

"MY COUNTRY! 'TIS OF THEE, STRONG HOLD OF SLAVERY": THE MUSICAL RHETORIC OF THE AMERICAN ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT

Karen Anton

University of Missouri–Kansas City

When people consider political movements like abolitionism in the United States, a common association involves the rhetoric of speech making. In fact, historians of rhetoric find that “there is usually a resurgence of rhetoric during periods of social and political upheaval” (Corbett and Connors 16). Frequently overlooked are the strong rhetorical implications of music, a commonly used method of furthering a political cause, whether it involves election campaigns or a social movement. In this form of rhetoric, compelling words are combined with musical suggestions, heightening the effect of the words on the intended audience.

A few scholars have begun to delve into the rich supply of antislavery music. Historian Vicki Eaklor’s *American Antislavery Songs: A Collection and Analysis* assembles 492 antislavery songs grouped into six categories of abolitionist thought. However, space for rhetorical analysis in such a work is limited. Robert James Branham and Stephen J. Hartnett discuss music’s role in disseminating political messages in *Sweet Freedom’s Song*, tracking the song “America”—including an antislavery parody—over a two-hundred-year span. In *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*, Jon Michael Spencer offers insight into the strong religious associations cultivated within antislavery music. For a more rhetoric-focused view of the movement, one may turn to Jacqueline Bacon’s *The Humblest May Stand Forth*, which examines the abolitionist rhetoric of minorities involved in the movement (blacks and white women) through speeches and written documents, emphasizing how they had to overcome the oppression of the majority to keep their voices from being silenced. Thus her research, though focusing on minorities’ rhetoric, is still centered on “standard” rhetorical documents.

While music was widely used in abolitionist campaigns, it is not often given the amount of rhetorical attention that full-length speeches and other written documents receive in works like Bacon’s. However, lyrics and audible music can be defined as rhetoric in and of themselves. In fact, multimodal pieces of rhetoric,¹ such as songs, have played a major role in countless social movements. Music can be used in specialized forms that compel listeners to be swayed in an opinion or feel attached to a message just as effectively as purely verbal rhetoric may. While musical responses were used for both sides of the slavery debate, this paper will focus on abolitionist techniques and strategies.

When the spirit of music and the logic of words combine in song, they form a commanding source of rhetoric more powerful than either may be alone. This paper offers a wide survey of the rhetorical techniques abolitionists employed and amplified through their usage of musical form and suggestion. Abolitionists were keenly aware of the positive role music had played in other movements and could play in their own. Through appeals carefully planned to make their songs accessible to specific audiences, American abolitionists utilized rhetorical techniques including pathos and parody, and the antislavery movement was able to use music quite effectively in its campaigns for freedom. Abolitionists published hymnals for religious audiences, created children’s antislav-

ery books, and submitted lyrics to newspapers to reach the American masses. These abolitionists, of varied backgrounds, were always careful to maintain accessibility and draw support not merely through the power of their words alone, but through the voice of music that accompanied those words.

The abolitionist movement began with a minority of shy supporters afraid to express their views to the masses. By the 1840s, a surge of abolitionist writings, including lyrics and songs, was published in newspapers, books, and sheet music to support the cause. By this time, abolitionists were becoming more audacious and “were generally more strident, and bolder in rhetoric and in deed than most early antislavery men and women had been” (Branham and Hartnett 87–88). With an increasing number of songs being written to support their cause, including parodies and even popular songs, abolitionists were increasingly gaining fame through the ’40s and ’50s. Abolitionist music, however, was strongly rooted in the tradition of hymnody.² The call for published abolitionist hymnals was first answered by William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *Liberator*, who collected hymns from various authors for his 1834 compilation *A Selection of Anti-Slavery Hymns for the Use of Friends of Emancipation*. While the music itself is not notated, Garrison notes appropriate tune names by most of the hymns, indicating to which melody each one should be sung. In his preface, he explains the difficulty in finding hymnbooks in print that are appropriate for antislavery meetings and also affirms the necessity of such hymn singing:

The rapid multiplication of Anti-Slavery Societies . . . and the frequency of their public convocations, seem to require a judicious selection of Hymns, descriptive of the wrongs and sufferings of our slave population, and calculated to impress upon the minds of those who read them, or commit them to memory, or hear them sung, a deep sense of their obligation to assist in undoing every burden, breaking every yoke, and setting every captive free. (Preface)

Already, appeals to pathos are being set up as Garrison predicts that those exposed to these hymns will feel moved to aid in spreading the antislavery sentiment. He also mentions in the preface that “the last Monday evening of every month is now extensively observed as a CONCERT OF PRAYER for the emancipation of the slaves, and the redemption of our land” (Preface). This combining of musical concert and religious prayer marks a theme that would continue to be used in music throughout the movement.

Maria Weston Chapman, who would later become a member of the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society, compiled another book of abolitionist hymns, *Songs of the Free, and Hymns of Christian Freedom*, in 1836. Many of the hymns in this book were carefully selected to not be inflammatory since they were already sung in churches. Chapman took great effort in her selections not to blatantly offend the American population still supportive of slavery. Although she does not list tunes along with her texts, choosing instead to simply list syllable construction, many of the songs she collected appear in later collections along with their tunes.

White abolitionists began to take a stand simply by publishing and circulating songs that had previously been spread by word of mouth, always taking great care to make the works accessible for their intended audience, religious white people. In 1840, Edwin Hatfield, a Presbyterian minister, edited antislavery texts in *Freedom’s Lyre; or, Psalms, Hymns, and Sacred Songs for the Slave and His Friends*, a work for “those who have been accustomed to meet and pray for the Emancipation of the Slave” (iii). Hatfield may be better remembered as a hymnologist than as an abolitionist, as he worked on several other hymnological works. In fact, he was requested by the

executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society to compile *Freedom's Lyre* (Spencer 39–40). His collection seems milder in rhetoric than Chapman's because it includes worship songs that do not deal with slavery, such as "The Mercy Seat." While Hatfield's songs addressed slavery, they were in respect to biblical slaves in Egypt and often not directly referential to American slavery. In fact, many songs, such as those in the section titled "Friends of the Slave Encouraged to Pray," are fairly generic in encouraging the power of prayer, and they do not specifically pertain to praying for an end to slavery. Granted, Hatfield admits in his preface that because only a limited number of antislavery songs had been composed, he had to include hymns that he did not consider the best representations of the genre. Still, these early publications appealed heavily to the Northern religious population.

Although more of Chapman's songs were adopted by the movement than those found in *Freedom's Lyre*, what makes the latter a striking collection is Hatfield's careful arrangement of the contents for ease of song selection. He created twelve divisions of hymns divided into categories, such as "The Cries of the Slave" and "Slaveholders Admonished." While some sections are clearly relevant to the American slave, such as those found in "The Friends of the Slave Assembled on the Fourth of July," many of the hymns are simply paraphrases of biblical quotations dealing with bondage and would seem to fit well in a church service without showing blatant support for the abolitionist cause. In fact, Hatfield's structure of contents even mimics hymnbooks intended for services, ending with a collection of doxologies, short verses praising God.³ The Psalms are especially cited sources in his collected hymns and quite fitting, since they were written to be sung within their biblical context as well.

In addition to religious appeals to the humanity of slaves, several early abolitionists considered the recruitment of children essential. Hatfield's collection included a hymn titled "Children Pleading for the Slave," and in 1842, John A. Collins created *The Anti-Slavery Picknick: A Collection of Speeches, Poems, Dialogues and Songs Intended for Use in Schools and Anti-Slavery Meetings*, a book quite specifically geared toward recruiting the younger generation to his cause. A utopian socialist and member of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Collins reportedly "irritated" Frederick Douglass by "exploiting abolitionist sentiments" for his own socialist cause (Spillers 99). Nonetheless, his preface emphasizes his desire for the involvement of the youth in the movement: "Let us encourage the young . . . to sing those songs which will inspire them with a love of freedom. These sentiments, early engraven upon their hearts, may change the future course and policy of action, and lead them to become the benefactors, instead of the oppressors of mankind" (4). The music in this text clearly reflects Collins's intended audience. Some songs are arranged for three treble voices, ideal for children's use because of the tonal range. One such song is "Remember Them That Are in Bonds," a simple piece in E-flat major consisting predominantly of repeated notes outlining the tonic and dominant, the most basic notes of the scale (135). The song has a particularly narrow range, accommodating the limited music-reading skills of young students, and includes exclaimed lines specifically marked "forte," or loudly, perhaps to add youthful excitement to the piece.⁴

However, not every piece in the book is so simple. "The Dawn of Liberty" features alternating solos for a treble and a tenor voice, accompanied by half notes in the lower voices until the chorus, which is written in three-part harmony. The treble and tenor voicings imply a young (treble) voice being educated by an older (tenor) voice. This song requires the singers to read double-dotted rhythms, is marked with the Italian "Andante" (moderately slow) at the beginning, and includes

a special chorus for the third ending, making it the most complex song in the book. This song was clearly written for singers with more training than those for which later books were marketed. Young adults completing their education fit the requirements for this training well.

White minister, utopian socialist, and private high school principal Hiram S. Gilmore compiled songs for his students in his 1846 publication *A Collection of Miscellaneous Songs from the Liberty Minstrel, Mason's Juvenile Harp, &c. for the Use of the Cincinnati High School*. This publication includes lyrics and tune names without printed music and from the title was clearly meant to be used in the formal education of high school children in a free Northern state. This publication differs from others because it targeted a black audience; Hiram Gilmore High School was founded in 1844 for black children (Reese 232). While this text does not offer musically unique excerpts, it testifies to the spreading audience for abolitionist music.

Collins and Gilmore were not alone in realizing the importance of gaining youths' support in the abolitionist movement. D. S. King, a Methodist clergyman, lists ideal places for the singing of antislavery songs in his *Liberty and Antislavery Song Book* (1842): "Let the Songs of Liberty be heard in the great public assembly, in the religious meeting, and around the hearth-stone of the family;—yea, more; let such be the favorite songs of our children; let their useful voices be heard in the highway and on the play ground" (3). Here, King suggests that the voices of children may be more convincing than those of adults in swaying more people to the abolitionist cause. Like Collins's work, King's compilation mainly includes songs arranged for the novice singer.

This theme of writing for the novice singer continues in George W. Clark's *The Liberty Minstrel* (1844), a collection of 119 works including an eloquent preface explaining the power of music, particularly through song. Clark was a member of the New York Anti-Slavery Society, and his preface reaches out to fellow white abolitionists, composers, and performers of the songs, asking them to truly understand and capture the spirit of the movement. He had lofty goals for the amateur singers: "Let associations of singers, having the love of liberty in their hearts, be immediately formed in every community. Let them . . . enter into the *sentiment* of the piece they perform, that they may *impress it* upon their hearers" (iv). By creating such a preface, he emphasizes the fact that music itself can stir the emotions of a person more strongly than words.

Clark himself wrote abolitionist songs complete with new tunes rather than setting lyrics to popular songs like many abolitionist songwriters, thus adding to the repertoire. He also credits most composers and lyricists used in his compilation in the song section in some way, even if it is only with titles that might as well say "anonymous," such as "Words by a Lady" or "Words by a Colored Man." Despite the seeming anonymity to titles like this, Clark is in fact giving a voice to the female and black minorities, thus overcoming some of the forced silence that Bacon cites in her work. In fact, their minority status serves a rhetorical purpose as well. As Bacon claims, a prophetic ethos can help "establish credibility before skeptical audiences . . . [and] offer marginalized rhetors the authority to harshly condemn their society and to call for change while simultaneously deflecting attention from themselves" (78). In "Stolen We Were," the black author effectively takes on the role of prophet calling for repentance from the sinning white man, "for the judgment is rolling around" (Clark, *Liberty* 140–41). He thus uses his minority status to give his words, set to the standard verse/refrain church hymn, further credibility.

"A Vision" is an original song written and published by Clark in this work (*Liberty* 142–43). The imagery in the text is quite innovative, as the scene is set in hell, marking a conversation between a Southern clergyman who owned slaves and the devil himself. In this piece the singer

takes part in a narrative in which he or she grows to dislike the ex-slave-owner more and more as the story develops. Corbett and Connors note that for people listening to rhetoric, “often enough their will is swayed more by their passions or emotions than by their reason” (18). Since the main character is indeed “devoid of human feeling,” it becomes obvious to the audience that somebody possessing any human feeling, or pathos, would never own slaves, but would treat fellow human beings with care and respect rather than enslaving them.

The rhetoric often catches the listener off guard as social roles and even the musical key signature are reversed from what might be expected. In the text, the clergyman is now an eternal slave to the devil, feeling what it is like to be enslaved for the first time. A highly effective reversal can be found in the closing stanza, as the devil declares to the Southerner, “I say, in haste, retire! / And you shall have a negro sent / to attend and punch the fire” (143). While in life, having a slave to attend the fire was a comfort and luxury for the slaveholder, in hell it is the fire of eternal damnation being stoked to even hotter temperatures. The music for “A Vision” is set in a major key, which is often reserved for happy or joyful situations, rather than the minor key that one might expect for a situation of eternal damnation. While a minor triad is outlined several times in the melody, the major key and 2/4 meter give the music a light feel, highlighting the comic irony of the slaveholder’s situation.

In 1856, Clark created another compilation, *The Harp of Freedom*, in which he republishes C.W. Dennison’s “Our Countrymen Are Dying,” a song that takes its tune from the popular church hymn “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains.” Many religious denominations in the United States at this time included this hymn in their services, so the well-known tune made singers familiar with the song, even though the lyrics were quite changed by Dennison. The original lyrics begin by listing the beautiful and remote places in which people should be taught the gospel message:

From Greenland’s icy mountains
From India’s coral strand
Where Afric’s sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand . . .

They call us to deliver their land from error’s chain. (Mason 167)

It is thus the diligent churchgoer’s job to free men living in these areas from ignorance of God. However, Dennison explains the horrors of slavery with reference to a more literal chain than that of error, changing the opening lines to

Our country-men are dying
Beneath their cankering chains
Full many a heart is sighing
Where nought but slav’ry reigns. (94–95)

This drastic contrast would not be lost on churchgoers familiar with the original hymn. In fact, Dennison becomes quite explicit in his lyrics: he promotes James Birney for Kentucky office, hoping to spur people to political action through his song.

The use of hymn tunes to create familiarity with an abolitionist song was quite common since a large percentage of the population consisted of churchgoing people who would know the hymns they sang every day best. This familiarity with tunes would help people learn the songs more quickly, particularly in cases in which the structure of the original text remained through use of parody. In Dennison’s “Our Countrymen Are Dying,” the juxtaposition of a pleasant church hymn and the horrors of slavery is poignant, particularly because the song is so centered on death and battle.

Dennison skillfully invokes a sense of patriotism through his word choice. The word “countrymen” makes one think of men who all belong to one country and work together to protect it. However, Dennison is portraying the slaves as these comrades who are dying in battle rather than the (white) soldiers of the United States. By making this comparison, the author is able to draw in an audience that abides by the ideals of patriotism and pathos, as listeners feel the losses of “warrior[s] steeped in the crimson flood” (Clark, *Harp* 244).

Whites were not the only people compiling songbooks for abolition. While William W. Brown was not a composer, he was a well-known orator for the New York Anti-Slavery Society. He was also a fugitive slave, the son of a white plantation owner and a black slave. He compiled *The Anti-Slavery Harp: A Collection of Songs* in 1848 in the style of *The Liberty Minstrel* and *Anti-Slavery Melodies*. This collection contains many songs that had previously been unpublished and also gives good deal of anonymity to the composers of the songs, as not even a description of them is offered. Many of the lyrics included in this source are set to existing tunes, and the music itself is not printed in the compilation. Notably, Brown calls his collection a “harp,” which is a term often used for collections of religious or worship hymns, again invoking a religious implication for the movement.⁵

“I Am an Abolitionist,” also called “Song of the Abolitionist,” reflects the common trend of writing new lyrics for a preexisting piece of music. It was collected in multiple songsters, including William Brown’s *The Anti-Slavery Harp* (lyrics only) and Jairus Lincoln’s *Anti-Slavery Melodies*.⁶ The text was perhaps more likely to be remembered since it was set to a tune with which U.S. citizens would have been very familiar. By choosing the tune “Auld Lang Syne,” often sung at New Year celebrations, for this setting, the author evokes connotations of new beginnings. However, the original lyrics to this tune also involve reflection on past events as well as the many trials that face people through the passing of time, prevalent themes in any ongoing social movement.

This song is truly a rallying call. While most other abolitionist songs summarize the plight of the slave, this one affirms the singer himself/herself as an abolitionist, perhaps to offer encouragement to a group of people who were often threatened or ostracized for their beliefs. The opening lines declare, “I am an abolitionist! I glory in the name” (William Brown 18). People singing this song are thus not only giving their allegiance to the cause, but also showing that they are not ashamed of their status as abolitionists and “glory” in the title. Each stanza is sung in the first-person singular, establishing personal involvement with the issue and motivating people to continue taking action. Unlike a speech given in first person, in which only the speech giver is part of the action, when a song is written in first person, every individual person singing in the chorus is the “I” in the lyrics, and each person is part of the action. As people sing, they genuinely “raise [their] voice for liberty” in song, confirmed in the need for their actions as abolitionists (Lincoln 28).

While the abolitionists did use the tune “Auld Lang Syne” for this song, it was not in order to parody it. No ill intent was meant for the old song—they were neither poking fun at the original nor reworking a tune that would have otherwise been offensive as abolitionist lyricists do in later compositions. The tune itself as published in *Anti-Slavery Melodies* is a simple three-part harmony with a narrow range. This arrangement strongly supports the idea that the song was meant to be accessible to even amateur singers who felt strongly about the cause. The lyrics speak for themselves, supported by a familiar tune with a steady cadence and rhythm, giving listeners something

memorable to consider as they are motivated to take action through the feeling of community invoked by the lyrics.

J. Simpson's *The Emancipation Car, Being an Original Composition of Anti-Slavery Ballads*, originally published in 1854, is what Simpson claims to be the first book of original poetry and songs published by an African American in the United States. Simpson, born a free man, included details of his personal life in the 1874 edition of *The Emancipation Car*. He cites his inspiration: "As soon as I could write, . . . a spirit of poetry, (which was always in me,) became revived, . . . and something seemed to say, 'Write and sing about it—you can sing what it would be death to speak'" (iv). As in the case of Brown, Simpson did not publish the notation; rather, he simply listed the tune names above his text. It differs from other abolitionist songbooks because Simpson asserts that it is entirely his work, even those songs that had been previously published. Many of the songs in this compilation were used long before its publication, including several that were spread orally on the Underground Railroad for years before finally being recorded (Eaklor, "Songs of *The Emancipation Car*" 98–101).

"Away to Canada" is one of J. Simpson's songs written for the Underground Railroad and published in *The Emancipation Car*. Only the lyrics were published, but it is clear from the chorus that its tune was "O, Susanna," a well-known minstrel song. This song is unique because it is a narrative of a fleeing slave rather than a call to arms for abolitionists or a simple bemoaning of conditions. It was meant to be sung as people actually escaped from the South, giving them a simple story to which they might relate. Simpson even incorporates the name "Susanna" as the wife the protagonist of the song left in order to run away to freedom, creating a strong link between the original lyrics and his own. However, his new lyrics appeal powerfully to pathos, begging for "pity" and mourning that his wife is still stuck in slavery. The juxtaposition of a happy man going to Alabama in the original lyrics against a grief-stricken man fleeing to Canada in Simpson's is striking. The traditional song celebrates a happy man playing a "banjo on [his] knee" while Simpson's man pleads to God to help him get to Canada "where colored men are free" (63–67). Additionally, in the sixth stanza the narrator explains that even Ohio with its strong Free Soil movement is not at all as free as it appears to be for slaves.

Unlike many abolitionist songs, this one does not have a happy or hopeful ending. The lyrics state the facts of the narrative exactly as they are and do not speculate on the future, but rather allow the singer to reflect on the dire situation. The narrative style of the song is also reflected in the sheer number of stanzas in the work (eight verses with eight modified refrains). This song was clearly meant to take a long time to sing, and each passing stanzas adds to the empathy the reader feels for the protagonist. He struggles through the wilderness, passing tree after tree, just as the singer repeats verse after verse with an unchanging tune. The familiarity of the tune combined with the unreality of a situation in which a man must run away, leaving his wife in slavery, gives the song a deeper meaning from its complexity of references.

While books and pamphlets were clearly a large part of the dissemination of antislavery music, individual songs often found their way into newspapers, where they were accessible to another audience. "America!—A Parody" was submitted to the *Liberator* newspaper by a person writing under the name "Theta" in 1839. Songs such as these mark the beginning of emboldened abolitionists, willing to mock even as patriotic a song as "America" to get their message of freedom across to fellow readers or singers.⁷ This song is very emotionally charged, especially in the sections concerning the "rights" of men. The wordplay is incredibly clever; the original lyrics are

kept as often as possible, and only key action words and phrases are replaced with quite demonstrative words:

My country! 'tis of thee,
Strong hold of Slavery—
Of thee I sing:
Land where my fathers died;
Where men *man's* rights *deride*;
From every mountain-side,
Thy deeds shall ring.

My native country! thee—
Where all men are born free,
If *white* their skin:
I love thy hills and dales,
Thy mounts and pleasant vales;
But hate thy *negro* sales,
As foulest sin. (Theta 72)

Theta seems to be especially bitter about the inconsistencies between one of the nation's most popular patriotic songs and the way the country's views of "freedom" actually worked. Despite the song's dire implications, the last stanza looks hopefully toward the future: "soon may our land be bright."

This piece was prefaced by a note explaining Theta's reasoning for rewriting the words of a famous patriotic song to better fit what she saw actually occurring in the world, emphasizing the more scholarly form and audience for newspaper publications of music hoping to invoke social change. Any educated reader learning songs from the newspaper would likely have more background in music and current events than a person simply singing out of a lyrics book. Even though there is no written notation for this piece, "America" is a tune that would be quite familiar to readers, even without the strikingly similar structure between the two versions. In addition, Theta added italic emphasis to important words in the lyrics where perhaps accents might have been printed if there had been space to publish with musical notation or if she had been speaking aloud.

Theta was not alone in rewriting the lyrics to this popular patriotic song. Jairus Lincoln did so as well in his "Song of the Alien American." This parody takes a much darker turn after the traditional opening line graphically describing that "Our flesh has long been torn, / E'en from our bones" (17). Lincoln used the tune "America" again for his song "Fourth of July in Alabama." This piece does not parody the original lyrics as in the two aforementioned songs, but rather sets the scene of the life of the slave. Lincoln describes the song as "the meditation and feelings of the poor Slave, as he toils and sweats over the hoe and cotton hook, while his master, neighbors, and neighbor's children are commemorating that day, which brought life to the whites and death to the poor African" (40). The vivid picture that he paints seems to embody *enargeia*, which, as Quintilian describes, makes "emotions . . . no less actively stirred than if we were present at the actual occurrence" (Corbett and Connors 11). This stirring of the emotions with vivid language describing the hardships of slaves concurrent with white people celebrating their freedom is greatly enhanced by setting the lyrics to such a patriotic tune as "America."

The transmission of abolitionist songs was not limited to notated and printed musical rhetoric. In fact, singing groups actively spread these songs through performance. In the early nineteenth

century, family singing troupes that toured from town to town giving live performances were incredibly popular. The Hutchinson family singers were one such group; they started as mere entertainers but then began to spread the message of abolition through songs they wrote, performed, and published, particularly in the 1840s.⁸ While the Hutchinsons were established popular singers before they became abolitionist performers, their names have now become inextricably intertwined with the abolition movement (Gac). Because of the Hutchinsons' popularity, abolitionist songs by their group were published to sheet music, which then spread even to private dinner parties, where young girls were expected to entertain guests at the piano.

"Get off the Track" was written by Jesse Hutchinson in 1844 and soon became a sheet music hit. The song was based on "Old Dan Tucker," a popular minstrel tune. The internal ironic qualities of creating a song to promote the emancipation of slaves from a song meant to mock them is stunning. By converting a minstrel song, which would originally have been sung in blackface, into an honorable song, Hutchinson depicts how slaves can overcome their struggles, just as the song overcame its base roots. This music with new lyrics was sold alone in sheet music form rather than only in collections with other pieces. The catchy tune was often performed by the Hutchinsons, a family of well-dressed white singers acting as models to show that good Christian families supported the cause.

The text of "Get off the Track" repeats itself in short, exclaimed phrases like "roll it along" sung on the same pitch, like a train relentlessly chugging forward. The driving speed creates energy in the words as well as accentuating the importance of phrases. This analogy is used effectively throughout the piece to encourage action and movement. The lyrics also accentuate the idea of a "soon to be happy nation," provided that people do indeed stop blocking the track of progress (Hutchinson). "Get off the Track" contains a visual component as well as text and musical notation. The cover shows the locomotive "Liberator" pulling the car "Immediate Emancipation" surrounded by white judges and gentlemen. This etching offers clear encouragement to take up the abolitionist cause.

These diverse sources offer a multitude of rhetorical songs to study. From white ministers to children to fugitive slaves to family pop singers, large demographics were involved with the songs of abolition. Abolitionists carefully picked their audience of common people and children and strove to make their rhetoric accessible to that audience. Whether the songs were passed on orally or compiled in various print media—as a large book with notation, as a book containing only lyrics, in a newspaper, or as individually sold sheet music—they circulated the country, and singing was used to show support for the cause. While many lyrics were original, some were set to new music and others were assigned to preexisting tunes, particularly hymn tunes. Composers always took care to choose melodies and voicings that would make their audience comfortable as well as establish points in favor of the antislavery movement. Within this group of new lyrics assigned to preexisting tunes exist parodies, which alter the original song structures only slightly in order to point out deviations in society that were mirrored by the songs. However, all of these song types were unified under the theme of abolition, pointing out injustice, looking for a brighter future, and creating social change in the United States of America. The wealth of antislavery songs discussed in this survey offers rhetorical scholars a variety of directions in which they may deepen their study of the rhetoric of the abolitionist movement.

Notes

My research was funded by a University of Missouri–Kansas City Students Engaged in Artistic and Academic Research (SEARCH) Undergraduate Research Grant. I am grateful for the opportunity to review the musical holdings at the Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

¹According to Cynthia Selfe, “The term *multimodal* is used by The New London Group to indicate the range of modalities—printed words, still and moving images, sound, speech, and music, color—that authors combine as they design texts” (48).

²In fact, altering songs and hymns in order to influence audiences was already an established tradition in the nineteenth century (Eaklor, *American Antislavery Songs* xxxv).

³The “Gloria Patri,” or “Glory Be to the Father,” is a common doxology used by many churches.

⁴Few songs from more “adult” antislavery books are nearly as specific in tempo or dynamic markings as the ones in *The Anti-Slavery Picknick*.

⁵For example, the well-known *Sacred Harp* hymnals already had been published in both white and “colored” versions. Use of the word “harp” may have been a reference to the biblical Psalm writer David, who played the harp.

⁶Lincoln, of Massachusetts, was influenced by the success of other movements’ music, citing the temperance movement as a particular role model: “If the progress of *that* reform is indebted in any degree, to the aid of *music*, will not the *Anti-Slavery cause* be advanced by the same means?” (3).

⁷This parody of patriotic texts is certainly not unique of the abolition movement. Notably, the parody of the Declaration of Independence at Seneca Falls is a prime example of other movements’ success with this technique.

⁸Youth singing groups, such as the Garrison Juvenile Choir, founded by African American woman Susan Paul, also sang abolitionist songs, both at antislavery society rallies and in the community (Lois Brown 60–61).

Works Cited

- Bacon, Jacqueline. *The Humblest May Stand Forth: Rhetoric, Empowerment, and Abolition*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2002. Print.
- Branham, Robert James, and Stephen J. Hartnett. *Sweet Freedom’s Song*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. Print.
- Brown, Lois A. “William Lloyd Garrison and Emancipatory Feminism in Nineteenth-Century America.” *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: History, Legacy, and Memory*. Ed. James Brewer Stewart. New Haven: Yale UP, 2008. 41–76. Print.
- Brown, William W. *The Anti-Slavery Harp: A Collection of Songs*. Boston: Abner Forbes, 1848. Print.
- Chapman, Maria Weston. *Songs of the Free, and Hymns of Christian Freedom*. Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836. Print.
- Clark, George W. *The Harp of Freedom*. New York: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1856. Print.
- . *The Liberty Minstrel*. New York: Leavitt & Alden, 1844. Print.
- Collins, John A. *The Anti-Slavery Picknick: A Collection of Speeches, Poems, Dialogues and Songs Intended for Use in Schools and Anti-Slavery Meetings*. Boston: H. W. Williams, 1842. Print.
- Corbett, Edward P., and Robert J. Connors. *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.
- Eaklor, Vicki. *American Antislavery Songs: A Collection and Analysis*. Westport: Greenwood, 1988. Print.
- . “The Songs of *The Emancipation Car*: Variations on an Abolitionist Theme.” *Missouri Historical Society Bulletin* 36 (1980): 92–102. Print.
- Gac, Scott. *Singing for Freedom: The Hutchinson Family Singers and the Nineteenth-Century Culture of Reform*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2007. Print.
- Garrison, William Lloyd. *A Selection of Anti-Slavery Hymns for the Use of Friends of Emancipation*. Boston: Garrison & Knapp, 1834. Print.
- Gilmore, H. S. *A Collection of Miscellaneous Songs from the Liberty Minstrel, Mason’s Juvenile Harp, &c. for the Use of the Cincinnati High School*. Cincinnati: A. S. Sparhawk, 1846. Print.
- Hatfield, Edwin F. *Freedom’s Lyre; or, Psalms, Hymns, and Sacred Songs for the Slave and His Friends*. New York: S. W. Benedict, 1840. Print.
- Hutchinson, Jesse, Jr. “Get off the Track.” Boston: Jesse Hutchinson, Jr., 1844. Print.
- King, D. S. *Liberty and Antislavery Song Book*. Boston: Kidder & Wright, 1842. Print.
- Lincoln, Jairus. *Anti-Slavery Melodies: For the Friends of Freedom*. Hingham: Elijah B. Gill, 1843. Print.
- Mason, Lowell. *Hymns of the Kingdom of God*. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1910. Print.
- Reese, William J. *The Origins of the American High School*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1995. Print.
- Selfe, Cynthia. “The Movement of Air, the Breath of Meaning: Aural and Multimodal Composing.” *Digital Media Project*. Department of English, The Ohio State University, Mar. 2007. Web. 29 May 2009.

- Simpson, J. *The Emancipation Car; Being an Original Composition of Anti-Slavery Ballads*. Zanesville: Sullivan & Brown, 1874. Print.
- Spencer, Jon Michael. *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990. Print.
- Spillers, Hortense J. "The Crisis of the Black Intellectual." *A Companion to African-American Philosophy*. Ed. Tommy L. Lott and John P. Pittman. Malden: Blackwell, 2006. 87–106. Print.
- Theta. "America!—A Parody." *Liberator* 3 May 1839, 72. Print.