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Ends, Means, and Attitudes: Black-White Conflict in the Antislavery Movement

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

ENDS, MEANS, AND ATTITUDES: Black-White Conflict in the Antislavery Movement Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease When he established the North Star in 1847, Frederick Douglass broke the ties which had bound him to William Lloyd Garrison. Although Douglas had been an officer in New England antislavery circles as recently as May of that year, he was, by late fall, exchanging harsh rejoinders with his erstwhile Boston colleagues. Within months the two editors had become open antagonists, and before long the forces of Garrisonian abolitionism were turned against their former friend. The American Anti-Slavery Society, Douglass averred later, was "exerting its energies, and expending its funds for the purpose, small or great, of silencing and putting to open shame a fugitive slave, simply . . . because that fugitive slave has dared to

differ from that Society, or from the leading individuals in it. . . Z¹ Douglass was not alone in his plight. Throughout the thirty years before the Civil War, Negro activists pursued their goals not only in conjunction with white dominated antislavery organizations but through distinctive race associations as well. Like Douglass, they chose means which demonstrated black self-sufficiency and pursued programs which stressed achieving full civil rights for free blacks as much as liberating the enslaved. Like him, they were often propelled on a separate course by the treatment they received from white abolitionists. Condescending patronage irked them. Prejudice among avowed friends angered them. The slowness and abstraction of the antislavery movement frustrated them. Their response was two-fold: as they established all-black conventions, councils, and vigilance committees, they became increasingly critical of their white colleagues in the antislavery crusade. It had not always been thus. When in 1831 the *Liberator* had announced the new wave of abolition, Garrison was welcomed for his disavowal of racial inequality. He publicized black opposition to the American Colonization Society. He fought against Massachusetts' proscription of intermarriage. In response, free Negroes eagerly supported Frederick Douglass' *Paper*, Jan. 13, 1854. ¹¹⁷ ¹¹⁸ civil war history his leadership, endorsed the new antislavery societies, and sustained the newspaper. By the end of the 1830's, however, that early enthusiasm waned as blacks who were active in the American Anti-Slavery Society became increasingly sensitive to the prejudices of their white colleagues. Samuel Cornish, one of the most frequent Negro office holders in antislavery organizations, smarted under their paternalism and demanded that black "moral and intellectual attainments" be judged by the same standards as white. He resented Lewis Tappan's refusal to consult blacks about the disposition of funds bequeathed for the "education and benefit of colored people." He scorned those who talked of the "sacrifice" they made when they met "colored Americans upon terms of social equality."³ Like Cornish, Theodore Wright, a New York Presbyterian clergyman and a member of the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society, expressed doubt about the good faith and intentions of white abolitionists. He was "alarmed" that the constitutions of the auxiliary antislavery societies frequently said "nothing . . . about the improvement of the man of color." They "overlooked the giant sin of prejudice," which it was their presumed task to "annihilate." Sarah Forten echoed his concern. Observing white colleagues as guests in her father's Philadelphia home, she unhappily concluded that these "professed friends" had not yet rid themselves of prejudice.⁴ Doubtless some of the criticism stemmed from the different emphases which black and white abolitionists placed on the status of the free Negro in the North. It was indeed American Anti-Slavery Society policy that "all persons of color who possess the qualifications which are demanded of others, ought to be admitted forthwith to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and the exercise of the same prerogatives, as others. . . ." - See Garrison's comment on racial equality, *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Feb. 12, 1830, quoted in Wendell P. and Francis J. Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879; The Story of His Life as Told by His Children* (New York, 1885-1889), I, 148. For colonization and intermarriage see James Forten to William L. Garrison, Aug. 9, 1831, *Garrison Papers*, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library; Louis Ruchames, "Race, Marriage and Abolition in Massachusetts," *Journal of Negro History*, XL...

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¹ *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Jan. 13, 1874.





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