ABOLITIONISTS ABROAD: WOMEN, TRAVEL, AND ABOLITIONIST NETWORKS

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In the first decades of the nineteenth century, British and American women rarely traveled abroad. Travel was expensive, unreliable, and dangerous. As a result, many women (and men) who participated in the transatlantic antislavery movement never met their counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic, although they exchanged letters, read the same tracts and donated to one another’s efforts. Those few abolitionists who did travel abroad in the early nineteenth century can be divided into two categories: those who could afford the trip, and those who felt they had to leave their native country to escape re-enslavement or racism. This dichotomy was true for both male and female travelers, although men were more likely to go on voyages sponsored by antislavery societies. The few women who did travel abroad in the early nineteenth century made important connections between groups of like-minded reformers who could sustain and support one another’s work for a common goal. The transatlantic networks formed by women like Maria Weston Chapman, Anne Knight, Mary Anne Estlin, and others strengthened the antislavery movement and sustained it through the schisms that wracked the movement in the 1840s and 1850s.

Travel between Europe and the United States became more common in the 1840s and 1850s because technological improvements shortened ocean crossings and lowered costs, opening up the possibility to far more women than before, not least among them the abolitionists.1 The trips abolitionists took abroad led to deeper friendships and stronger female networks, which was increasingly important to sustaining the movement after 1840. This was because in 1839-40, a number of large antislavery organizations split in two over the question of the role that women were to play in the movement after Abby Kelley was elected to the executive council of the American Antislavery Society (AAS). William Lloyd Garrison, a far-left founder of the AAS, and his associates supported women’s and African Americans’ equal participation in antislavery work. More moderate activists supported gender-segregated societies and a more traditional role for women. Garrison and his supporters reformed the AAS before sailing for London’s World’s Antislavery Convention in 1840, and their opponents founded the American & Foreign Antislavery Society

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(AFAS) and waged a slander campaign against Garrison and the AAS in Britain. Several American women undertook journeys to Britain in an effort to correct the misinformation spread by the AFAS in the 1850s. African American reformers were caught up in the schism as well, and most of the African American women who worked with interracial antislavery organizations allied themselves with those who supported women’s equal involvement. However, African American women were not always seen as equals by those who supported women’s participation in the antislavery movement. African Americans faced both sexism and racism from their allies in the antislavery movement as well as the general public. This essay will discuss some of the trips these white and African American women took to abroad at mid-century in an effort to mend the divisions in the antislavery movement and to spread its message; it also will discuss some of the border crossings of earlier women travelers from both sides of the Atlantic before the schism.² It will be shown that women activists succeeded in strengthening the antislavery movement with their travels but, after the split, failed to fully mend the divisions between the various factions or to fully integrate African American travelers into the close-knit network of female reformers they constructed.

When women did travel in the early nineteenth century, they rarely traveled alone. Notable early female travelers like British reformer Frances Trollope and actress Frances Kemble Butler came to the United States accompanied by family members. Both women mostly confined their writings to observations of domestic scenes. Despite their restraint, Trollope’s and Kemble Butler’s critics expressed their concerns about the impropriety of both women’s experiences, a common theme in critiques of women travelers.³ Yet, there were a few women who made transatlantic voyages without a male chaperone or companion in the early nineteenth century. A case in point is Harriet Martineau, a travel writer who traveled around the United States from 1834 to 1836 to conduct research for her book, Society in America (1837). Although Martineau traveled without a designated companion, she was seldom alone. While in the United States, she spent much of the early part of her trip with a group of other British travelers. She visited other authors or notable figures and spent most nights as a guest in someone’s home when not actively traveling from place to place. Accommodations became harder to find after her participation in antislavery meetings in Boston in 1835. She found that the South, which had previously welcomed her as a celebrity, was now outraged, and her new abolitionist friends worried about her safety.⁴ Traveling...
alone or at least without male family members left Martineau more vulnerable when her antislavery leanings became more widely known in the United States.

Some British women who traveled around Europe in the 1820s also did so with a party whose membership changed from city to city. Anne Knight, for example, who later became one of the most outspoken advocates of women’s rights and antislavery in Britain, began her career as an international reformer in the 1820s, traveling with a group of other radical Quakers through Europe and conducting missionary work. Knight’s letters to her siblings asked them not to spread word of what she was doing and to keep her letters private from her controlling mother. Although Knight traveled without a male family member, the group she accompanied allowed her to travel as a single woman; the trip also coincided with the growth of her philosophy of women’s rights. Knight was thirty-eight when she embarked on her first European tour and was still living in her family home with several of her siblings. Knight’s experience shows us that travel, particularly international travel, allowed many reforming women to experience some independence from family and to develop intellectual and reform interests outside the family sphere.

Other women were able to use family connections to engage in travel abroad. American men began to travel to Britain in the early 1830s to expand their abolitionist networks and raise funds for their cause. British audiences were important for radical American abolitionist writers, and British readers’ interest in America was fueled by travel writers like Martineau. Some married American women joined their husbands in traveling to Britain in the 1830s, and some of them received a warm welcome. Boston abolitionist Ann Phillips, for example, accompanied her husband Wendell on his visit to Britain as a representative of the American Antislavery Society in 1839. After meeting British abolitionist George Thompson and his wife as well as Elizabeth Pease, the organizer of the Darlington [England] Ladies Antislavery Society, Phillips wrote to her abolitionist American friend Maria Weston Chapman (whose own foreign travels will be recounted below) and told her about the hearty invitation she received from them. Thompson, she reported, had said, “‘What would, what would I give to see them, Maria Chapman, all. All must come next year [to the World’s Antislavery Convention], men and women too, do they not mean to?’” and that “Elizabeth Pease too [was] very anxious, those of you who can possibly come should, she longs to

5 Gail Malmgreen, “Anne Knight and the Radical Subculture,” Quaker History 71, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 104. See Box W2 of the Knight Papers, Friends’ Library, London, for Anne Knight’s letters to her family about her 1824 trip to Europe. It is unclear if Knight was the only single woman with the group.

Thompson’s invitation and Phillips’s warm reception from British abolitionists encouraged American women to come to the World’s Anti-slavery Convention, which was held in the summer of 1840. The interest of British abolitionists encouraged American women to seek connections with British women’s organizations.

Not every British family who hosted Phillips was as welcoming as Thompson and Pease. In the same letter where she described her excitement at meeting her fellow abolitionists, Phillips recounted an awkward conversation with a Mrs. Joshua Bates, who “thought us rather odd folks, what with living in a warren st[reet], riding in hackney coaches, caring for such things as slaves, everywhere we pass for queer folks not drinking spirit. We find we are not thought much of. ‘What will you have to drink? Nothing.’ They look at us in mute amaze[ment].” As this illustrates, abolitionists like Phillips, particularly radicals who followed AAS founder William Lloyd Garrison in embracing a variety of reform ideas including temperance, dress reform, and living simply, as some Quakers in the United States did, found themselves the objects of curiosity when they visited with the British elite. Garrison and his closest allies adopted a number of very radical stances in addition to antislavery, and Garrison promoted a variety of radical causes in his paper, The Liberator. This radicalism attracted criticism from both proslavery forces and less radical abolitionists. Most British abolitionists did not give up the comforts of middle-class and elite life as quite a few of the radical American abolitionists did, and temperance efforts had hardly crossed the Atlantic yet. As more abolitionists from the United States began to travel across the Atlantic, the differences between British and American reformers’ lifestyles and religious beliefs became points of contention.

Several abolitionists, including many women, did take up Thompson’s kind invitation and traveled to London in the summer of 1840 to attend the World’s Anti-slavery Convention. Two of them, Pennsylvanians Lucretia Mott (with her husband James) and Mary Grew (with her father Henry) kept journals of their travels. The differences between these two accounts demonstrate the ways in which exposure to a wider world and the women’s goals for their trip shaped their experiences. Lucretia Mott, a forty-seven year old Quaker minister and grand dame of American anti-slavery, was not a woman who normally kept a diary, but she recorded her trip to England with...
her acerbic wit. Mott’s journal was written for others to read, and her husband used it when he compiled his own published account of the convention. The other diarist was twenty-seven year old Mary Grew, who was excited at the prospect of overseas travel. She dedicated it on the frontispiece to her “own use, in deepening and retaining first impressions of a sea voyage and a tour in England, and with the hope of imparting in a slight degree, to the members of her ‘household band,’ the pleasures thence derived...” Mott’s diary covers the convention and the social scene around it in careful detail and skims over the excursions the group took before and after. Grew, however, filled her pages with anecdotes about the cities and towns they visited and the people they met. She spent little time talking about the convention itself unless something notable happened, like the day a man who was trying to close a skylight fell into the crowd. The two diarists give us very different pictures of the women’s trip to England — differences that highlight their varying expectations and personalities.

That expectations shaped women’s experiences on their travels is clearly evident in the different attitudes towards the trip to England reflected in Mott’s and Grew’s journals. Grew was excited to see historical sites and tour the countryside, while Mott was more curious about British reform and religion. Grew gleefully recounted her first time exploring London’s streets on her own and recorded her excitement at climbing the tower of St. Paul’s Cathedral even though ladies were not supposed to do so. She convinced the guard to allow her to attempt the climb after being told ladies were not allowed to ascend the tower. Mott simply recorded that they saw the sights and that the “girls,” as she called the younger women with whom she traveled, enjoyed themselves. Even when she visited William Shakespeare’s home, she simply noted the excursion. Grew was deeply affected by the sights she visited, as is evident from her comment after seeing Jewry Wall, a Roman ruin in Leicester: “To an American, fresh from his new and young country, it is deeply interesting to stand amid such antiquities as these, and they inspire him, not only with wonder and veneration and solemnity, but they oppress the intellect and heart with awe. At least, I found it so.” Grew’s amazement at historical sites reflects her larger attitude toward the trip, which she saw as a once in a lifetime opportunity to expand her knowledge of the world and her circle of friends. Mott saw the trip much differently, instead comparing American and British institutions. She wrote extensively of visits to poor houses and factories and commented...
only briefly on the many social gatherings she attended unless there was a conflict.

Both Mott and Grew commented extensively on their experiences in British churches. Grew attended one British church where she found the preacher boring and was insulted to discover that the pew doors were locked to strangers and she would have to stand throughout the service. When she attended services at Westminster Abbey, she found “the sermon was not above mediocrity.”17 Mott had low opinions of British religious services as well. Shortly after arriving in Liverpool, the Motts attended a Quaker service at Isaac Crewdson’s evangelical church. Mott concluded, after spending the day with Crewdson and his meeting, as Quakers call their congregations, in their opulent hall, that she and her husband “respected their zeal and sincerity, while we mourned such a declension from the simplicity of the Faith of the Society of Friends.”18 Although she was better received by and had a higher opinion of Scottish Friends, Mott’s attitude towards British Quakers set the tone of her entire visit. At each stop she compared British institutions to those in America and usually found them wanting. Religious tourism made up a large part of the trip that the women delegates made in 1840, and they found religious adherence and performance disappointing.

Mott and Grew also noted that restrictions on women’s behavior and public speaking were much more deeply entrenched in England than in the United States in the early nineteenth century. They were both upset by their exclusion from the Antislavery Convention in London, and they both also commented on the many times they were informed that women were not allowed to do one thing or another or when space was not available for women in churches and meeting halls. At the same time, they noted that these discriminatory rules and prohibitions were sometimes practiced inconsistently. Grew was told women could not climb the tower of St. Paul’s only to find out after she had done so that, in fact, women had climbed it in the past.19 Mott was not allowed to speak at the convention only to be invited to speak at one of the sessions afterwards.20 Both women’s experiences illuminated the barriers to women’s participation in public life in Britain. American women visiting Britain were more often allowed or even encouraged to speak in public or participate in activities normally restricted to men only because their foreignness made it acceptable for them to break the rules of British society. Mott was left feeling “disappointed to find so little independent action on the part of women” in Britain.21

17 Ibid., June 22.
18 Tolles, Slavery and the “Woman Question,” 17. Crewdson was part of a controversy over the role of the inner light in Quaker worship. He had repudiated the teachings of the American radical Elias Hicks, whom the Motts followed, and eventually Crewdson and his followers left the Society of Friends to form their own meeting, which they called the “Evangelical Friends.”
20 Tolles, Slavery and the “Woman Question,” 47.
21 Ibid., 38.
Some British women also felt constrained by the boundaries on women’s public participation in the antislavery movement in England, which may have prompted them to travel abroad to work for their cause. Although fewer British women traveled abroad to promote antislavery, those who did formed their own networks of supporters in Europe and the United States. For example, Anne Knight, mentioned above, decided to undertake a speaking tour through France in the 1840s after George Thompson and other British antislavery leaders refused to do so, even though she had never before spoken to a public audience in England. After her mother died, she felt less constrained by her family, with whom she still lived, and she was frustrated by the lack of transnational cooperation among male activists. She left England in 1846 and spent nearly three years in France, attempting to convert the country’s revolutionary government to an antislavery position and to support the newly independent French colonies in the Americas.22 She relied heavily on her female compatriots in England and the United States as well as members of her family to supply her with literature and other antislavery materials, which she translated into French.23 She made a number of close friends while in France, including French feminist Jeanne Deroin. When Deroin was exiled from France in 1852, she stayed with Knight in England. Knight also helped Deroin and her colleague Pauline Roland publish the Women’s Almanack, an international magazine dedicated to women’s rights.24

After her time in France, Knight’s interests expanded beyond the antislavery and peace movements to include women’s rights more than any other reform movement, not least she found herself relegated to writing and raising money in these other causes. When her sister and brother-in-law traveled to Jamaica and then the United States after the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention, Knight was disappointed in what they reported about women’s rights in American antislavery efforts. She wrote to Maria Weston Chapman, telling her, “it was a disappointment to me that my sister was so little instructed of your woman principle; her husband’s prejudice indeed was almost as weakened as hers.” Knight was disappointed in American abolitionists for their lack of clear commitment to women’s rights; she had hoped that her sister and brother-in-law would be persuaded by American feminists where she had been unsuccessful. She continued, “but it is a greater vexation still to see so little on this from you when we had hoped the brethren would have sent so full & largely supplies of comfort to the family of warriors; pray my dear if you think us claiming any regard, show it by some help from your storehouse

23 Anne Knight to Maria Weston Chapman, October 30, 1839, Ms A 9 2 v.12, p.73, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.
of womanism.” The American antislavery movement, despite the outrage of the female delegates about their exclusion from the 1840 convention, did not back women’s rights to the extent Knight thought necessary.

Knight faced discrimination based on her sex in both the antislavery and the peace movements and sometimes found French society more open to her appeals for the equality of enslaved people and of women. Her letters and appeals to politicians both in Britain and France called for women to gain political rights, but the rhetorical strategies she employed verged on being insulting. She once asked, “Is not the poor woman as fit to vote—as fit to legislate—as the man who entertains the House by relating how the donkey goes before...?” Her blunt words and insistence that women have an equal say in politics and reform work alienated many other reformers who thought that antislavery or peace were more important than women’s rights. Travel did not always help her make the connections she wished when it came to agitating for women’s rights, but Knight’s journeys to France did allow her freedom to pursue political causes her family did not fully support. She also met lifelong friends and allies in the causes she worked for and created a transatlantic women’s rights movement out of the antislavery movement whose lack of “womanism” had so disappointed her.

One of these friends was Maria Weston Chapman, the American abolitionist and recipient of letters by both Knight and Phillips already quoted above. Like some other American women in the antislavery movement, she traveled with her family to visit European sights and to visit other antislavery activists in England. During an extended seven-year stay in Europe that began in 1848, she provided her children with a European education and the American antislavery movement with a steady flow of European information and goods for the bazaars. Having been widowed in 1842, Chapman managed the stint abroad with the help of her sisters Caroline and Anne. Her sisters helped her manage her four children and then embarked on their own tours of Europe and Britain. The Chapman family apartment in Paris became the center of antislavery activity in the city. Chapman hosted visitors from England and America between her children’s classes and excursions. At first she tried to distance herself from antislavery work, telling Elizabeth Pease that, “I hope to be more useful here than at home to our Cause for I can do more financially, at least I hope to be able to do so. My time is entirely occupied for the present moment

25 Anne Knight to Maria Weston Chapman, November 12, 1841, Ms.A.9.2 v.15, p.107, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.
26 Anne Knight, “Woman–Her Mission,” The Anti-Slavery Bugle, December 6, 1851. The joke about the donkey may refer to the 1820 debate over the Bill of Pains and Penalties Against Her Majesty, during which Lord Thomas Denman cracked an unfortunate joke about placing the princess upon a donkey and remarking that the donkey preceded her ass. See T. C. Hansard, The Parliamentary Debates (London, 1821), 3:1167.
with the education of my children, but my thoughts are at the same time devising plans for the cause.”27 Chapman’s children spent their time learning French, taking dance and deportment lessons, and studying art. Chapman’s energies went into collecting items for the bazaar boxes she shipped to Boston every fall, filling them with lace shawls, dolls dressed in Paris fashions, and other items she thought would appeal to upper-middle-class shoppers in Boston.28 She was unable to remain separate from antislavery activity for very long, as her proximity to European abolitionists and the regular visits of American reformers kept her closely connected to the cause.

In the summer of 1851, Chapman and her sister Anne Warren Weston left Paris for England and traveled around the country visiting women’s antislavery societies with two of Chapman’s children. With each visit, a declaration of similar sentiment and sisterhood was issued by the organization they visited, strengthening women’s ties across the Atlantic.29 Chapman and her sister’s visit to England coincided with the shift of the women’s antislavery organizations away from supporting the British & Foreign Antislavery Society and its American counterpart, the American & Foreign Antislavery Society, and towards Garrison’s American Antislavery Society and its emphasis on immediate emancipation, women’s equal participation, and secularity.30 American women’s visits to the societies and individuals with whom they had corresponded for years cemented relationships and changed the direction of the antislavery movement in Britain. These visits allowed women to meet face-to-face, something that had not happened in almost a decade as American women were busy trying to mend divisions in the American movement. Chapman had gained great notoriety for her pamphlets, chiefly Right and Wrong in Massachusetts (1839), and her presence in Britain excited antislavery women to new zeal. After this visit, British women once again began making and donating items to antislavery fairs in the United States. Chapman and Weston’s society, the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, benefited enormously from British donations, and their fair in Boston became one of the highlights of the antislavery social scene, drawing wealthy members of society from all political backgrounds.

Visiting Britain gave Chapman and her family the opportunity to deepen ties with British abolitionists and to grapple with the religious and moral questions that were dividing British activists. After her arrival in London in July 1851, Chapman met with some longtime correspondents for the first time, including Elizabeth Pease. Pease

27 Maria Weston Chapman to Elizabeth Pease, November 29, 1848, Ms. A.1.2 v.18, p. 41, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.
30 There is a long historical debate over the connection between the 1840 World’s Antislavery Convention and the rise of women’s rights efforts in the United States. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, when she compiled the multivolume History of Woman Suffrage in the 1880s, pointed to the convention as the origin of the idea for the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention. However, Lucretia Mott, who played a major role at the Seneca Falls convention, including contributing to the writing of the Declaration of Sentiments, never mentioned meeting Stanton at the meeting or referenced any conversations there as part of the reason for her involvement in Seneca Falls and the women’s rights movement. See Judith Wellman, The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Women’s Rights Convention (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2004); and Faulkner, Lucretia Mott’s Heresy, 96, for discussions of the alleged connection.
wrote to Chapman to arrange the visit, but noted that she “must not be late in returning in the eveng. [sic] as I have a great objection to wandering about London alone, after dark.”31 Pease’s reluctance to stay late in London reflects the unease many women felt about traveling alone. Pease was a reluctant traveler in general, and rarely traveled after her father’s death in 1846 despite many invitations to visit friends both in Britain and abroad.32 The visit strengthened a friendship developed through letters about antislavery and fundraising for the Boston fair.

While in London, Chapman also met some of Pease’s fellow Quakers and engaged them in a debate over antislavery and faith. In a letter to Pease, for example, she asked: “Does it [the Society of Friends] really then, think it a greater crime to believe in ‘the inner light’ than to buy & sell men? Had it really rather support slavery than a free Antislavery platform? Can it really embrace a slaveholder & excommunicate an abolitionist?”33 This debate had begun while Chapman was visiting and continued in British newspapers throughout the summer and fall. Both Pease and Chapman had chimed in repeatedly to support the American Antislavery Society (AAS), which was accused of immorality due to Garrison’s support of “come-outerism”, i.e., the call to leave one’s church if the minister refused to denounce slavery from the pulpit. Both women also recruited other abolitionists to join them in supporting the AAS. Chapman, Anne and Emma Weston along with William and Ellen Craft, William Wells Brown, and several other formerly enslaved men also attended a meeting of Unitarians in London, where the topic of debate was antislavery. Their appearance at the meeting attracted a great deal of attention and pressed British Unitarian churches to adopt antislavery as an official stance.34

Although the pressures of commitments in England were heavy, Chapman and her family missed the closeness of friends and supporters when they returned to Paris in October 1851. Chapman wrote Pease upon her return that “It grieved me to leave England without another sight of you. We all said every hour in the day while at Bristol, Oh that Elizabeth Pease were here.”35 Although life in Paris was less demanding and more focused on social activities and the children’s education, Chapman and her sisters did not always enjoy their time off from antislavery work. Friends in England wrote to remind them of how much they were missed at gatherings for the cause. Emma Michell, a friend of Chapman’s whom she had met through British abolitionist John

31 Elizabeth Pease to Maria Weston Chapman, July 3, 1851, Ms.A.9.2 v.16, p.70A, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.
33 Maria Weston Chapman to Elizabeth Pease, October 1, 1851, Ms.A.1.2 v.20, p.137, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library. Believing in “the inner light” in this passage refers to Quakers’ belief that all humans carry a piece of God’s light within them, but Quakers disagreed on the primacy of the inner light over the Bible.
35 Chapman to Pease, October 1, 1851.
Bishop Estlin and his abolitionist daughter Mary Anne Estlin, noted that one of her friends “cannot speak of you all without tears in her eyes.” The deep emotional ties between antislavery women were forged in these visits abroad, and the feelings of support, security, and relaxation that came when they surrounded themselves with likeminded people attest to the importance of these friendships for many of the movement’s leaders.

These friendships provided personal support but also became a new source of stress during the tumultuous decade of the 1850s. As revolutionary violence and political strife tore at French society, Chapman and her sisters wrote regularly of what they witnessed, and friends expressed concern for their safety. The Estlins wrote to Chapman in December 1851, “Now I wish that you could see it right to come away from it all, not to put it less, but because you are so valuable to others, so very precious to some, that the thought of danger for you saddens my spirit and makes it very fearful—it seems to us if all Anti-Slavery hope must be banished from Paris.” The political turmoil of Napoleon III’s 1851 coup d’état overwhelmed any other concerns in the city. Letters went astray, and information was implied rather than stated outright as no one was sure if French censors were reading the mail. John Bishop Estlin wrote to Anne Warren Weston, who had returned to Boston, that her sisters in France “write most guardedly, not signing their names & requiring of us the same precautions. We presume they have sheltered some proscribed person.” Although their letters do not reveal whom they sheltered, Chapman took a deep interest in the political developments under the regime of Napoleon III and wrote extended critiques of French society and politics. Friends in England provided Chapman and her family with a connection to the antislavery movement and a space to reflect on how “The Anti-Slavery cause is dearer to me than other things because its principles include all other things.” Although the coup focused Chapman’s thoughts on the connections between simultaneous struggles for human rights on both sides of the Atlantic, she and her sisters also felt it necessary to enlist help in the ongoing efforts to dispel misinformation in England about American antislavery efforts.
Concern over growing divisions in the antislavery movement in the 1850s drove some abolitionist women to take their own journeys across the ocean and to forge new contacts with other reformers. Philadelphian Sarah Pugh organized a trip to England in 1852 in an effort to correct misinformation and gather materials for the antislavery bazaars held in Boston and Philadelphia. The idea for her trip originated in a series of letters between the Weston sisters, Mary Anne Estlin, and Pugh herself. Eventually, Pugh volunteered to undertake the trip to Britain to meet with women’s antislavery organizations and explain the differences in the two groups within American antislavery. Pugh arrived in Britain in June 1852 and quickly met up with the Estlins. She also spent time with travel writer Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Pease before embarking on a trip to Ireland, where she visited radical abolitionist and Irish nationalist Richard D. Webb and his family and friends. Webb was an ally of the American radical abolitionists and had been a regular correspondent with Garrison and the rest of the Boston clique since the 1830s. It was on her trip to Ireland that Pugh first encountered abolitionists who opposed the “Old Organization,” including opposition to Garrison, Chapman, and the Philadelphia organizations, and espoused a philosophy of abolition that insisted on a separation from a government and churches they saw as corrupted by slavery, and that also entailed a call for equal rights for African Americans and equal participation of women in the movement. Thankfully, Pugh did not find herself alone in defending her friends. Scottish abolitionists Eliza Wigham and Mary Edmondson, who were both visiting Dublin as well, supported her efforts. Pugh wrote to Chapman and her sister Emma that, “It was a special delight to me to hear such staid Friends as they are pour out their righteous indignation upon the opposers of Garrison & Garrisonian abolitionists.”

Pugh initially intended only to stay in Britain for the summer, but soon found herself an integral part of the Estlin household and an important speaker in the antislavery circles of southern England. But after a while, Pugh became homesick and almost returned to the United States with Caroline Weston, who returned to Massachusetts in September 1852 to nurse her ill brother. Mary Anne Estlin also wished to accompany Weston back to Boston but was unable to do so. Pugh’s homesickness stemmed as much from feelings of inadequacy as from missing home. She remarked that “Each day develops some new phase of their [the Estlins] ever active goodness—Of their A[nti].S[lavery]. labors one half had not been told me!”

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41 Sarah Pugh to Maria Weston Chapman and Emma Forbes Weston, August 31, 1852, Ms. A.9.2.26.52, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.

42 Emma Michell to Maria Weston Chapman, August 30, 1852, Ms. A.9.2.26.51, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library; Pugh to Chapman and Weston, August 31, 1852.
Comparing herself with the extremely productive Estlin family made her feel as if she was not contributing enough to the cause. The Estlins were in final preparations for the release of the *Antislavery Advocate*, the newspaper edited by Richard D. Webb, and they enlisted Pugh in the preparations, perhaps to help her feel more engaged in the cause. Emma Michell and the Estlins conspired to keep Pugh in Bristol until November, when they hoped to gather the antislavery supporters together. Michell and the Estlins served as a nexus of antislavery connections in Britain, they had befriended most of the Garrisonian Americans who traveled abroad and knew many British activists as well. They set out to defend Garrison and his American supporters and establish new antislavery vigor in England.\(^43\)

Michell reported that despite what Pugh said, “She has already done good service at Bath,” where her audience “eagerly listened to Miss Pugh’s exposition, gave forth their fears and doubts touching Garrison and the Infidel question, and were comforted in her replies.”\(^44\) She and the Estlins hoped that over the winter she would do more to convince other British women to break from the British and Foreign Antislavery Society’s auxiliaries.

Sarah Pugh was not the only American woman touring Britain in the mid-1850s. Pugh’s letters make frequent reference to former fugitive slave Ellen Craft, who was touring with her husband and William Wells Brown. Ellen and William Craft had traveled to England in November 1850 to escape being returned to slavery under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. They had made a daring escape from Georgia to Massachusetts via train in 1848, during which Ellen posed as a wealthy white man and her husband as her servant. Ellen, who spent several years in England, attended a normal school with the help of antislavery supporters, bore a child in 1852, and continued to participate in public speaking and in the busy social life of the antislavery scene while nursing her infant. Unlike Pugh or the Weston sisters, Ellen Craft took to speaking publicly in support of antislavery campaigns.


\(^44\) Emma Michell to Miss Weston, September 25, 1852, Ms.A.9.2.v.6 p.54, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.
alongside her husband, both as a way to earn a living while in England and as an activist. The Crafts were also caught up in the disputes over religion and abolition that divided the antislavery community in the 1850s. They sided with the Garrisonians, who had supported their efforts to gain their freedom on both sides of the Atlantic. Unfortunately, Ellen Craft left very few letters of her own, but she is frequently mentioned in the correspondence of the white women with whom she socialized. This correspondence also illustrates that while the white women clearly considered Craft to be one of their circle, they did not regard her entirely as an equal.45

Mary Anne Estlin and Emma Michell took particular interest in Ellen Craft’s welfare after they were introduced in early 1851. Estlin invited the Crafts and William Wells Brown to visit them in Bristol, possibly in response to her father’s concern about the fact that they were charging money for their speaking tour in order to pay for their lodgings.46 Although John Bishop Estlin may have disliked their methods, both Mary Anne and her aunt soon became deeply attached to Ellen Craft, who returned the sentiment. Michell related to one of the Weston sisters that “They are quite like the family in this house, indeed Ellen calls it ‘coming home’ when she returns to it and it is pleasant to hear her murmured song and light step of happiness as she moves about it, when on the stair one day I heard her singing, ‘I shall not be a slave any more’ springing forward at the same time with a sense of newborn freedom.”47 Ellen Craft’s experience under slavery and her personality, often described as gentle and humble, won her many friends in England, and they remarked that her manner and carriage made her life story all the more shocking in its contrast. As a result, she became a popular lecturer, both on the stage and in private gatherings where she discussed her experiences and her thoughts about slavery.48

Once the Crafts had been persuaded not to charge money for their public tours, they had to rely on the charity of their antislavery friends, whose affection turned into protective concern. When the Crafts went to London after visiting Bristol, for example, Mary Anne Estlin worried about how they would support themselves “or what power their friends will possess of providing or arranging for them.”49 Most visiting abolitionists either rented rooms in boarding houses or stayed with other abolitionists. The Crafts’ financial precariousness was only one problem the Estlins saw; their health was another. Mary Anne’s letter continued, “I think Ellen’s health has never sufficiently
recovered the shock of their cruel persecution in Boston, to make her equal to all the tossing about she has since had to encounter & I am never as happy as when she is under our immediate protection." 50 The Estlins assumed that the couple were unable to manage their own affairs and inserted themselves into managing them even though there was no evidence that the Crafts had encountered any difficulties obtaining lodging in their travels. It is unclear how the Crafts responded to this paternalism, although they spent a good deal of time with the Estlins and Pugh for much of the summer. They then enrolled in a school in Surrey, where they remained through the fall of 1852, when they had a son. In 1853, William Craft remained deeply involved in antislavery work while Ellen attended few events as she was nursing her baby. After completing their studies at the normal school, the couple decided to open a boardinghouse and remained in Britain until after the American Civil War. 51

Just before the outbreak of the Civil War, another American abolitionist traveled to Britain: Sarah Parker Remond, the daughter of one of the wealthiest African American families in Massachusetts. She had begun her antislavery speaking career in the United States, where she toured with her brother, Charles Lenox Remond. After fighting for the right to attend the theater in a well-publicized court case in 1857, she decided to become an antislavery speaker. The abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison commented on her speaking ability after she spoke at one of his movement’s meetings: “Sarah spoke but once in our meetings, but acquitted herself admirably. She only needs a little more confidence and a little more practice to make her a good lecturer.” 52 The entire Remond family was friendly with many of the Garrisonians, and Charles Lenox Remond was a close friend of Garrison’s. By the time Sarah became active as an antislavery speaker, her brother had had a falling out with some members of Garrison’s circle, including the Weston sisters. Within a year of Garrison’s comments on her abilities, Sarah Parker Remond had left the United States for Great Britain and set out on a speaking tour, which regularly overlapped with events held by the Crafts and William Wells Brown. 53 She was popular with British audiences, and she had to turn down invitations to speak as news of the power of her speeches spread. 54

Like the Crafts, Remond found friendship tinged with paternalism in the British women she met. She knew even before leaving the United States that she would continue to face racism in Britain. Thus, she wrote in a letter before her journey that she “did not fear the wind nor the waves, but I know that, no matter how I go, the spirit of prejudice

50 Ibid.
51 “William and Ellen Craft,” Frederick Douglass’ Papers, October 29, 1852; Richard Davis Webb to Maria Weston Chapman, May 29, 1853, Ms.A.9.2 v.27, p.39, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library; Zackodnick, Press, Platform, Pulpit, chap. 2.
52 William Lloyd Garrison to Helen Garrison, February 12, 1857, Ms.A.1.1 v.5, p.37, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.
53 Zackodnick, Press, Platform, Pulpit, 50.
will meet me...so I shall gather up all my courage, and endeavor to depend upon myself.” Although her contacts in England encouraged her to rely on the friends her brother had made during his trip in 1840-41, she knew those ties were thin after eighteen years. Remond’s financial security did temper some of the paternalism she may have faced. In addition to financial support from her family, Remond also had money from the speaking tour, which she donated to antislavery organizations. Moreover, she also received some indirect financial aid from antislavery activists in Britain. Mary Anne Estlin reported that Remond’s tuition at a London medical college was being paid for by wealthy abolitionist and philanthropist Elizabeth J. Reid because Remond “has won many to the love of the cause thro’ her personal influence & her public advocacy.” Unlike the Crafts, Remond had the financial resources to support herself, and her decision to become a physician allowed her to remain in Europe for the rest of her life. Remond moved to Italy in the 1860s seeking to escape racism that was still present in England and find a new home for herself and her sisters.

Antislavery women with the means to travel crossed the Atlantic to continue reform work with new communities or to expand their own horizons. Women travelers, particularly those who spent considerable time abroad such as Maria Weston Chapman and Anne Knight, developed their own networks and also facilitated connections between other women by encouraging them to travel, as in the case of Sarah Pugh, or providing safe space for their work, as Knight did with Jean Deroin. Travel was one way in which women could build personal relationships that supported their antislavery work and one another, even as it also illuminated the growing divisions over the question of gender roles, race, and social class between American and British abolitionists. African American women travelers’ experiences, including those of Ellen Craft and Sarah Parker Remond, give us insight into the racial and class dynamics of international travel, as both women were treated very differently due to their race and class status than white abolitionists. Women’s roles as hostesses and parents continued to overwhelm their reform work even when traveling abroad, and visitors placed additional burdens on antislavery women’s households. Maria Weston Chapman struggled with the burdens of educating her children and the demands of reform work during her seven year stay abroad, but that same stay allowed her to develop lasting friendships with European reformers, particularly with the Estlins and Emma Michell. Traveling allowed women to

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55 “Letter from Miss Remond, From the London Anti-Slavery Advocate,” The Liberator, November 19, 1858.

56 Remond may have had reason to worry about the strength of her brother’s ties to British abolitionists. In 1849, Richard D. Webb informed Caroline Weston that he thought Charles Lenox Remond was a “shameless beggar” and was unsurprised to hear of his falling out with the Westons. Richard Davis Webb to Caroline Weston, March 25, 1849, Ms. A. 9.2 v.24, p.69, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.

57 Mary Anne Estlin to Maria Weston Chapman, October 20, 1859, Ms. A. 9.2 v 29. p 73, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library.

reflect upon the differences between their own society’s treatment of them both as reformers and as women and that of the countries they visited. Their conclusions regarding this experience also brought diverging ideas about gender roles to the fore as women commented upon the political and social structures of other countries. Discussions about the limitations of women’s lives and the differences between Britain, France and the United States emphasized the ways in which women were kept from fully expressing their artistic and political ideas or were criticized by men for doing so. African American women also sought new friendships and opportunities for personal growth abroad but discovered that racism disguised as paternalism shaped their interactions with white reformers even in England. All of these conversations and experiences heightened the desire for women to gain equality for themselves as they sought freedom for the enslaved.

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