

Errors in Print

Griffiths was not always pleased with what she saw upon opening Douglass' newspapers. In a scolding aside, she wrote in one early column:

> By the way, let me say here that your paper of the 10th August met me in Leicester on Monday morning – and that on glancing over my letter, from the "*Ship Yorkshire*," I felt somewhat irritated to see the many contradictory and foolish things your printers have made me say. *Where* were the proof readers, I wonder? The most trying part, in regard to these mistakes is, that as *five* weeks must, necessarily, elapse before the corrections appear in your columns, it is utterly useless to make any; so I can but beseech my good friends in the office to have a little more consideration, and I, on my part, will endeavor to write more legibly in time to come.[62]

A few weeks later, Griffiths wrote, "I do hope that your printers will not make me say, in future, anything so *improbable* as that Rev. S.R. Ward was to preach on the coming *Saturday*: for Dr. Raffles! For pity's sake, my friends, be more merciful to me."[63] Intermittently, the problem persisted. In 1862, Griffiths wrote: "I must trust you my friends

[59] Griffiths, "Letters – No. III," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, August 31, 1855.
[60] Griffiths, "Letters – No. IV."
[61] Griffiths, "Letters – No. III." Italics in original.
[62] Griffiths, "Letters – No. IV." Italics in original. Anyone who has seen Griffiths' handwriting, however, might have sympathy for the printers.
[63] Griffiths, "Letters – No. V," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 12, 1855. Italics in original.

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in general to pardon the defects, and I must pray my friends the printers to spare me from murdering the Queen's English as much as I am made to do in the letter that comes to me in print this day, I mean the bazaar letter. Possibly I wrote more illegibly than usual."[64]

Exhaustion and Illness

After arriving in the United Kingdom, Griffiths wrote initially about a whirlwind of visits to old friends and supporters. Soon, however, there were growing mentions of antislavery meetings attended and acknowledgement of groups and individuals who had made goods to be sold at the annual bazaars of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, of which Griffiths continued as secretary. "I am travelling, visiting, and talking, perpetually, except when sleeping," she wrote.[65] And as it had during her time in the United States, the pace caught up with her. On Oct. 2, 1855, after ecstatically heralding her arrival in Glasgow, Griffiths reported, "I have a terrible attack of influenza – such an [sic] one as I never once knew during my six years' sojourn in the States."[66] Despite the flu, Griffiths continued her demanding schedule, "visiting nearly all day and every day, and making an attempt to be agreeable, which is altogether impossible when accompanied by such a string of evils as cold, cough, sore throat, hoarseness, face ache, &c, &c."[67]

By Nov. 15, 1855, Griffiths' condition had worsened. "I have been, more or less, an invalid since I wrote last to Rochester, and compelled to remain for several days, a close prisoner, and victim to severe influenza."[68] Calling the malady "an old and ugly foe," Griffiths reported that the final straw was "two hours' earnest conversation with the Ladies

[64] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXXII," *Douglass' Monthly*, August 1862.
[65] Griffiths, "Letters – No. VI," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 26, 1855.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Griffiths, "Letters – No. VII."

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Anti-Slavery Committee, on the 4th inst., in a very damp atmosphere," followed by a party in her honor the next night. In the middle of declaiming on the Fugitive Slave Bill and Daniel Webster, Griffiths lost her voice, and "My confused remembrance of that evening, is of hot blankets, and bottles, and mustard poultices, and other etceteras [sic] connected with a sick room – of a terrible difficulty in breathing – of kind and anxious faces around me – and of soft and gentle hands, smoothing my pillow."[69] It would not be the last time Griffiths' exertions put her in a sick bed. She reported such illnesses throughout the life of her column.[70] On the other hand, a six-month hiatus in her writing was attributed simply to "diverse unforeseen circumstances."[71]

Feeding Anglophilia

Literary historian Elisa Tamarkin has dismissed Griffiths' "Letters" as travel writings, rather than antislavery texts, arguing, albeit sketchily, that they contributed to black – and white – anglophilia among the American abolitionists. Indeed there *was* considerable space devoted to depictions of geologic formations, monuments, gardens, parks, and historic sites Griffiths visited.[72] Nearly half a column of type was spent describing her visit to Glasgow cathedral,[73] and a trip to Leicester unleashed a history ranging from Roman legionnaires to the death of Cardinal Wolsey.[74] Still from Leicester, her next letter made no mention of abolition in more than two columns that described visits

[69] Ibid. Italics and punctuation in original.

[70] See, for instance, Griffiths, "Letters – No. LV," *Douglass'* Paper, June 18, 1858; Griffiths, "Letters – No. LXII," *Douglass' Monthly*, February 1859; Griffiths, "Letters – No. LXIV," *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1859; Crofts, "Letters – No. LXX," *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1860.

[71] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXI," *Douglass' Monthly*, November 1860.

[72] Elisa Tamarkin, "Black Anglophilia; or, The Sociability of Antislavery," *American Literary History* 14 (Autumn 2002): 444-478.

[73] Griffiths, "Letters – No. VII."

[74] Griffiths, "Letters – No. IV."

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to ancient ruins.[75] Likewise, an 1858 report on Queen Victoria's visit to Birmingham and Coventry never once mentioned slavery.[76] Her estimation of her native land was high and frequently expressed. "It is in country life in England that you find the perfection of *comfort* and hospitality; and I cannot think that any American tourist who has been domiciled in one of these happy, English homes, can ever recross the Atlantic with the impression that the English are a cold-hearted, inhospitable people."[77]

Not infrequently, Griffiths romanticized British history, often through the lens of Sir Walter Scott or Robert Burns. A visit to Ashby castle sent her thoughts "flying much further back in the annals of history – and in imagination I heard the sound of the trumpet, and the clang of arms, that summoned the haughty '*Templar'* and the '*Disinherited Knight*' to the fell conflict, while banners floated and pennons waved, and gallant knights and gentle ladies looked on, in speechless anxiety, to see the dread encounter."[78]

Public Speaking

Although Douglass regularly spoke out for women's rights and in Rochester Griffiths had associated with some of the leaders of the American suffragist movement, she maintained on several occasions an aversion to the limelight. "I am not a women's rights – or a public speaker," she wrote Douglass' benefactor Gerrit Smith.[79] Reporting on her visit to the Boys' House of Refuge in Glasgow, she confided to readers that on being asked to speak to the boys on slavery, she agreed without knowing there would be 300 in

[75] Griffiths, "Letters – No. V," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 12, 1855.
[76] Griffiths, "Letters – No. LVI."
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Julia Griffiths to Gerrit Smith, October 26, 185[?], Gerrit Smith Papers, Bird Library, Syracuse University.

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the audience. She was enlightened, she wrote, by "a dear friend (who knows me to be quite *English* in my views of women speaking in public.)"[80]

In her travels, Griffiths often visited social welfare agencies such as orphanages; schools for the poor, the blind, the deaf, and orphans; and homes for the poor and aged. Frequently, she was asked to speak on slavery. At the Girls' House of Refuge in Glasgow, where "I found that '*Uncle Tom*' was familiar to them as a '*household word*,'" an hour's talk by Griffiths prompted the girls to donate 10 shillings, 6 pence "for the cause of the slave, saved by these poor little girls, out of their '*gingerbread money*.'"[81]

Reports of these visits were as close as she came to acknowledging poverty and squalor in the United Kingdom that produced the need for such institutions. Aside from what appears to have been a genuine interest in various reform efforts of her day, Griffiths invariably found concern for slaves among the inhabitants of these houses of refuge. Humble offerings served as examples of selflessness and social concern to drive home in her letters the imperative for those more fortunate to do their share.[82]

As an Englishwoman who still held the title of secretary of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, Griffiths at times was consulted on other abolitionist affairs. A letter to *Douglass' Monthly* mentions that she was asked about a Philadelphia clergyman who in Great Britain was offering defenses for slaveholders.[83] Scholar Susanna Ashton found that in 1858 at Huddersfield in the north of England, Griffiths was brought in to interview John Andrew Jackson, to determine whether he was a fugitive as he claimed. The meeting was

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[80] Griffiths, "Letters – No. VII," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 16, 1855.
[81] Griffiths, "Letters – No. IX."
[82] See, for instance, Griffiths, "Letters – No. LI," *Douglass' Paper*, February 12, 1858.
[83] Ebenezer Burr, "A Nondescript Divine," *Douglass' Monthly*, May 1859.

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mentioned by the Rev. Richard Skinner, minister of the Huddersfield - Ramsden Street Methodist Church, who brought Jackson to Griffiths and wrote a brief testimonial in March 1858. That testimonial was included by Jackson himself in an 1862 memoir. Skinner wrote, "J. A. Jackson having called on me and shown his testimonials, I took him to a lady, Miss Griffith [sic], who was visiting this town on anti-slavery business, and who has resided several years in America. She examined him very closely, and was fully satisfied that his representations of himself are correct. I believe implicit reliance may be placed in his truthfulness and honesty.”[84]

Anti-Slavery Rhetoric

Griffiths used her columns to advance her antislavery message by direct exhortation and indirectly by creating a sense of unanimity and community. “I am truly rejoiced at the deep and earnest Anti-Slavery feeling in Glasgow,” she wrote. “[T]he active friends of the cause are many; and they are glad of all the information that can be given them by those who have been nearer to the scene of action than they.”[85]

She added, “*Hope on*, and *work on*, my dear colored friends; rest assured that the heartfelt sympathy of some of the best people in Great Britain is yours. Only show that you are willing to help yourselves, and sure I am that, when the right times comes, [sic] they will show that they are ready to help you in your arduous undertaking.”[86]

Despite Griffiths’ ardent abolitionism, however, her columns sometimes pulled their polemical punches. “In acceding to the wish, expressed by yourself and many other of

[84] Richard Skinner, testimonial dated March 25, 1858, in John Andrew Jackson, *The Experience of a Slave in South Carolina* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

[85] Griffiths, “Letters – No. VII,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, November 16, 1855.

[86] Ibid. Italics in original.

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my American friends," she wrote, "that I would give, from time to time, a sketch of my journeying, I desired to avoid all controversial matters."[87] With that preface, she answered a question she said had been put to her repeatedly in Scotland and England: "Whether I believe it right to work with those who are not *Christians* for the abolition of Slavery?" As long as the non-Christians kept "their peculiar religious, or anti-religious opinions" out of the effort, Griffiths affirmed, "I hold myself ready, at all times, to co-operate with Jews, Hindoos [sic], infidels, or heretics, for the abolition of Slavery."[88]

And though she seems not to have risen on every occasion to defend abolition against Southerners and their sympathizers, she did report a few such contacts:

> One day, while I was staying at Duffield, a '*friend*' from Philadelphia dined with us. Of course, he professed to be Anti-Slavery; but sorely was I grieved to hear him advocate Millard Fillmore, as a fitting man for the next President. I bit my lips, and listened to the eulogy, until I could not hold my peace any longer; and then out came a sermon – text 'The Fugitive Slave Bill.' If I were rude, I really could not help it; it was most painful to me to see a kind-hearted and intelligent man, wearing a chess [sic] which is a badge of philanthropy the world over, standing forth the champion of him who, at one time, held the destinies of unoffending thousands in his hand, and who signed an edict, which surrendered them to the fell grasp of the destroyer.[89]

One subject that reliably triggered a strong reaction was the American Colonization Society's efforts to relocate free blacks to its colony in Liberia. Like Douglass, Griffiths was inalterably opposed to the idea.[90] "I have conversed with many hundreds of fugitive slaves, and I do not remember having heard one man among them express a wish to go to Africa," she wrote.[91]

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[87] Griffiths, "Letters – No. VI."
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] See, for instance, Griffiths, "Letters – No. LXII," *Douglass' Paper*, December 31, 1858; *Douglass' Monthly*, February 1859.
[91] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXII," *Douglass' Monthly*, February 1861.

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An interested observer of American politics, Griffiths expressed dismay over the 1860 presidential election. "I never hoped much of Abraham Lincoln's anti-slavery," she wrote in December, "but matters are worse than I anticipated, and after all, the Republican triumph is, to the *true* friends of freedom, a dreamy, gloomy one. Oh! that the noble Seward who is as much in advance of his party as Lincoln lags behind it, had been *the man*; but such a member of *poor, timid* people in the (nominal) ranks of freedom, this could not have been hoped for."[92] She would continue to rail against Lincoln's "infatuation and timidity"[93] until with the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 he became "henceforth, fully entitled to the respect, the confidence, and the sympathy of all honest men."[94]

Garrisonian Target

Although agreed on the goal of ending American slavery, abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic often differed bitterly on the means to achieve their end and tensions ran high among American abolitionists seeking British financial, political, and moral support.[95] Though numerous iterations existed, the principal poles in the American abolitionists' wars were Douglass and his political abolitionists on the one hand and *Liberator* editor William Lloyd Garrison's supporters on the other. Garrison and his followers demonized Griffiths, blaming her for Douglass' disaffection from the Garrisonian fold. The battles had been particularly hot and personal earlier in the decade, but even into the late 1850s Garrisonians continued to fume. Garrisonian Maria Weston Chapman wrote to Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1858 accusing Douglass of ingratitude and

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[92] Ibid. Crofts (nee Griffiths) had known Seward in America and continued to correspond with him into the 1860s.

[93] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXXII," *Douglass' Monthly*, August 1862.

[94] Crofts, "Letters – No. 86 [sic]," *Douglass' Monthly*, March 1863.

[95] Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*.

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using his connections "to raise money to tell falsehood and raise more money to tell more falsehoods; – all under the false pretence of a cause he has not the slightest interest in but as it serves his selfish purposes."[96] Warming to the subject, Chapman asserted that Douglass "began to think of getting himself a living out of the cause, before he saw Miss Griffiths. But she quite confirmed his evil tendency, made his interests, in the selfish sense her own, – retails his falsehoods in England to the very people to whom we recommended him."[97]

Garrison spared no invective when Griffiths came to mind. In a letter to the Rev. Samuel J. May, he thundered:

> Through the machinations of that double-and-twisted worker of inequity, Julia Griffiths, the hue-and-cry of "infidelity" is raised afresh in England and Scotland, by various religious cliques, against the American Anti-Slavery Society, in order to prevent any further contributions being made to the National Bazaar. Douglass is impudently held up as the Christian champion who is nobly battling our "infidel" abolitionism, and every effort is made to extend the circulation of his paper on this account. He connives at all this villainy, being utterly unscrupulous in carrying out his own designs.[98]

Another Garrisonian stalwart, Parker Pillsbury, had been in England preparing to return home to Boston when news of Griffiths' arrival in England reached him. Cancelling his plans, Pillsbury, according to biographer Stacey Robertson, became "obsessed with Julia Griffiths. He constantly tracked her activities, wrote about her to Boston, and spoke about her during his private gatherings."[99] Basically, Pillsbury organized a smear campaign

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[96] Maria Weston Chapman to Harriett Beecher Stowe, February 5, 1858. Beecher-Stowe Family Papers, 1798-1956 (A-102; M-45), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

[97] Ibid.

[98] William Lloyd Garrison to Samuel J. May, Boston, March 21, 1856, in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Volume IV: From Disunionism to the Brink of War, 1850-1860* ed. Louis Ruchames (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1975), 389.

[99] Stacey Robertson, *Parker Pillsbury: Radical Abolitionist, Male Feminist* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 109.

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of innuendo and lies against Griffiths, one that was picked up by leading British Garrisonians such as Richard Webb of Dublin, editor of the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*.[100] Coming to Griffiths' defense, the British *Anti-Slavery Reporter* called the attacks jealousy and "as ungenerous as they are calumniatory."[101]

Despite these attacks, her surviving columns leave little evidence of how the broadsides affected Griffiths. A hint that they did reach her, though, is found in her account of an evening in the home of Joseph Sturge, a noted British antislavery leader. "[L]et me say here, that the welcome given me by the host (a man I *so much* honor, venerate and love) would have amply repaid me (if the letters of valued American friends had not previously done so) for the harshness and injustice of those who, perchance, sinned against me but '*in ignorance*.'"[102]

At other times, Griffiths sought to dispel doubt sown by her enemies. "*Rumor* (ever on the wing) has flown to me across the waters of the wide Atlantic, with the news that I am intending to abandon the cause of the slave! And anon this said *Rumor* wings his flight southward, from dear old Caledonia, fraught with regretful murmurs at the possibility of my (imaginary!) desertion! *Fear not this*, my friends! *Hope it not*, mine enemies."[103]

Sowing Antislavery Seeds

"Letters" documented an important strategy of Griffiths' campaign. The reason for her constant travel throughout the United Kingdom was to plant and nurture women's antislavery societies. Acting as the secretary of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery

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[100] Blackett, *Antislavery Wall*, 115-116.
[101] "Frederick Douglass' Paper," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, London, April 1, 1857.
[102] Griffiths, "Letters – No. IV." Italics in original.
[103] Griffiths, "Letters – No. LXIV," *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1859. Punctuation and italics in original.

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Society, which she had helped found, Griffiths brought to town after town a template for organizing and a draft constitution. For instance, from mid-March to the first week in April 1857, Griffiths made multiple visits to Rotherham, Barnsley, and Wakefield, communities south of Leeds, to speak on slavery and promote associations that first would support Douglass and his journalism and, second, would join with the Rochester women to provide funds for slaves escaping through that city on the underground railroad.[104]

In late October 1855, Griffiths "flitted across the channel, from Glasgow, to pay a brief visit to some of our kind, co-operating Irish friends here [Dublin], and to be present at the Exhibition (held last Friday at the *Friends' Institute*) of the beautiful contributions for the Rochester Anti-Slavery Bazaar." Included in the exhibition were similar contributions from "our good friends at Cork … and, really, the array of useful, tasteful and ornamental articles was wonderful and gives most cheering evidence of the *practical* nature of the anti-slavery profession made by this branch of the Irish friends of the cause."[105]

Where women's associations already existed, Griffiths' presentations succeeded in enlisting support and focusing their energies on Douglass and Rochester. In 1857, after two February visits from Griffiths, the Sheffield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association, founded in 1825, voted to reorganize around the Griffiths model of support for Douglass and aid in cash donations or bazaar goods for the Rochester women.[106]

In her never-ending search for money for Douglass, Griffiths had adapted fundraising carried out by women of the day for other reform movements and church

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[104] See, for instance "Wakefield Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society," "The Barnsley Ladies' Anti-Slavery Association," and "The Rotherham Ladies Anti-Slavery Association," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, London, May 1, 1857.

[105] Griffiths, "Letters – No. VIII," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, November 23, 1855.

[106] "British Abolitionist Movements: The Sheffield Anti-Slavery Association," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, London, April 1, 1857.

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support. Her antislavery women could send craft items and handiwork to Rochester to be sold at the annual antislavery bazaar. Or, they could hold a bazaar at home and send the proceeds to the Rochester society. A variant, such as occurred in 1860, had multiple antislavery societies sending goods to be sold at the Halifax Ladies Anti-Slavery Society bazaar. Griffiths' account identified goods from more than twenty societies in the British Isles, Paris, and even the United States, yielding more than £300.[107] In any case, Griffiths had seen to it that in Rochester, whatever the source of the money, a considerable amount of what was raised went to Douglass.

Besides the women's associations, Griffiths also promoted and handled subscriptions to Douglass' newspapers and collected cash gifts for Douglass. "To all the Societies [sic] and friends who have contributed, through me, during the past year," she wrote, "I feel (on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves) most grateful; and to all I beg to say that I shall have as much pleasure in forwarding their respective donations to the States, in time to come, as in time past, and also in attending to the numerous communications with which they favor me."[108]

The funds were critical in Rochester. "Every thing [sic] is at a dead stand here," Douglass told Griffiths, "and, but for the money sent over through your kind agency, I do not know how we should be able even to send off to Canada the scores who are escaping during the present fall."[109]

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[107] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXX." In her account, Griffiths acknowledged that having Douglass present helped the event's success. Douglas was in the United Kingdom in the wake of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859.

[108] Griffiths, "Letters – No. LXIII."

[109] Frederick Douglass to Julia Griffiths, quoted in "British Abolitionist Movements," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, April 1, 1858.

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The field of overseas supplicants was crowded. "The subject of slavery is certainly being brought considerably before our people at this time," Griffiths wrote in 1860, "and subscriptions towards some branch of the cause are being levied in all directions."[110] She continued:

> In one town we have Mr. Mitchell begging for a chapel and school in Toronto. In another, Mr. Troy, collecting for a similar object in Canada West. *Here*, there is Rev. W. King, asking contributions for Buxton Settlement; and *there* is Mr. Day, raising funds towards starting a newspaper. Then we have a host of colored friends going up and down the country, east, west, north and south, collecting money to buy their various relatives out of slavery. I cannot but wish that this latter tribe was thinned, for my mind greatly misgives me as to the genuine nature of all the cases.[111]

A year later, she advised Douglass to dissuade his friend J.W. Loguen of Syracuse from traveling to England at that time. "There is a countless number of people (whose names I do not know) going up and down the country and collecting money for the cause; and truth to say, the friends are rather wearied with the continual importunities they receive."[112]

Personal Matters

Although never loathe to describe at length some tourist attraction or other, or to share her opinions on antislavery matters, Griffiths could at times be puzzlingly reserved about her personal life on the road. Often, she seems to have traveled alone, though usually finding groups of friends at her destinations, so the discerning reader may have been startled as her sixty-fifth letter began to unfold under a Paris dateline. In it, she wrote ecstatically and almost exclusively about the city's "indescribable and irresistible

[110] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXI."
[111] Ibid. Italics in original.
[112] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXIV," *Douglass' Monthly*, June 1861. Loguen, a Syracuse agent on the Underground Railroad, also had received goods and cash through Griffiths and frequently wrote Douglass and the Rochester women's society of his appreciation for her efforts.

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fascination."[113] Twice in the column, she used first-person plural in describing her trip, indicating, perhaps, a traveling companion. Only near the very bottom of the long letter, came a hint: "Dr. C. preached twice on Sunday at one of the English chapels. If he were making a lengthy stay here, I am induced to believe that some of our zealous Protestant friends would keep him fully employed in preaching, and would find me some pleasant and profitable occupation also."[114] Griffiths, 47, had married the Rev. Dr. Henry Only Crofts, 45, of the New Connexion Methodist Church on March 18, 1859, at Haverstock Chapel, London.[115] The column was signed "Julia G. Crofts." They were honeymooning.

It is clear that Douglass had known of the pending marriage, though no personal correspondence has been found to confirm that. He did, however, publish a wedding notice in his April edition of *Douglass' Monthly*, so readers were not caught unawares.[116] Nevertheless, Henry Crofts received no introduction through his bride's column. From Douglass, however, readers had learned that Crofts "is an excellent anti-slavery man, and … Miss Griffiths, as Mrs. Crofts, will not be less devoted to the anti-slavery cause, nor less efficient in its service in consequence of her change in circumstances."[117] During his 1859-60 trip to Great Britain, Douglass stayed with the Crofts and used their home as a base for his speaking engagements, several times appearing on the stage with the Henry Crofts.[118]

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[113] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXV," *Douglass' Monthly*, June 1859.
[114] Ibid.
[115] General Register Office, vol. 1b, p. 184.
[116] "Marriage of Miss Julia Griffiths," *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1859.
[117] Ibid.
[118] "Leeds Young-Men's Anti-Slavery Society," *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, London, January 2, 1860.

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Discussion

In her "Letters from the Old World," Griffiths embodied the communicative experience as letter writer, traveling agent, and lecturer in excursions throughout the United Kingdom. By blending the stuff of travelogues with a message of social consciousness, Griffiths' "Letters," at least 87 appearing over more than eight years, contributed to the maintenance of important transatlantic networks. In the process, and because her networks were employed principally in support of Douglass and his newspapers, Griffiths' efforts helped him to become one of the giants of nineteenth century journalism.

Adopting the structure of travel narratives, Griffiths fed the fascination people on each side of the Atlantic had for one another. At the same time, she knit both sides' efforts into the overall common goal. Her letters helped create and maintain a virtual community that kept abolition high on its agenda. Besides the sightseeing reports, Griffiths regularly apprised readers of her considerable antislavery efforts. In 1859, she reported that:

> At the risk of being deemed, by a *few*, egotistical, I shall gratify the *many*, by here stating that since my return to England, I have assisted to form twenty new anti-slavery societies among my British sisters, to re-organize many old societies, that were nearly gone into disquietude, and to meet a large number of societies that for years have been faithfully laboring for the negro's welfare. I have traveled many hundreds of miles, in weather of all kinds – been present at more than one hundred and fifty anti-slavery committee meetings at diverse times and places – besides having had the gratification of forming one at *innumerable* anti-slavery gatherings in the social circle, and of their narrating to my kind friends something of what I saw, heard and *felt* about American slavery while in the United States.[119]

As in Rochester, where in her dual roles as secretary of the women's antislavery society and an editor of Douglass' publications she could create content from the former

[119] Griffiths, "Letters – No. LXIV." Italics in original.

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and guarantee its publication in the latter, Griffiths' arrangement with "Letters" involved a communication loop that doubled back on itself. Her column was written from the United Kingdom, relating the antislavery activities of various Britons, for publication in Douglass' papers in Rochester. Upon publication, those letters circulated among Douglass' subscribers in the United States, but as Douglass' papers were sent across the Atlantic, British readers would see them, too. Names of ordinary people who never would meet peppered Griffiths' columns regularly. Likewise, Douglass' papers regularly published lists of British benefactors to his work and to the antislavery women in Rochester.

This arrangement meant Griffiths was writing of and to an audience in the United Kingdom as well as readers on the western side of the Atlantic. Reports of their doings could bolster the activities of her countrywomen, provide examples for others, and in her constant namedropping, instill a sense of critical mass, cohesion, solidarity, and empowerment for members of her network. The accounts heartened American abolitionists and gave them encouragement and hope of British support.[120]

Given many Americans' high regard for all things British, it was important for Griffiths to continue affirming British interest and support. Such affirmations would be part of the glue that helped hold the political abolitionists together against assaults from the Garrisonians. At the same time, as Douglass argued, it was vital to the abolitionist cause overall to keep slavery before the British public. "British influence must go one way or the other for slavery or against it. The cause of the slave cannot afford to lose that influence; and in order to retain it, the subject of slavery must be kept before the British people," he

[120] See, for instance, Nubia, "For Frederick Douglass' Paper," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 26, 1855; William Whipper, "Letter from Wm. Whipper to Miss Griffiths," *Douglass' Monthly*, March 1859. "Nubia" was the pen name of a regular San Francisco contributor to Douglass' publications in the 1850s.

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asserted.[121] "With … the many excellent anti-slavery organizations organized by our ever faithful friend and coadjutor, Mrs. Dr. Crofts, we may hope that the anti-slavery sentiment of Great Britain will be much strengthened. To the associations mentioned, very much of English anti-slavery life may now be ascribed. They kindled anew the expiring flame of anti-slavery, and kept the cause alive where it might otherwise have died out."[122] Douglass concluded, "We earnestly hope that these societies will continue their exertions. The good that they do may seem small to them; but the poor bondman flying for liberty, whom they assist, and the truth they enable us to bring before the American people, make them important and indispensable auxiliaries."[123]

Douglass did not mention it, but his concern for bringing his truths before the British may have been heightened by the influence Southern agents were having on many British newspapers. In particular, historian Amanda Foreman details the work of Henry Hotze, a former Alabama journalist working in England for the Confederate government who succeeded in planting numerous pro-Southern editorials and "news" reports in leading British newspapers and even started a weekly of his own to lobby influential government officials.[124] Indeed, the *Times* of London, "the commanding Government newspaper" drew a more than three-column denunciation of its support for slavery and concern over loss of American cotton by one American abolitionist.[125]

Tested by the "Cotton Famine"

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[121] Frederick Douglass, "The Prospects of Our Monthly," *Douglass' Monthly*, September 1860.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Foreman, *World on Fire*, 273. See also, Richard B. Harwell, "The Creed of a Propagandist: Letters from a Confederate Editor," *Journalism Quarterly* 28, no 2 (Spring 1951): 213-218.
[125] George B. Cheever, "A Plea for Slavery in the London Times," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, July 16, 1858. Reprint from the *New York Independent*.

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Although her reports were generally upbeat, Griffiths' world was not always seen through rose-colored glasses. Several times she expressed sadness at the deaths of antislavery friends and the ravages of time on others. "A few years sometimes produce great changes in a circle of friends, and death and sickness have made great inroads here," she wrote from Edinburgh in 1861.[126] Nevertheless, aside from her avowed antagonist, slavery; regular bouts with illness; and occasional elegies for departed antislavery activists, there were few imperfections in the world Griffiths described. Largely ignoring squalor and poverty, Griffiths acknowledged them only in descriptions of efforts to alleviate the appalling conditions, such as her visits to orphanages and houses of refuge.

An exception would test the resiliency of the antislavery community that Griffiths and others created and maintained. Textiles were among the principal industries in the north of England, and American cotton was the principal raw material. As historian Amanda Foreman observed, "The textile industry was one of the most important in Britain, and the cotton trade translated into a business worth $600 million a year, providing employment and financial security in England for more than 5 million men and women."[127] That "80 percent of Britain's cotton supply came from America"[128] was a dependency that rankled some in the United Kingdom, who saw Americans able to "humble us to terms by withholding their cotton."[129] When President Abraham Lincoln on April 19, 1861, ordered Federal blockades of Southern ports and wartime exigencies forced Southerners to curtail planting, the cotton trade was strangled. British textile mills either

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[126] Crofts, "Letters – No. LXXVI," *Douglass' Monthly*, October 1861.
[127] Foreman, *World on Fire*, 9.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Editorial, *Times*, London, April 19, 1862.

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closed or cut their hours drastically. Vast numbers of mill workers were thrown out of work in "a fearful mass of destitution."[130] Government and private relief agencies, including "parochial authorities, [British Poor Law] unions and benevolent societies"[131] struggled to feed and clothe the poor.[132]

By late summer 1862, the Lord Mayor of London had asked "for parcels of old clothing on behalf of the distressed populations of the manufacturing districts."[133] By June 1863, London's *Sunday Times* reported, "The number of persons in the twenty-seven unions of the cotton districts receiving parochial relief on the 13th inst. was 165,396, or an increase of 118,118 on the same week in 1861."[134] A contemporary source recalled that "There were, in January 1861, eleven thousand persons in the receipt of relief in the seven-and-twenty unions which form the cotton districts of the North of England, and for the same month in 1863 there were four hundred and fifty thousand paupers on the roll."[135] The *New-York Times* reported in 1862, "Each week's destitution makes more rapid strides among those various classes of tradesmen who, though not counted in the number of millhands, live entirely on their wages, and to whom the withdrawal of £136,000 from weekly circulation means little less than total ruin. Tailors, shoemakers, bakers, milliners, beerhouse-keepers, and all such persons whose customers mainly belong to the working

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[130] Ibid.

[131] "Manufacturing Districts of England," *New York Times*, March 6, 1862.

[132] See, for instance, George R. Boyer, "Poor Relief, Informal Assistance, and Short Time During the Lancashire Cotton Famine," *Explorations in Economic History* 34 (1997): 56-76; Boyer, "The Evolution of Unemployment Relief in Great Britain," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34, no. 3 (Winter, 2004): 393-433.

[133] "The Lord Mayor Asks," *Sunday Times*, London, September 28, 1862.

[134] "The Cotton Famine," *Sunday Times*, London, June 28, 1863.

[135] A.T. Stewart, *The Cotton Famine of 1862-'63* (Belfast: William Mullan & Son, 1881).

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classes, are now making their appearance in large numbers on the books both of the Guardians and the Relief Committees."[136]

When the public relief efforts buckled, riots broke out, only to be put down by police and the army in some areas.[137] By spring 1862, officials in the north of England were appealing to governments throughout the country for help in meeting the needs of the destitute.[138] By summer, Parliament intervened.[139]

As historian Amanda Foreman details, although "an ingrained hatred of slavery" had "united all the classes in England,"[140] Southerners fought fiercely, often through the British press, for British backing and recognition and used the cotton famine as important leverage with the British government.[141] Although never becoming the principal focus of Griffiths' travel chronicles, from time to time her columns did mention the crisis. In an extensive report on a visit to the world's fair held May 1 to November 1, 1862, in London, she commented that one of "the only drawbacks to the national gladness" over the exposition was "the extreme distress that continues to prevail in our manufacturing districts, which will prevent many thousands of our operatives from coming to London, as they did in 1851, to see the world's show."[142]

In a "Letter" written in late September 1862 but not published until the following January, Griffiths addressed the cotton famine in greater detail, saying, "The Lancashire

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[136] "The Distress in Lancashire," *New York Times*, November 26, 1862.

[137] "England's Domestic Dilemma," *New York Times*, April 26, 1863. See also, for instance, Edwin Waugh, *Home-life of the Lancashire Factory Folk during the Cotton Famine* (Manchester, UK: John Heywood Ltd., 1857). Accessed online at http://www.spinningtheweb.org.uk/web/objects/common/webmedia.php?irn=2845 on May 25, 2012.

[138] Boyer, "Evolution of Unemployment Relief," 404.

[139] Ibid., 407.

[140] Foreman, *World on Fire*, 292.

[141] Ibid., especially chapters 8-23.

[142] Crofts, "Letters – No. 82," *DM*, August 1862.

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distress is at this time occupying the thoughts and employing the time of most of us in these Northern [sic] regions, as well as many in the South. The sufferers are vast in numbers, and bear their sufferings so patiently that every heart is softened and every one impelled to do his utmost to save these poor operatives from starvation."[143] Griffiths noted that "large sums of money are being raised in the cities and towns, to meet the demands, and clothing old and new is gathered together and sent to the scenes of distress from all parts of the kingdom." The women's antislavery societies Griffiths created and nurtured were poised to turn attention to the suffering at home. She, herself, was "collecting this week and hope to send to Ashton in the course of a few days."[144]

The economic hardships were not lost on the American side of Griffiths' abolitionist network. Her next "Letter," written in February and published in March 1863, was largely euphoric in reporting British antislavery's response to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Along with her column, however, Griffiths sent Douglass a copy from a speech made in Rochdale "at the meeting held there for the purpose of expressing thanks to the merchants and citizens of New York for their generous contributions towards the relief of our poor operatives in the cotton districts."[145] Among those benefactors was Gerrit Smith. "Heaven bless our dear friend Gerrit Smith for his aid to Lancashire at a time when the calls upon him in behalf of his own countrymen must be so numerous."[146]

Although some in the United Kingdom blamed the misery on the U.S. government for choking off the supply of raw cotton – and sympathy in some quarters had always been

[143] Crofts, "Letters – No. 85," *DM*, January 1863.
[144] Ibid.
[145] Crofts, "Letters – No. 86," *DM* March 1863.
[146] Ibid.

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strongly pro-Southern – Griffiths asserted proudly that the impoverished "have borne their suffering without murmur and no voice has gone forth from them to our Government urging the recognition of the South as the surest way to shorten their season of trial. There is something very touching in all this – the *working classes* are, for the most part, right on the Slavery subject and they have given their particular proof that they are so."[147]

Representations of Reality

Griffiths' approach and her results reflect the findings of scholars in other studies. In examining the antebellum travel accounts of three other women writers, literary scholar Cheryl J. Fish concluded that "their personal satisfaction as travelers was almost always contextualized within social critique. … By keeping at least partially within the 'woman's sphere' and by balancing the threat they represented with moderated outrage … [these women] did significant work, creating alternative forms of domestic harmony and pragmatic action within their mobile locations." [148]

In many respects, Griffiths' "Letters" fit James Carey's cultural history definition of communication in that she participated in "a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed."[149] Griffiths provided Douglass' readers a representation of an antislavery reality – spiced with lively descriptions that brought to life sights and cultural attractions in the United Kingdom and Europe – all through a lens of antislavery rhetoric. The sheer volume of "Letters" – at least 87 over more than eight

[147] Ibid. In this and other columns, Griffiths singled out *The Times* of London for its pro-Southern drumbeat. Foreman, noting British press complicity with Confederate lobbying efforts that included a form of press-release journalism, mentions a workers' meeting "in Ashton, which was one of the most deprived towns in the [textile manufacturing] area, ended with a resolution in favour of recognition for the Confederacy, but someone from the floor successfully tacked on an amendment that urged Britain and France to 'crush the abettors of slavery and oppression.'" Foreman, *World on Fire*, 275n†.

[148] Fish, *Black and White*, 3.

[149] Carey, *Communication as Culture*, 23.

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years – contributed to the maintenance of the vision of their world that Griffiths wanted readers to share, and occasional cracks in the system could be repaired with corrective content that cemented the vision.[150] Finally, although her readers' mindsets are less quantifiable, the fact that hundreds of antislavery women in England, Scotland, and Ireland continued – at Griffiths' direction – to create products for antislavery fairs to support Douglass and the work of the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society testifies to her readers' transformation from individuals with no ties to one another into a community built around antislavery.

Historian Jean Fagan Yellin has pointed to Griffiths' importance when she lived in Rochester as a daily reminder "to the other Rochester feminist-abolitionist activists – [of] the international character of women's involvement in the movement."[151] Through "Letters from the Old World," Griffiths expanded that presence to both sides of the Atlantic, providing women a vision and examples of how they could become politically active in the antislavery cause yet remain within societal norms for women in the public sphere of the day. It was a network of women – and some men – who knew of each other chiefly through Griffiths' pen.

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[150] See, for instance, "Letters – No. LXII," *Douglass' Monthly*, February 1859, in which Griffiths assures readers that just because she had not discussed the "Free Cotton" movement did not mean "my Abolitionism was of a *very neutral* tint indeed!" Italics in original.

[151] Jean Fagan Yellin, "Harriet Jacobs and the Transatlantic Movement, lecture presented at Sisterhood and Slavery: Transatlantic Antislavery and Women's Rights, Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, October 25-28, 2001. Accessed October 15, 2011, at http://www.yale.edu/glc/conference/yellin.pdf.

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