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Stanley Harrold. *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004. x + 246 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8131-2290-8.

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The Increasing Radicalism of Abolitionism

This relatively short monograph (150 pages of interpretive text) packs a big punch, as it essentially argues that the real radicals of the antebellum abolition movement were not the provocative, socially iconoclastic, and highly prominent Garrisonians but, rather, the political "ímmediatists" associated with Gerrit Smith and, by l850, Frederick Douglass. In this book, Stanley Harrold examines three anti-slavery speeches given in the early l840s by white abolitionists Smith and William Lloyd Garrison and by black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet. He also assesses the impact those speeches had on abolitionist thought and tactics. Helpfully, Harrold includes the text of the speeches for readers. What makes this trio of speeches worthy of such close analysis is that, unlike the hundreds of other talks given by abolitionists, these three were addressed explicitly to slaves, rather than to northern and southern whites or northern free blacks. While Harrold's stated purpose is to analyze the speeches in terms of both the content and the contexts in which they were given, he also uses them as a useful window through which to glimpse the evolution of the articulate, fragmented, and ever-contentious abolitionist movement, particularly in the l840s.

The very existence of these three slave-focused speeches reflected an emerging awareness among some abolitionists that the strategy of just focusing on changing the pro-slavery mentality of white people, both in the North and South, was inadequate. In addition, abolitionists needed to include the actions of slaves in their anti-slavery strategizing by establishing contacts with them and, more radically, by actively encouraging slaves to engage in actions that would help weaken slavery. While these speeches were delivered in the North, addressing them to absent slaves was no mere rhetorical exercise. As Harrold points out, the three speakers and their allies assumed that slaves would learn of the speeches' content (p. 9), just as Lincoln assumed slaves would learn of the substance of his Emancipation Proclamation twenty years later.

Indeed, giving such speeches to absent slaves was just the first in a series of tactics that some abolitionists promoted as part of their effort to actively include slaves in their overall strategy of subverting slavery. As Harrold usefully discusses in chapter 5, abolitionists would try to make physical contact with slaves in the border region through three means: proselytizing, buying slaves their freedom, and helping slaves to run away. While providing evidence of the latter two actions is not especially new, what is noteworthy about this discussion is Harrold's claim that such actions were not just randomly done by free-agent abolitionists acting on their own, in a tactical vacuum. Instead, both strategies reflected activists' efforts to implement in the South the speeches' intellectual-political message, however dangerous such ventures would have been.

For Harrold, the most provocative element that unites the three speeches is their shared ambivalence towards the issue of slaves resorting to violence to upend slavery. All three individuals broached it; all three refused to embrace it explicitly, especially if it involved collective actions by the slaves. Garrison was most tepid. Despite his violent-sounding rhetoric, his brand of abolitionism, which enjoined northerners to raise anti-slavery pressure so high as to lead to northern disunion and, eventually, to the crumbling of slavery within a weakened independent southern nation, overshadowed his nominal encouragement of slaves to resist by running off. Smith, despite his ambivalence, saw violence as more likely since he actively encouraged slaves to run off, and even said that God would permit them to "take [ie. steal] , all along your route, in the free, as well as the slave State[s], so far as is absolutely essential ... the horse, the boat, the food, the clothing, which you require" (p. 21; see also p.158).

Garnet went furthest, for instead of advocating running, he advised slaves to "cease to labor for tyrants" (p. 188). Harrold calls this, perhaps a bit misleadingly,

a "general strike" (p. 35). Garnet also urged slaves to demand payment and remonstrate "with them in language which they cannot misunderstand" about slavery's "sinfulness" (p. 185). While Garnet did not explicitly call on slaves to defend themselves in the eventuality that slaveholding tyrants would refuse to pay and insist that slaves go back to work, he was pretty certain that violence would follow. Masters, for their part, would, in such a situation, "commence the work of death" (p.184); moreover, slaves would also strike out with violence. Garnet might be seen as suggesting this when he claims that slaves' motto should be "RESISANTCE! RESISTANCE! RESISTANCE!" (p. 188). His belief in the inevitability of violence may be seen as well in the fact that when he finally did publish his speech, in l848, it was as an appendix to his reprinting of David Walker's *Appeal*, an 1829 black abolitionist tract most famous for raising the possibility of slave violence as the means for overthrowing the institution of violence.

The l850s saw a convergence of physical contact and slave action. In the face of the Fugitive Slave Act of l850, northern abolitionists became much more willing to encourage slaves to flee and more willing to physically and collectively interfere on runaways' behalf in the North, where authorities were apt to reclaim slaves and send them southward. In perhaps the most startling point of the book, Harrold argues that by the early l850s many abolitionists had become so willing to engage in such direct and aggressive action with slaves, that John Brown's actions of l859 would have happened earlier–presumably with the comparable support of other northern abolitionists–if the Fugitive Slave Act had not siphoned off abolitionist energies for resisting authorities in the North.

This normalizing of John Brown–placing his actions in terms of the broader trajectory of abolition's increasing embrace of aggressive action–is one of the many useful nuggets in this study. Harrold is to be commended as well for highlighting the slave borderland, the focus of most abolitionist strategizing, as a discrete multi-state region with its own slavery/anti-slavery dynamic. He also does a good job of navigating the choppy, often muddy waters of abolitionist factionalism, while always conveying how smart and articulate the many abolitionists were, even if they often disagreed amongst themselves. Given the sloppy thinking endemic to today's political debates, it is hard to believe that the anti-slavery movement sustained such intellectual vigor for thirty years.

A few suggestions are in order, however. First, given the importance of addressing slaves explicitly, it would have been interesting for Harrold to speculate as to why more such speeches were not delivered in the l840s and l850s. Second, in discussing why abolitionists began broaching the issue of violence in l842 and l843, Harrold might note that the country itself was becoming saturated with slavery-related violence. Violence on behalf of the "slave power" was on the rise, as seen, most notably, with the recently- concluded seven-year old Second Seminole War (ending in 1842). This war also saw slaves, in league with the Seminole, using violence to resist white encroachment and otherwise secure their autonomy in Florida.

Third, in explaining some abolitionist criticism of the three speeches and the advocacy of violence, Harrold might have usefully explored the extent to which some abolitionists' criticism reflected their deep embrace of the expanding free labor/free market ideology of nineteenth-century capitalism. Being thus imbued with a belief in the wonders of a free market, whereby individuals bought and sold their labor power as individuals, not as workers conspiring together in unions or as strikers, northern abolitionists might have been reluctant to embrace the tactic of collective action on the part of slave laborers, such as when Garnet advocated a labor shutdown. Indeed, what made the tactic of slaves escaping eventually so enticing to mainstream abolitionists is that running away could be presented and understood as an individual act (whether this was the case or not); it could be offered as heroic evidence that squared perfectly with the emerging individual-in-the-market ethic of nineteenth-century America. Similarly, in criticizing Smith for sanctioning slave theft, other abolitionists might have been revealing less their Protestant-based code of proper moral behavior and more their deep embrace of the sanctity of the capitalistic marketplace and its celebration of private property rights.

Finally, in what is the most problematic aspect of his study, Harrold discusses throughout how the three speeches were essentially addressed to slave men and that one of their underlying themes was the appropriate action that men had to take, in part, to manifest and secure their masculinity. Evidence from the speeches suggests that Harrold's claim about the male-centered nature of the speeches simplifies a more complex rhetorical reality. While the three speakers do, to be sure, place a greater burden on men for leading the challenge against slavery, the three formally address themselves to all of the "slaves of the United States," or, as Garnet adds more descriptively, "you … THREE MILLION" (p. 188). Moreover, Garnet mentions women–as wives, sisters, daughters–repeatedly, particularly in terms of their

sexual abuse by the slaveholding "tyrants," which suggests that the fault line of gender within slavery created a certain tension within Garnet's address over the roles of men and women. However, Garnet complicates the gender dichotomy of male protector vs. female victims when he includes "sons [who are] murdered," too (p. 186).

These concerns notwithstanding, this study constitutes a valuable addition to the ongoing historiographic enterprise of trying to make sense of America's large and sprawling anti-slavery movement and would be useful in both survey and more specialized courses.

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