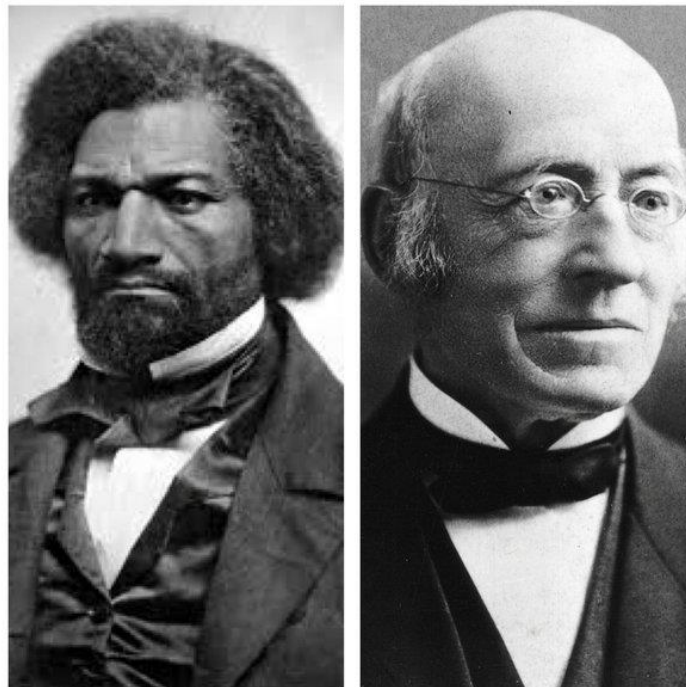


## Frederick Douglass in Buffalo September 15 – 16, 1847

The September 15, 1847 edition of Buffalo's *Commercial Advertiser* announced in its *Home Matters* section:

Anti-Slavery Meeting at Protection Hall, adjoined to the Post Office. –Wm. L. Garrison, Frederick Douglass and Charles L. Remond speak today and tomorrow, beginning this morning.

Unfortunately, William Lloyd Garrison was not able to attend. He had become ill during the Ohio portion of the lecture tour and was recovering in Cleveland. This tour, which included Pennsylvania, Ohio and Upstate New York, was historically significant in that it was the last time in which Garrison and Douglass worked the abolitionist road together. They had a falling out in their relationship which never did recover.



### Background

Frederick Douglass, just a few weeks after returning from a successful sojourn of nearly two years in Great Britain, joined William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Lenox Remond and others on an abolitionist speaking tour through Pennsylvania, Ohio and Upstate New York. The work of agitation was centered on the state of Ohio, where Abby Kelley, Stephen Foster and others had

formed a grassroots abolitionist organization ready for harvest. Kelley felt it was critical that Garrison make an appearance in the state.

The tour began in August 1847 with racist hostility in Harrisburg, PA. The Pennsylvania capital had not previously seen a black speaker. A mob disrupted their meeting on August 7<sup>th</sup> with nasty shouts, projectiles and firecrackers. Douglass was shouted down while speaking and hit with a brickbat while Garrison's head was spattered with sulfurous eggs.

However, Ohio proved to be a more welcoming community. Between August 15<sup>th</sup> and September 12<sup>th</sup>, Douglass and Garrison visited 15 northeastern Ohio towns, speaking more than 30 times in that span. Thousands came out to hear the famous abolitionists, with many of the meetings held in the "great Oberlin Tent". This huge flexible structure could hold as many as four thousand people under it, giving the meetings that classic feel of an evangelical revival.

The punishing schedule took its toll on both men. Douglass repeatedly suffered from a loss of voice. At one point, he was "entirely exhausted and voiceless" and attempted to fight it by wrapping a damp cloth around his neck.

In mid-September, after several meetings in Cleveland, Garrison collapsed from exhaustion; possibly suffering from typhoid fever. He agonized through three dreadful days of chills and fever, and for several weeks stayed behind in Cleveland.

Douglass, meanwhile, continued the tour into Upstate New York and Buffalo.

### **Douglass in Buffalo**

Charles Lenox Remond and Frederick Douglass arrived in Buffalo for a two day event beginning on September 15<sup>th</sup>. The Buffalo *Commercial Advertiser* supplied some information on it:

The Abolitionist meeting was well attended last night. Some of the speakers made eloquent addresses. The speech of Douglass contained several passages of this kind, but between them and the drollery with which they were interspersed, there was by no means the proper distance - the sloping margin as it were - which good taste requires. Yet he spoke very effectively. There was a long debate between the Abolitionists *par excellence* and the Liberty party men - the Abolitionists contending for a dissolution of the Union, which the others disapprove.

The "Abolitionists" referred to were the Garrisonians' Remond and Douglass. Their argument, under Garrison's leadership, was to have "No Union with slaveholders" and "no compromise with slavery", thus presenting secession from the slaveholding states as a measure to be considered. The Liberty party, although a very weak third party, had a strong presence in Upstate New York. They were as anti-slavery as the "Abolitionists" but preferred a different path; a political undertaking which would make such a dent in the two major parties - the Democrats and the Whigs - that at least one of them would need to embrace the anti-slavery movement.

### **Consequences of the Tour**

One major significance of this lecture tour was the loss of friendship between William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. Since 1841, when Douglass first appeared at an anti-slavery meeting, Garrison had taken him under his wing and acted as a mentor. But the protégé rose to a superstar level and became more than a symbol. He developed into an alpha male of the movement, as was his mentor, and craved an independent role. It was a natural progression and a break-up between the two was inevitable.

The final straw took place when Garrison became ill and was left behind in Cleveland. Douglass continued on to Buffalo and Syracuse. Garrison was hurt when he realized that his protégé failed to inquire as to his health. He then learned second hand that, reversing an earlier decision, Douglass was now intent on starting a newspaper of his own. His ambition knew no bounds. The idea of his own newspaper with himself as editor drove him to seek a new location outside of New England. Rumors had spread that he was setting up in Cleveland but ultimately, it was Rochester, N. Y. that became Douglass's new home.

### **Significance of the Buffalo Visit**

The tour in general, and the Buffalo stop in particular, represent the last time that Douglass argued so strongly in favor of the Garrisonian mode of abolitionism. Moving forward, his views began to incorporate a wider area of discussion. While not completely erasing the moral suasion" idea, he would now include the use of politics, and even violence, as a legitimate movement to end slavery.

A second significance to Douglass's appearance in Buffalo was not so much for what he said or even for his presence. He had made his way to the city at least once previously and would return several more times in the future. However, this time he and Garrison did not come together, albeit due to the latter's illness. But Douglass, whether purposely or not, took the opportunity to break away from his mentor and the influence of the New England Garrisonians. This was the beginning of Frederick Douglass becoming his own man in the abolitionist community – thinking, planning, writing and speaking as his own man.

### **Sources**

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