

Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)

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ASALH announces the publication of the latest issue in the second century of *The Journal of African American History*.

Special Issue

"Rediscovering and Reassessing Frederick Douglass's Novella

***The Heroic Slave*"**

Guest Editors John R. McKivigan and Jane E. Schultz

Contents

The Journal of African American History's (JAAH) Winter 2017 issue focuses on the latest edition of Frederick Douglass's only fiction work *The Heroic Slave* (1853). The Frederick Douglass Papers project at Indiana-Purdue University in Indianapolis, with John McKivigan as Editor, held a national conference in February 2014 devoted to this literary work and assembled historians and literary scholars to offer their views and assessments. This JAAH Special Issue includes the latest and well-documented perspectives of these researchers on Douglass's militant novella.

In "The Nonfiction Madison Washington Compared to the Character in in Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* and Similar Civil War-Era Fiction," historian Stanley Harrold relates the story of enslaved African Americans' revolt, led by Madison Washington, aboard the *Creole* after it sailed south from Virginia in November 1841; and their liberation upon arriving in British territory in the Bahamas. Based on published and unpublished accounts of the incident, Harrold examines the versions of the revolt offered by Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Lydia Marie Child in their fictional works. Harrold found that the fictional works seemed to capture the essence of the revolt, even when the account failed to correspond with the historical evidence.

Historian L. Diane Barnes in "Insurrection as Righteous Rebellion in *The Heroic Slave* and Beyond" examines the beliefs about slavery and injustice found in the statements attributed to

African and African American insurrectionists in the antebellum era, including Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner. In the early 19th century, proponents of slavery focused on what they claimed were “natural laws,” while the enslaved and antislavery activists emphasized each human being’s “natural rights.” Barnes identifies the consistency in the appeals to the “natural right to freedom” proclaimed by slave insurrectionists and their defenders.

Historian John McKivigan and archivist Rebecca A. Patillo in “*Autographs for Freedom and Reaching a New Abolitionist Audience*” describe the historical background for the publication of the antislavery volume that included Douglass’s *The Heroic Slave*. Pursued as a means to raise funds for abolitionist groups, the contributors to *Autographs for Freedom* (1853) were prominent figures nationally and internationally, and the volume reflected the increased militancy among long-time and recent adherents to the antislavery cause in the United States.

Literary scholar Jane E. Schultz has identified and traced the idea of finding shelter and safety in “Gimme Shelter: The Ironies of Refuge in Frederick Douglass’s *The Heroic Slave*.” In the transit from slavery to freedom to recapture and revolt, Madison Washington was often offered shelter as he tried to claim his freedom, according to Douglass’s story. Shultz assesses the irony in the failure to find a permanent place to live, even among those who promised shelter. Frederick Douglass and Madison Washington, as fugitives, exemplify the difficulty in finding shelter for those fleeing unjust enslavement.

In his commentary “Contextualizing and Rereading *The Heroic Slave*,” literary scholar Robert S. Levine remarks on the closeness of literary analysis to historical interpretation in general, and emphasizes that both the historians and literary scholars contribute to a larger discourse framed by specific literary structures. He believes that these historical and literary interpretations confirm that *The Heroic Slave* is an important text in the Douglass’s oeuvre and in 19th century African American and American literature.

The JAAH Fall 2016 issue is available for purchase from ASALH in hard copy, and for use in courses through Publications Director, Karen May, at kmay@asalh.net. The digital version will soon be available through “JSTOR Current Journals”; please check and make sure your university library subscribes to the program.

Be sure your membership is up to date. Forthcoming JAAH issues will examine African American migrations during and after the Civil War, international reparations campaigns, and 300 years of the African American experience in New Orleans.

For more information, go to the JAAH website: www.jaah.org; or contact Sylvia Cyrus, JAAH Managing Editor, executive.director@asalh.net.