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Black Abolitionists of Central New York: An Intimate Circle of Activism

Bonnie Ryan
Syracuse University

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Franz Leopold Ranke, the Ranke Library at Syracuse, and the Open Future of Scientific History
By Siegfried Baur, Post-Doctoral Fellow
Thyssen Foundation of Cologne, Germany
Baur pays tribute to "the father of modern history," whose twenty-ton library crossed the Atlantic in 1888, arriving safely at Syracuse University. After describing various myths about Ranke, Baur recounts the historian's struggle to devise, in the face of accepted fictions about the past, a source-based approach to the study of history.

Librarianship in the Twenty-First Century
By Patricia M. Battin, Former Vice President and University Librarian, Columbia University
Battin urges academic libraries to "imagine the future from a twenty-first century perspective." To flourish in a digital society, libraries must transform themselves, intentionally and continuously, through managing information resources, redefining roles of information professionals, and nourishing future leaders.

Manuscripts Processing at Syracuse: An Insider's View
By Kathleen Manwaring, Manuscripts Processor
Syracuse University Library
After explaining the specialness of special collections, Manwaring compares the processing of books and serials, with their preselected, preorganized content, to the processing of manuscripts, which "reflect the chaos inherent in real life." The latter requires "total immersion" in order to "discover and reflect the underlying structure of the individual's life experience" while making his or her papers accessible to scholars.

African Americans and Education: A Study of Arna Bontemps
By Joseph Downing Thompson Jr., Director
John Hope Franklin Research Center for African and African-American Documentation, Duke University
Using the life and work of Arna Bontemps as a case in point, Thompson exam­inies the relationship between the formation of racial identity and the culture of educational institutions themselves, not merely the intellectual, cultural, and political traditions imparted by them.

Black Abolitionists of Central New York: An Intimate Circle of Activism
By Bonnie Ryan, Associate Librarian 101
Reference Department, Syracuse University Library
In the spring of 1999 Ryan curated an exhibition in E. S. Bird Library titled “Intimate Circles of Activism: Abolitionists of Central New York, 1830–1860.” This article, an offshoot of the exhibition, focuses on letters to activist and philanthropist Gerrit Smith from certain African American abolitionists.

Stephen Crane’s Inamorata: The Real Amy Leslie
By Charles Yanikoski, Independent Scholar 117
Harvard, Massachusetts
In 1896 Stephen Crane had a love affair with a woman named Amy Leslie. Was she a denizen of the New York underworld, as many scholars have maintained? Or was she, as Yanikoski argues, a Chicago actress, theater critic, and celebrity?

Some Unpublished Oscar Wilde Letters
By Ian Small, Professor of English Literature 135
University of Birmingham, England
Oscar Wilde scholar Ian Small provides the historical context of four Wilde letters held in the Syracuse University Library.

Cultural History and Comics Auteurs: Cartoon Collections at Syracuse University Library
By Chad Wheaton, Doctoral Student in History, Syracuse University 143
With Carolyn A. Davis, Reader Services Librarian Syracuse University Library Department of Special Collections
After discussing the importance of the comics as a subject for scholarly study, Wheaton describes selected cartoonists and genres represented in Syracuse University Library’s cartoon collection. Carolyn Davis provides a complete list of the Library’s cartoon holdings.

Marya Zaturenska’s Depression Diary, 1933–1935
By Mary Beth Hinton, Editor 165
Syracuse University Library Associates Courier
Selections from the diary of the poet Marya Zaturenska reveal her struggles as a woman and an artist, and provide glimpses of the intellectual scene in New York and London during the depression.

News of Syracuse University Library and of Library Associates

Post-Standard Award Citation, 1998, for David H. Stam
Post-Standard Award Citation, 1999, for Dorothea P. Nelson
Post-Standard Award Citation, 2000, for Kathleen W. Rossman

Recent Acquisitions:
- Thomas Moore Papers
- Kat Ran Press (Michael Russem)
- Margaret Bourke-White Photographs
- The Werner Seligmann Papers


In Memoriam
Monrovia, Liberia, August 18, 1835

My Dear Friend,

As the vessel will not sail as soon as we expected therefore I will improve the opportunity to write unto you some more of the sad state of Africa. The Colonization Society is continually sending out here old men, women and children then say how many we have sent to Africa and one half of them do not live out their six months and the others generally are sick from one to two years and all that time they have to be begging from the Public for something to eat and often beg and never receive and I do affirm to say that in this way the Colonization Society is running themselves needlessly unto debt. . . .

This letter was addressed to Gerrit Smith (1797–1874), a wealthy landowner and social activist from Peterboro, New York. Its author, Ephraim Titler, was a free African American employed by the American Colonization Society to guide other African Americans to Liberia and to serve as a missionary there. Titler's

Bonnie Ryan is a librarian in the Reference Department of Syracuse University Library with responsibilities in the areas of African and African American Studies and Anthropology. She is also a doctoral student in Syracuse University’s Department of Anthropology, specializing in historical archaeology. Her research interest is the African Diaspora, specifically the lives of free blacks in the middle to late nineteenth century.

1. In this and subsequent letters I have preserved the original spelling and punctuation.
2. Founded in 1816, the American Colonization Society was the first nationwide organization to work against slavery. The published objective of the society was to “Christianize” the Africans, and its plan was to return free African Americans to their “homeland” by recolonizing them in western Africa. Many well known abolitionists were once members of the society, among them William Lloyd Garrison and Gerrit Smith. Most African American activists, on the other hand, thought that the colonization movement denied the American heritage of African Americans born in the United States, whether slave or free. Therefore, they rejected the movement’s tenets.

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Library Associates Courier
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letter is one of almost 300 abolitionists' letters among the Gerrit Smith Papers housed in Syracuse University Library's Department of Special Collections. This article will include excerpts from some of these letters.

On 18 February 1999 the Library opened an exhibition titled "Intimate Circles of Activism: Abolitionists of Central New York, 1830–1860." Most of the items in the exhibition came from the Gerrit Smith Papers. That collection includes letters, business transactions, pamphlets on scores of social issues, newspapers, photographs, maps, and other documentary material. As curator of the exhibition, I drew primarily on abolitionists' letters because they bring to a personal level the history of slavery and antislavery during the nineteenth century. This article will focus on some of Gerrit Smith's African American correspondents.

This article is not the first to focus on these letters. In the Journal of Negro History, Benjamin Quarles points out that Smith, more than any other white abolitionist of the times was "especially sensitive to the cause of the Negro . . ." Quarles notes that, with a few exceptions, Smith received at least one letter from every literate African American of the times.

Quarles notes that his "acute social consciousness and his generosity made Smith a target for advocates of nearly every contemporary movement in the North designed to promote human betterment." Gerrit Smith indeed adopted many causes: temperance, women's rights, and land reform, as well as abolitionism. He served as a conductor of the Underground Railroad, opening his

3. A catalog of that exhibition, Intimate Circles of Activism: Abolitionists of Central New York: 1830–1870, was published in the summer of 1999 by Syracuse University Library.

4. The Gerrit Smith Papers are part of a larger collection, the Smith Family Papers, which includes documents of Gerrit's father, Peter Smith. The latter attained the family fortune by working with John Jacob Astor in the fur trades and post-Revolutionary War land speculation. Other sources for the exhibition were the general collections of E. S. Bird Library and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library, as well as the Onondaga Historical Society.

home to refugees. He briefly ran and later supported educational programs for promising young African American men, and deeded 140,000 acres of land to hundreds of African American families. He was a founder and presidential candidate of the Liberty Party, its single platform being abolition. He supported John Brown's attack at Harper's Ferry and participated in the "Jerry Rescue," which took place in Syracuse, New York.

The activities of abolitionists in Syracuse and the surrounding area were so well known that when Daniel Webster paid a visit to Syracuse in 1851, he warned the citizens that failing to follow the federally mandated Fugitive Slave Law could lead to dire consequences. In defiance of Webster's speech, a group of prominent abolitionists decided to take public action—among them Gerrit Smith, Samuel May, Jermain Loguen, and Samuel Ringgold Ward. This group prevented the capture and kidnapping of William "Jerry" Henry, a self-liberated African American working in Syracuse who was apprehended by slave hunters. The group freed Jerry Henry from his captors and helped him to escape to Canada. The "Jerry Rescue" helped to solidify the abolition movement in the area during the 1850s.

As a member of the "intimate circle" of abolitionists, Smith was in frequent contact with many African Americans, free and self-liberated, male and female, who were active in the antislavery and abolition movements. The majority of the males were clergymen who used their pulpits or their missionary assignments to give voice to the abolitionist cause, or editors like Frederick Douglass and Samuel Ringgold Ward, who promulgated their beliefs through their newspapers. African American women activists were often teachers or lecturers speaking about abolition as well as issues such as temperance. Women activists also worked through numerous social and religious organizations within their communities.

The letters in the Smith collection portray in painful detail the effect of the American slave system on all concerned, enslaved and free, black and white. They span a period from the early 1830s, when the abolition movement was at its height, to the 1870s, when it subsided. The goals of the movement evolved from one of colonization and exile of African Americans from the United States
and a gradual dissolution of slavery, to a more radical activist philosophy calling for the immediate eradication of slavery and the recognition that African Americans are part of American society.

Following are excerpts of letters from Ephraim Titler, Frederick Douglass, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, Jermain Loguen, and Edmonia Highgate.

**EPHRAIM TITLER**

Titler’s first letter to Smith in the 1830s describes the problems encountered by the American colonists in Africa. Titler’s observations aroused Smith’s misgivings about the American Colonization Society’s methods and motives:

*Monrovia, August the 7th 1835*

My Dear Friend,

I take this opportunity to inform you that I am yet alive and not being able to use mine own hand I borrow another to Answer yours It was your request that I would write to you a long letter of all that I have past through while in Africa That would take too much time for the ship is now ready to sail I have visited a goodly number of the native towns to see the Situation of Africa I find it totally given to idolatry O Africa poor Africa the sad state of Africa We want help in Africa and also I have visited every settlement under protection of the Colonization Society.

A subsequent letter shows that in 1837 the slave trade was alive and well in Africa.

*Edina, June 9, 1837*

I write to let you know that the slave trade is carried on in an rapid state in this country The Long Bush Country people will steal a man & bring him down to the half bush then will let the Bassa people take him to the Spanyard In the town where I am station, I as a teacher, it is about 50 miles back in the interior. . . . men came into the Town with a slave They said they was going to stay in that town that night It was made known to me. I went [?] said, is this a slave. he replied it is. said I what are you going to do with him. He said he was going to sell him to the Spanyard. I said how would you like to be sold under Cruel White Men. he replied this is Country trash. The king said the wite men cum hear & buy them he said if I want to stop them, we must stop The white man from Coming hear to buy them and then we cannot sell them. Amen, say I. Break up the market & the slave trade will die of itself. This is my own hand. I remain yours.
The State of South Carolina.

KNOW ALL MEN, by these Presents, THAT

We, the President, Directors &c. of the Bank of the United States, by Hugh Johnson, President of the Office of the said Bank in Charleston,

for and in consideration of the sum of

Eleven Hundred and Thirty six Dollars

to be in hand paid, at and before the sealing and delivering of these Presents, by Edward Pinckney

(to the receipt whereof we do hereby acknowledge) have bargained and sold, and by these Presents, do bargain, sell and deliver, the said

Five Negroes named Pradelphia, Doris, Libby, Polly, & Slave

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said negroes

with the future issues thereof, unto the said

Edward Pinckney

executors, administrators, and assigns, his and their only proper use and

behavior, forever. AND on the said

Edward Pinckney

executors and administrators, the said bargained premises, unto the said

Edward Pinckney

executors and administrators, and assigns, from and against all persons shall and will

warrant, and forever defend by these Presents.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my Hand and Seal

dated at Charleston, on the fifth day of March — in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and twenty seven, and in the fifty first

year of the Independence of the United States of America.

Signed, sealed and delivered.

For Bank of United States.

James Dick
Presid. Office Bill Scts.
FREDERICK DOUGLASS

There are more than 100 letters from Douglass in the Gerrit Smith Papers. The following letter reveals Douglass’s difficulties as editor of the *North Star*, which Smith often served as a patron.

Rochester, 30th March, 1849

My dear Sir,

You kindly enquire if the North Star is well supported. I am sorry to say it is not. I will explain the reasons. Many of my best friends, especially in the east, look upon it as an unnecessary, if not a useless instrumentality for promoting the cause of the slave and believe, I would be far more servicable as a public speaker than I can be as an editor. I started the paper against their wishes and against their advice, they feel therefore little or no interest in its support. Besides this, the paper is not a party paper and looks with grateful friendship upon all classes of ab­ litionists and is disposed to denounce as knaves those who believe that voting is a duty—the failure to do this is perhaps the most grievous omission of which the paper is guilty in the eyes especially of my Boston friends. On the other hand, the paper is not enough of a Liberty Party paper or in other words it is too strongly Garrisonian to be looked upon with much favor by Liberty Party men. . . . Whether the paper is doing good or not, perhaps is not for me to say but I believe it is doing good. The simple fact that such a paper exists is servicable to the cause of my disposed [despised?] and maligned race.

The dear little boy of ours whom I spoke in the paper today as being sick seems much better this morning—We have also a dear little girl under our roof—only one week old—Mrs. Douglass is doing very well—up nearly all day yesterday.

In the early 1850s, Frederick Douglass ended his relationship with William Garrison, who had been his closest ally as well as a father figure. McFeely writes in his biography *Frederick Douglass* that one of the reasons for the break was Douglass’s desire to start his own newspaper, an ambition the Garrisonians tried unsuccessfully to discourage. 6 But Douglass also disagreed with the Garrisonians on many other points, among them the claim that the Constitution was a proslavery document. Douglass later aligned himself with Gerrit Smith and others who believed that the Constitution could be construed as an antislavery document designed to promote freedom for all.

Rochester, January 31st, 1851
Gerrit Smith, Esqr.,

You will observe—by reading the resolutions adopted at the Annual meeting of the Western N.Y. Antislavery Society that I have already ceased to affirm the proslavery character of the Constitution. In drawing up the resolution for that meeting I purposely avoided all affirmation of the proslavery “compromises” as they are termed. . . .

Douglass worked with Smith on many projects: the editorship of Douglass’s paper, lectures and activities with the National and state-wide Anti-Slavery Societies, and recruitment of African American soldiers into the Civil War.

Rochester, March 6, 1863
Hon Gerrit Smith,

My Dear Sir: I have thought much of your letter to Mr. Clay expressing the wish that we should have at least one colored company of soldiers from the State of New York to make part of the regiment now forming in Readville Massachusetts. At first I have some ground for hesitation. Subsequent reflection and conversation with our friend Mr. George L. Stearns from Boston have convinced me that your suggestion should be carried out. I have therefore already let myself to the work of raising at least one company in this state for the war to be part of the first Colored regiment of Massachusetts. I have visited Buffalo and obtained seven good men. I spoke here last night and go thirteen. I shall visit Auburn, Syracuse, Ithaca. Charley my youngest son was the first to put his name down as one of the Company.

SAMUEL RINGGOLD WARD

Samuel Ringgold Ward was a minister, a lecturer, and an editor. A black man, he served as pastor to a white congregation in Cortland, New York—a unique phenomenon in nineteenth-century America—and as an agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society. Ward was one of the principal participants in the “Jerry Rescue,” after which he, like “Jerry” Henry, fled to Canada.

The letter below probably refers to an 1842 Supreme Court case, Prigg v. Pennsylvania. Prigg, a slavecatcher employed by a Maryland slaveowner, Margaret Ashmore, entrapped and kidnapped a self-liberated slave, Margaret Morgan, in Pennsylvania. Prigg shipped Morgan and her children back to slavery in Maryland, despite Pennsylvania’s state law, which forbade the kidnap-
ping of former slaves.⁷ The Supreme Court voted in favor of Prigg. Most likely Ward is expressing his outrage over the verdict:

April 18, 1842
Gerrit Smith Esq.

Dear Sir

The decision of the Supreme Court alarms me. I can see no kind of legal protection for any colored man's liberty. Everything is made as easy as possible for the kidnapper. How easy is it to seize a man & under pretense of carrying him before a [?] judge to take immediately south! Be a man [?] ever free he is liable to instant seizure & enslavement. Citizens in such a case do nothing but give physical resistance. This is contrary to the Constitution tending to dissolution & subjecting them to a heavy penalty. But few would run the risk. [?] have only to be informed that such is the Supreme Court's decision [?] & interpretation of the constitution & they are ready to aid the hyena. So do I view it.

And now a word in reference to my personal interest in the matter. . . . On a visit this summer, my mother placed facts in the possession of my wife which I never before knew . . . my being born free—legally—is not susceptible of proof. I am resolved therefore to remove immediately to Kingston, Canada.

The following letter reflects Ward's activity with the Liberty Party, which advocated the immediate eradication of slavery. Established in the early 1840s as a challenge to the Whig and Democratic Parties, the Liberty Party lasted only about ten years. In the letter Ward is trying to persuade Gerrit Smith to run for a Liberty Party office, which he did. Subsequently, Smith won a seat in Congress.

Cortlandville, August 14, 1848
Gerrit Smith Esq.

Dear Sir

[second page] Now let us have the call for a Liberty State Convention—Let us beseech Foote to resign, and instruct the National Committee to nominate Curtis. Let us urge the National Reformers to take him up and to go to the ballot box this fall, with hope, courage and consistency. . . . You must be our "Eternal Candidate."

Ward edited several newspapers, including the True American and the Impartial Citizen. In the following letter, he responded to Gerrit Smith's request that he edit a paper for the Liberty Party.

Cortlandville, July 26, 1849
G. Smith. Esq.

Dear Sir

[second page] I agree with you as to the demands of the Party, in respect to an organ. But you are aware that the sole reason of my not devoting myself to the editorial profession and cultivating the talents of an editor, is that I am compelled by the lack of funds, to travel in behalf of my own paper. Any other man, however talented, would in my circumstances, be obliged to do the same.

After living in Kingston, Ontario, for a number of years, Samuel Ringgold Ward was offered land in Jamaica and moved there in 1855.

HENRY HIGHLAND GARNET

Garnet’s parents were refugees from slavery and eventually settled in New York City. As a youth, Henry Highland Garnet served as a cabin boy on two voyages to Cuba. While he was on one of these voyages, his family was attacked by slave hunters and dispersed. In 1831 on his own, he studied at the High School for Colored Youth in New York City. He attended Noyes Academy in New Hampshire for a short time, but angry white citizens demolished the school. Garnet was critically injured defending the school and as a result was disabled for the rest of his life. He eventually found his way to the Oneida Institute, an interracial academy run by Beriah Green, a staunch abolitionist and good friend of Gerrit Smith. There he flourished. After graduating Garnet continued his abolition work. When Gerrit Smith allotted land grants to African Americans beginning in the 1840s, Garnet served as a land agent. He was politically active not only in the largely white abolitionist organizations, but in the black abolitionist organizations as well. He is best known for his 1843 speech in Buffalo calling for slaves to rise up and fight to the death for their freedom.

Gerrit Smith deeded 140,000 acres of land in the Adirondacks to African American families. Garnet among others served as a land agent for Smith, seeking out reputable families, and handling legal and monetary transactions. The letter below discusses such a transaction.

Troy, N.Y. Sept. 20, 1848
Gerrit Smith, Esq.

Dear Sir,

William Hill who turns out to be a notorious block head, refuses his deed—please transfer it to “Thomas Van Vechten of Stillwater [?] Co” . Please give his [deed] to “Joseph Wilson of Stillwater” Please send them by mail to Stillwater to the care [?] Jamesville Chesney. These are good men.

As a Presbyterian minister, Garnet was sent for a number of years to Jamaica, where he preached and lectured. He was among many African American abolitionists who traveled worldwide, often to Europe and Great Britain, to promote the cause of abolition. The letter below was written to Smith on Garnet's return from Jamaica.

Boston, March 25, 1856
40 Poplar Street

My dear Brother,

[second page] I am now quite well, the fever having left me as soon as I got into the Gulf of Florida. Should it be deemed prudent I hope to return in six or eight months. My friends of Boston have kindly invited me to give a course of Lectures—[?]—“Jamaica in Slavery and in Freedom” I should deem it a privilege to speak to my old friends in Western New York, should the way open and if you think it would be advisable to undertake such a thing have the kindness to inform me. . . . Everything looks pleasant in my dear native land. . . . The kind welcome too of my valued friend Douglass is gratifying in the extreme and is a source of great pleasure to me. I give him my heart and hand in the good cause.

In the next letter Garnet angrily responds to a meeting of black abolitionists held in Troy, New York, in support of the Republican Party. He is trying to enlist some funds from Smith to develop counter-measures against the Troy meeting. This letter reflects divisions within the ranks of the abolition movement.

New York, Sepr. 10, 1858
Gerrit Smith Esq.

My Dear Bro.

[second page] This is our proposition. To call a state convention of Colored people at Rochester at an early date—rallying the West, and your friends in New York and get your attendance to address us—and [?] show to the country that we will fight forever under the banner heading the illustrious name of “Gerrit Smith”. . . . For the sake of truth, Love, and justice we must redeem the honor of our people from this base, and wicked Committee of this miserable convention. In order to do this, we must have some means at hand—as the Republicans showered
their money upon the Troy meeting... Some of the best men in the state will cooperate. We will write to Douglass today—who did not attend the convention. Write me your opinion immediately and let me know your decision.

**JERMAINE LOGUEN**

Jermain Loguen was a self-liberated slave who became the principal conductor of the Underground Railroad in Syracuse. A graduate of Beriah Green’s Oneida Institute, he was a minister and bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. He also participated in the “Jerry Rescue” in October 1851.

Syracuse, Nov. 5, 1869
Hon. Gerrit Smith

Dear Friend,

I take the present opportunity of addressing you in behalf of our educational work in the South. We feel that our society is doing a good work with the means we have had at our command and as we are fully convinced that our plan is the true one for the benefit of freedmen at the South at present, we feel encouraged to work in this way.

Loguen’s home served as a way station to slaves on the Underground Railroad, and the man himself was an influential node in the network of abolitionists. He is believed to have introduced a good number of abolitionists to each other. Loguen probably introduced Harriet Tubman to William Seward, who eventually deeded land to her in Auburn, New York. There she made her home after the Civil War. In a previous *Courier* article Milton Sernett wrote of Loguen’s life as an abolitionist. Sernett rediscovered Loguen’s grave in Oakwood Cemetery, a large and beautiful Victorian-era cemetery in Syracuse, where many prominent Syracuse and New York state residents have been laid to rest.

**EDMONIA S. HIGHGATE**

In the following letter, Loguen introduces Gerrit Smith to Edmonia Highgate, a young African American teacher who wanted to become more active in the abolition movement through her ed-

ucational efforts among the Southern Freedmen and the temper­ance cause.

Syracuse, April 27, 1869
Hon. Gerrit Smith

My Dear Sir,

I write to introduce and commend to you my young friend Miss E. S. High­gate. She has been a very worthy worker both North and South among our Freed brethren. She enjoys the fullest confidence of this community and I must say she is much beloved by the freed men where she has been teaching in Nor­folk and other places. Give her all the help you can.

Edmonia Highgate, a Syracuse native, taught throughout the North and South for the Freedmen’s Bureau. She and her mother and sister were active in the abolition movement. Recommended by Jermain Loguen and Smith, she often lectured on the education and temperance movements. In the following letter, Highgate en­lists Smith’s help in finding her an audience for a lecture on tem­perance.

New York, June 10, 1870
Mr. and Mrs. Gerrit Smith.

Dear and highly esteemed friends

The good and gifted Theodore Tilton said to me not long since “You must write a lecture to interest the general public, deliver it as other lecturers do and you will then be in a way to secure the funds necessary to aid the cause to which you are devoted.” He furnished me ever so much aid in way of influence next fall.

And I need exalted surroundings and access to books in order to prepare my lecture, Light in Dark Places. I am just hesitating about accepting Mr. Smith’s most hospitable invitation “to come and see us” in order to do something to­ward utilizing Mr. Tilton’s advice.

Do you think I could advance the cause of Temperance by delivering an address on that subject whenever opportunity offered. None feels more deeply on that subject than I do. Please direct to me if you write, to 558 Broadway, Alb­bany, N.Y.

The following letter, from Edmonia Highgate to Gerrit Smith’s wife, is about Highgate’s sister’s marriage to a Mississippi State sen­ator, A. T. Morgan, a white man.

McGrawville, N.Y., September 2, 1870

[second page] They have their share of disagreeable things to contend with owing to the prejudice against the two races intermarrying—They are however so
admirably suited to each other that they are extremely happy . . . Col. Morgan is a noble type of abolitionist and is very desirous to meet Mr. Smith before his duties compel him to return to Mississippi which will be in November. They have reason to apprehend considerable danger in Miss. but you see Col. Morgan is state senator and must brave what comes. They barely escaped being mobbed the night of their marriage. They have gained considerable very unenviable notoriety through the newspapers especially democratic sheets. Here is something pleasanter clipped from the Syracuse Journal.

Hoping that yourself and Mr. Smith are very well.

The following two letters are to Gerrit Smith from A. T. Morgan, Edmonia Highgate's brother-in-law, announcing her death in October 1870. Highgate died in Syracuse, New York, allegedly from an abortion, and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery. There is little information, not even a picture, to be found on the fascinating yet brief life of this woman.

Oct. 17, 1870
Dear Friend
I send you notice of our sister's death clipped from the Courier. The Standard's account is terribly [?] unchristian. We believe it is all a Lie. She left us a few days ago to make arrangements to go south . . . We shall [?] ever endeavor to vindicate her Life . . . She was so good and pure we can't believe it . . . after all, it is only a mulatto woman! And the cause of her death is thus announced. You are the only one to whom we dare look now. If you are not able to come, send us help. I was just on the point of leaving for the south when the terrible news came this morning. This must be made right.

McGrawville, N.Y., Oct. 21, 1870
Honorable Friend,
Your generous letter of sympathy [?] us in our late affliction is before me. We thank you . . . A firm, true woman in everything effecting the future of humanity as God gave her to see. She refused while south, to accept service with a salary of a thousand or even twelve hundred dollars annually because the service was in itself a surrender or compromise of principles—the school being for blacks alone. Nor would she accept a situation under our state-school law unless as a teacher of children, not black children or white children. She was strictly temperate in her private as well as her public life.

ABOLITION MOVEMENT ON THE WANE

In the 1870s, the abolition movement began its downward swing. The Civil War was over and slavery had been abolished, but
there arose new challenges to the integration of African Americans within American society. The outcome of the Civil War was in many ways a disappointment for black activists as opportunities for newly freed African Americans had yet to materialize. The following letters to Smith from Garnet and Douglass reflect this new pessimism.

Frederick Douglass to Gerrit Smith, Washington, D.C. Sept. 23, 1873
Venerated Friend:

I am not sure that my boys will be able to continue the "[The National] Era". I have put about ten thousand dollars into the concern and have given it over to them entirely. They have formed a stock company and the paper is under their management.

The trouble of supporting the paper is twofold. First the negro is not yet a reader: Secondly he is unconscious of having an associate [associated?] insistence or common cause. All the social forces drive us asunder. Our confidence is in the white race. White schools, white churches, white Theology, white legislators, white public journals, secure our highest confidence and support. Our women powder their faces and buy the hair of the white race to make themselves more acceptable or less objectionable to the white race. Nor is this strange. The power, the wisdom, wealth and the glory are with the white race I make no complaints. I accept the inevitable and I shall cheerfully work to raise my people to a higher plane of life.

Frederick Douglass to Gerrit Smith, Washington, D.C. Sept. 24, 1874
My Dear Gerrit Smith:

As to the future of our Republic, I share your fear. Not alone however, are my fears excited by the power and the policy of the Democratic Party. Righteousness is the strength of nations as well as individuals. In this respect, Washington is the place to see the weakness if not the strength of this nation. The moral atmosphere is more than tainted, it is rotten. Avarice, duplicity, falsehood, corruption, servility favoring and trickery of all kinds confronts us at every turn. There is little here but distrust and suspicion.

Henry Highland Garnet to Gerrit Smith,
No. 185 Bleecker St.
New York
Jan 27, 1873
Hon. Gerrit Smith
My much Esteemed friend,

[third page] My daughter Mary, a good child, and a sterling woman is married and living in N.J. and has two little daughters. My son Henry has fine talents but
is yet unconverted to Christ is teaching in South Carolina, his mother's native state. I am preaching the gospel among the poor in this city and enjoy excellent health, but mourn as much as ever, the loss of my gentle, sweet-tempered, and god-loving Julia. I am alone. As old age is creeping upon me, I begin to feel that all the trials of an old abolitionist do not end when slavery is destroyed.

CONCLUSION

The letters excerpted above document the private lives as well as public thoughts of the African American abolitionists who wrote them. By reading them we can begin to reconstruct the ideas these abolitionists shared and the intimate circles of their relationships with each other as well as with Gerrit Smith.