

Advocates of Freedom

From the 1830s to the 1890s, scores of Black abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, Moses Roper, and Ellen Craft traveled to England, Ireland, Scotland, and parts of rural Wales to educate the public on slavery. By sharing their oratorical, visual, and literary testimony to transatlantic audiences, African American activists galvanized the antislavery movement, which had severe consequences for former enslavers, proslavery defenders, white racists, and ignorant publics. Their journeys highlighted not only their death-defying escapes from bondage but also their desire to speak out against slavery and white supremacy on foreign soil. Hannah-Rose Murray explores the radical transatlantic journeys formerly enslaved individuals made to the British Isles, and how their presence sheds light on our understanding of the abolitionist movement. She uncovers the reasons why activists visited certain locations, how they adapted to the local political and social climate, and what impact their activism had on British society.

Hannah-Rose Murray is Early Career Leverhulme Research Fellow in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, researching formerly enslaved oratorical, visual, and literary testimony in the British Isles during the nineteenth century.

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African American Transatlantic Abolitionism in the British Isles

HANNAH-ROSE MURRAY

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I will never relax my efforts in assisting to put down that accursed system of human suffering, degradation, and torture – slavery!
James Watkins (1862)

This book is dedicated to the formerly enslaved African Americans who rode across the waves to the British Isles. They traveled thousands of miles, wrote hundreds of letters or narratives, and lectured to millions of people, for hours on end. In the process, they often pushed their bodies (and voices) to breaking point. Some are already known to us whereas others are lost to history, waiting for their testimony to be recovered.

Unfortunately, this book can only capture a fraction of their extensive, exhaustive, and unrelenting crusades against slavery and white supremacy.

I dedicate it to their activism, testimony, and, above all, their memory.

TRIGGER WARNING

Throughout the pages of this monograph, I make reference to or discuss racism, racial violence, trauma, rape, and torture. A content warning is important and necessary, since I have repeated verbatim some of the excruciatingly painful memories shared by formerly enslaved people. Some of this material will be emotionally challenging to deal with and may be potentially triggering.