

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Making History By Analogy: Frederick Douglass Remembers William The Silent



More than 150 years ago, Charles Darwin aptly noted that “*analogy may be a deceitful guide*” (1859/1996, p. 391). Yet comparison is so fundamental to human experience that even our immune systems operate by classifying invaders according to their similarities to or differences from previous assailants (Mitchell 2001). Cognitively, humans seem to manage the surfeit of information that we receive by making schematic and analogical linkages, creating structures of knowledge that allow us to make sense of our world (Khong 1992, p. 13). It is not surprising, then, that analogical reasoning and its subset, analogical argument, are topics of great interest to scholars from a wide array of disciplines, from argumentation theory to cognitive science, from mathematics to linguistics, from philosophy to artificial intelligence (Guarini et al. 2009; Walton et al. 2008, p. 40). Rhetorical scholars also find analogies compelling, noting their power to generate and extend thought (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, p. 385), to provide psychologically and rationally appealing evidence for claims (Campbell & Huxman 2009, pp. 90-92), or to persuade by linking the familiar with the new (Zarefsky 2006, p. 406). The basic character of an analogy – the fact that it “expresses the *similarity* of *different* things” (Burbidge 1990, p. 4) – means that it can be logically weak (see Walton et al. 2008, pp. 43-86) yet imaginatively engaging and profoundly influential.

When scholars of U.S. political and rhetorical history have examined the analogy, they have usually emphasized the ways in which historical analogies have affected elite policy-makers in moments of crisis. At such times, analogies have allowed elites to create shallow and misleading interpretations of current events, upon which they then base illogical, misguided, or pernicious decisions for action. U.S. policy-makers use analogies badly: that is the recurring conclusion of scholars, whether they are examining Woodrow Wilson’s framing of the early days of World

War I as similar to the War of 1812 (May 1973, p. ix), Harry Truman's understanding of the North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950 in light of the events in Europe in the 1930s (Neustadt & May 1986, pp. 34-57), the U.S. State Department's comprehension of events in Vietnam through comparison to various world crises from the 1930s through the early 1960s (Khong 1992, pp. 58-62), George H. W. Bush's interpretations of the Gulf War of the early 1990s alongside remembrance of World War II and Vietnam (Stuckey 1992), or George W. Bush's invocations of World War II in speaking of 11 September 2001 and its aftermath (Noon 2004). Scholars have different recommendations concerning the use of historical analogies by policy-makers (compare, e.g., Neustadt & May 1986 with Khong 1992), but there is a general consensus that the deployment of such analogies for political decision-making is fundamentally problematic, encouraging gross simplification and mistaken conclusions. David Hooglund Noon puts it succinctly: analogies in such cases, he writes, often prove powerful because they bypass "serious intellectual engagement" with complex phenomena (2004, p. 355).

I am sympathetic to this line of scholarly thinking, and I support efforts to encourage greater historical awareness among policy-makers and the public so that the complexity of the past can more often be a legitimate resource for understanding the present. In this paper, however, I also wish to revisit the potential of the historical analogy to promote, not only to suppress, thoughtful reflection on the past and the present. I propose to do this by examining a different kind of rhetorical text and rhetorical situation than those typically treated in the literature on historical analogies. Rather than studying the discourse of elite policy-makers in moments of crisis, I will foreground a popular lecture by a social commentator who was interpreting the recent past in light of distant history. Rather than emphasizing brief analogical references that assert similarity in casual ways, I will offer an illustration of an intricate comparison that highlights difference as well as likeness. And by situating a historical analogy within the "rhetorical trajectory" (Griffin 1984) of the commentator's own rhetorical practice, I hope to show how such an analogy can affect the development of subsequent claims. Putting it in other terms, I hope to suggest how a historical analogy can generate structures of knowledge (see, e.g., Schank & Abelson 1977), making sense of the world in new ways through associative and inferential means. Finally, drawing upon the dynamics of the case studied here, I will posit some general recommendations for future studies of analogies and

analogical argument.

### *1. Background of the Case*

The central subject of this paper is a 19th-century public lecture written and delivered in the United States and entitled “William the Silent.”<sup>[i]</sup> It narrates European history from the abdication of the Spanish king Charles V in favor of his son Philip II in 1555-56 through the death by assassination of the Dutch leader William of Orange in 1584. William, Prince of Orange, Count of Nassau (1533-84), was the first of the hereditary stadtholders of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, and he led the Dutch in the revolt against the Spanish empire of Philip II. Known today as the Father of the Netherlands and commemorated in the Dutch national anthem, he was called “the Silent” because of a tendency to keep his own counsel in political affairs.<sup>[ii]</sup> The lecture “William the Silent” was written by the American author and social reformer Frederick Douglass (1818-95), probably in the summer of 1868 (see Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, p. 445). Douglass delivered this lecture to fee-paying popular audiences throughout the northeastern and north central regions of the United States during the 1868-69 lecture season and periodically thereafter, throughout the 1870s and at least as late as the mid-1880s. The lecture not only chronicled European history that was three centuries old at the time, but it also analogized that history to the recent U.S. Civil War (1861-65), correlating the experiences of the Netherlands and the U.S. North and linking William of Orange to the U.S. Civil War president, Abraham Lincoln (1809-65). Douglass’s analogies provided the premises for a broader argument from classification (see Walton et al. 2008, pp. 66-70), which proffered the conclusion that both wars, and both men, served a progressive impulse for human liberation.

Such an assertion comported with the emphases of Douglass’s life and rhetorical practice. An autobiographer, newspaper editor, and social activist, Douglass was best known to the public as a “self educated fugitive slave” (Douglass 1871). He had escaped from slavery in Maryland in 1838 and had written and lectured on behalf of emancipation before and during the Civil War (McFeely 1991). He began delivering public lectures to lyceum audiences in 1854 (Blassingame 1979, pp. lxiv-lxix), and after the war his travels as a lyceum speaker occupied a considerable part of his time during the lecture season in the autumn and winter each year and provided a reliable source of income (Ray 2005, pp. 114-23).

U.S. lyceums of the postwar period functioned as a kind of mass media network of

their day (Ray 2005, pp. 13-47). These local voluntary associations sponsored regular public lectures often delivered by traveling celebrities. Audiences in town after town saw the same speakers and heard virtually the same lectures, and newspapers vigorously promoted lyceums. Even in the postwar era, when lyceum lecturing was becoming increasingly commercialized with the advent of lecture management bureaus (see McKivigan 2008, pp. 113-43), the expectation that lyceum lectures would offer an edifying or educational message still prevailed, a vestige of the lyceum's heritage in the antebellum movement for public education. Douglass responded well to these conventions, producing closely argued, written texts, designed to provide instruction and entertainment. On the platform, he performed these texts with verve (Ray 2005, pp. 121-22).

As a commercially successful lyceum lecturer, Douglass generated performances that appealed to the white Protestant middling classes that were the lyceum's most stalwart supporters, and at the same time, he adapted reformist messages to address these audience members in ways that challenged them to change their attitudes and behaviors so as to recognize and incorporate the desires and ambitions of African Americans in public life (Ray 2005, pp. 113-42). His postwar lyceum lectures, like his other public discourse, promoted racial equality partly through an interpretation of recent history.

## *2. Remembering Abraham Lincoln*

A key element in Douglass's rhetorical efforts to make a place for African American people in the national polity of the postwar era was his vigorous participation in ongoing struggles about how the U.S. Civil War would be remembered. His contributions to these struggles are well documented, and traces of them can be located in his writing, his speeches, and reports of his self-presentation. Historian David Blight, for example, demonstrates Douglass's emancipationist vision of the war: the war, for Douglass, had been always and primarily a war to free the slaves. This perspective contrasted sharply with the reconciliationist and white supremacist visions of many of his contemporaries (Blight 2001; see Blight 1989, p. 240). Douglass's repeated characterization of the war as an "abolition war" was not only an effort to nurture a certain interpretation of the past, but he also offered that way of remembering as a program of action for the present and the future (see Schwartz 1997, p. 492). Americans should follow their "abolition war" with an "abolition peace," Douglass maintained, and even during the armed conflict of 1861-65 he was clear that that

vision entailed not only an end to chattel slavery but the right to work, to participate fully in political decision-making, to reject colonization pressures, and to reside peacefully at home in the United States. In a lyceum lecture of 1863-64 entitled "The Mission of the War," he called for "liberty for all, chains for none; the black man a soldier in war, a laborer in peace; a voter at the South as well as at the North; America his permanent home, and all Americans his fellow-countrymen" (Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, p. 24).

Interpretations of the war and the peace changed irrevocably on 15 April 1865, when President Lincoln died by assassination in Washington, D.C., only six days after the war formally ended with the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia. From the moment of Lincoln's death, Douglass's public discourse about the war, like the discourse of his contemporaries, had to make sense of the legacy of the martyred president (see Peterson 1994, pp. 3-35). During Lincoln's life, Douglass had often differed sharply with him. For example, he had written in frustration after Lincoln's First Inaugural Address in 1861, a speech that attempted reconciliation with slaveholders, that the president was "the most dangerous advocate of slave-hunting and slave-catching in the land" (Douglass 1861, p. 434). Although the war years had given Douglass cause to praise as well as to criticize Lincoln, on the day of Lincoln's death Douglass eulogized him impromptu at a meeting in Rochester, New York, briefly lauding the fallen president as "one of the noblest men [to] trod God's earth" but avoiding an extended discussion of his character or his policies. Instead Douglass focused on interpreting the event of the assassination as yet another "demonstration of the guilt of slavery" and urging the nation against a reconciliation that neglected the interests of black Americans (Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, pp. 76, 78).

Over the next three decades Douglass spoke often of Lincoln, regularly recounting the common, popular story of Lincoln as a self-made man, born in a simple frontier cabin and attaining national prominence through his diligence and self-education. Douglass also spoke of the president's wartime experiences as a process of learning. In late 1865 Douglass said that if Lincoln "did not control events he had the wisdom to be instructed by them" (Douglass 1865, p. 13). Learning from experience - being instructed in the great school of life - was a familiar image in Douglass's public discourse (Ray 2005, p. 129). As his interpretations of Lincoln's life grew in scope and complexity, this image proved resilient: Douglass argued that the war gave Lincoln wisdom about racial justice

and recommended that his surviving countrymen learn from the late president's example.

In considering Douglass's interpretations of Lincoln, scholars of U.S. rhetorical history are most familiar with his oratorical masterwork of 1876, delivered on the occasion of the dedication of the Freedmen's Monument in Washington, D.C. (Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, pp. 427-40; see Wilson 2000). The bronze monument by sculptor Thomas Ball was erected with funds contributed by freedmen and women, although white patrons controlled the choice of the design (Savage 1997, p. 92). The monument -controversial in its own day and in ours - depicts Lincoln, holding the Emancipation Proclamation in his right hand, standing with his left arm extended above a crouching male slave. Douglass's oration at the dedication avoided a discussion of the monument itself and instead offered a thorough, elaborate review and assessment of Lincoln's record on racial justice.**[iii]** Douglass provided a harsh indictment of Lincoln's tardiness in promoting emancipation and his frequent opposition to racial equality. At the same time, he celebrated the attributes that, according to him, made Lincoln uniquely fitted to save the Union and to free it "from the great crime of slavery" (Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, p. 436). Historian James Oakes aptly notes Douglass's evolving characterizations of Lincoln in this speech, from the varying perspectives of a crusading abolitionist, a black leader, and a Republican Party loyalist (Oakes 2007, pp. 266-75).

The Freedmen's Monument address has emerged as the text that best exemplifies Douglass's complex evaluation of the actions of the deceased president, and it remains one of the most nuanced assessments of Lincoln's ambivalent connections to racial equality. Yet its stylistic polish and the striking interplay of its themes may obscure the rhetorical trajectories from which it emerged. Furthermore, whereas contemporary scholars and students easily explain Douglass's condemnations of Lincoln, it is sometimes more challenging to understand why he also praised him (see Wilson 2000, p. 16). Douglass's own wartime experience, his direct interactions with Lincoln, and his recognition of the sociopolitical importance of linking postwar civil rights efforts to Lincoln's legacy explain a great deal about why he evaluated Lincoln as he did in 1876 (Oakes 2007). Yet the evolution of Douglass's assessments of Lincoln can be usefully clarified through an investigation of his public discourse before the 1876 oration. So in addition to recovering the potential utility of historical analogy, this

paper also posits a revised understanding of Douglass's evaluation of Lincoln, by recuperating a text preceding the Freedmen's Monument address that illuminates the development of Douglass's thought. That preceding text is his lyceum lecture of 1868-69, "William the Silent."

### *3. Reading the U.S. Civil War via 16th-century Dutch History*

Douglass's "William the Silent" drew heavily from *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, a dramatically written three-volume history by the U.S. diplomat John Lothrop Motley (1814-77) that had been published to critical and popular acclaim in 1856.<sup>[iv]</sup> Perhaps owing to the widespread circulation of Motley's prewar volumes and reviews of them, both in Great Britain and in the United States (Holmes 1879, pp. 74-81), basic facts about William of Orange were sufficiently present in U.S. public consciousness during the Civil War that Union troops sometimes referred to General Ulysses S. Grant as Ulysses the Silent (Porter 1897/1986, p. 196). In fact, when Douglass began delivering his "William the Silent" lecture in 1868, a newspaper at the University of Michigan reported that he was speaking about "William the Silent - the Grant of the Netherlands" ("Fred. Douglass" 1868). This popular, casual analogy had doubled back on itself: Grant's wartime reticence had provided the premise for a claim of similarity to William, and now William was explained via Grant, albeit based on only one simplified attribute (see May 1973, p. xi). Although Douglass's lecture barely refers to Grant (see Douglass n.d., p. 24), ephemeral references to the Union general and to William in public media suggest a cultural awareness of William of Orange among the U.S. public of the 1860s. Thus, the lecturer's choice of topic may have seemed more relevant to his contemporaries than we might imagine.<sup>[v]</sup> Certainly history and biography had been popular lyceum topics for several decades (Ray 2005), and although "William the Silent" represented Douglass's only foray into lecturing on the distant past (see Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, p. 445), it is not difficult to imagine why he might have thought the subject would be intellectually engaging and financially profitable (see Ray 2005, p. 118).

Motley's 1856 history of the 16th-century war between the Netherlands and Spain emphasized the religious conflicts of Roman Catholicism and the Protestant Reformation and unabashedly took sides, celebrating the heroism of the Dutch Protestants and vilifying Catholic Spain. (Later scholars would modify Motley's assessment to emphasize legal and economic factors as well as religious ones as causes for the conflict.) Douglass's lecture followed Motley, foregrounding

religious turmoil and identifying Protestantism with liberty and Roman Catholicism with “bigotry” and “cruelty” (Douglass n.d., pp. 5, 6). This dualistic thinking struck a familiar chord for 19th-century U.S. lyceum audiences, reflecting and supporting the anti-Catholic sentiment (and its counterpart, anti-immigrant feeling) that was common among native-born U.S. Protestants (Jenkins 2003, pp. 27-30). Anti-Catholicism was also prominent in the Republican Party of Lincoln and Douglass, which had absorbed former members of the antebellum nativist American Party (Jacobs 2009, p. 63). The expressed hostility to Catholicism in Douglass’s lyceum lecture, then, linked it with mainstream Protestant and Republican thought and also drew upon antebellum notions that the founding of the United States was the “climactic achievement” of the Protestant Reformation (Drury 2001, p. 105). Thus, in praising the Reformation, it was possible allusively to celebrate American exceptionalism, a common undercurrent of lyceum lectures generally and of Douglass’s lectures specifically (Ray 2005, pp. 135-39). Yet the anti-Catholicism of Douglass’s lecture undercut his frequently expressed views about universal equality and made the champion of human rights vulnerable to claims by Catholics that he was, ironically, launching a “foul attack of rampant bigotry” (Bower 1869c).

Douglass’s lecture itself, however, does not debate such points. It correlates “freedom of thought” and “freedom of religion” unabashedly with Protestantism and expresses American gratitude to the Dutch for its defense, although it does criticize the excesses of the Protestant iconoclasts who defaced and destroyed Catholic churches in the Netherlands of the 16th century (Douglass n.d., pp. 2, 30). Many of Douglass’s commercial lyceum lectures exhibit the difficulties of articulating positions that mesh dominant ideals with reformist messages (Ray 2005, p. 141), and “William the Silent” is no exception. Sixteenth-century Protestantism emerges as imperfect but triumphant, and in this guise it could appeal to many in Douglass’s audiences who then might be prepared to find plausible his claims about 19th-century liberation.

Embedded within Douglass’s narration of the Dutch Revolt and William of Orange are analogies, both overt and subtle, to the U.S. Civil War and Abraham Lincoln. Not only do the comparisons frame 16th-century Dutch history in a way that 19th-century American audiences might be imagined to find accessible, but the features of Dutch history also lead Douglass to emphasize certain attributes of the recent past while suppressing others. Rather than explaining the unknown

through comparison to the known, then, Douglass's historical analogy invites a revised interpretation of what is purportedly familiar – the recent American conflict and the recently assassinated U.S. president – by reframing them in terms of a distant place and time (see Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, p. 373). Thus Douglass's "William the Silent" not only can be read productively as a precursor to the Freedmen's Monument address, but it can also shed light on the ways that juxtaposing the elements of analogies helps to create meaning about the past. Sociologist Barry Schwartz (1997) notes that pairings of figures in commemorative action organize the field of meanings publicly available for making sense of those figures, and similarly, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, p. 381) claim that the elements of analogies often interact, affecting interpretations of each. By highlighting the key characteristics of Douglass's comparisons, I hope to show the ways in which he generated his unique sense of history.

Douglass's "William the Silent" begins by identifying three wars – the war of the Netherlands against Spain, the American Revolution, and the U.S. Civil War – as examples of conflicts that resulted in the increase of "the liberties of mankind." Early in the speech Douglass links these examples through an allusive claim of classification: he gives all these wars biblical stature, saying that "the Red sea lies ever between the pilgrim and the promised land" (Douglass n.d., p. 1).**[vi]** In a lecture that lasted two or more hours (Mead 1951, p. 223; Bower 1869a; "Hon. Fred. Douglass" 1885), Douglass endorsed violent resistance to oppression and lamented the human propensity to visit horrors on other people for the sake of religion.

Although Douglass initially follows Motley in analogizing the war in the Netherlands with the American Revolution (see Motley 1856, 1:vi, 3:625; Holmes 1879, p. 144), as the speech unfolds Douglass's own analogies to the U.S. Civil War become dominant. Amid his chronicle of 16th-century events, he claims that early in each conflict, Dutch and Union statesmen were adrift, without clear policies or principles, and unable to announce a purpose of liberation until their suffering taught them what their goals were. Douglass analogizes obstacles to success, saying that "the doctrine of the divinity of kings deterred the people of the Netherlands, and the doctrine of the divinity of slavery appalled and retarded us. . . . The abandonment of this divine right error was the turning point in the fortunes of both wars" (n.d., p. 9).**[vii]** According to Douglass, the Netherlands

and the U.S. North both suffered from internal division, “raw recruits, incompetent generals, inferior arms, and an empty treasury.” Douglass calls the Netherlands war “the irrepressible conflict of the sixteenth century” (p. 14), a phrase that his auditors would hear clearly as an allusion to a well-known 1858 speech by William Henry Seward, then a U.S. senator, in which Seward asserted that the two American economic systems of free and slave labor were on a collision course toward “an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces” (Baker 1884, p. 292).**[viii]** Even as Douglass rhetorically joins the two wars as constituents of a single enterprise for liberty, however, he also notes distinctions between the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition and the horrors of Confederate prisons, claiming a particularly vicious cruelty in the former case as a result of religious motivation (n.d., p. 15).

Douglass openly tests the quality of the analogy, mentioning difference as well as likeness (see Neustadt & May 1986, p. 41), but as his lecture unfolds, analogical similarities prevail. A portrait gradually emerges of two wars fought for liberty: the earlier, for religious liberty; the later, for liberty from bondage. This framing elevates the U.S. Civil War to a world historical status, coincides with Douglass’s emancipationist vision, and implies a future course of action to sustain hard-won freedoms. The historical analogy asserts teleology (see Zarefsky 2010): for those auditors who were ready proudly to celebrate the conclusion of the Protestant Reformation in the American experiment – and many auditors were – Douglass’s analogy invites commitment to the goal of freedom in the wake of the most recent war for liberty, to ensure the next step of human progress.

Douglass’s comparison and contrast of the two principal characters of the dramas – William of Orange and Abraham Lincoln – create a climactic moment of the speech. He first asserts the analogy, claiming that Lincoln bears a unique resemblance to William. Then Douglass immediately shifts to an assessment of the claim of similarity, identifying ways in which the two men differed. William was a well-educated, wealthy prince; Lincoln, a self-made laborer. William led public sentiment; Lincoln, Douglass says, responded to it. Yet each man’s character traits were appropriate for the moment, and so, Douglass claims, the two were “appointed to a common mission in the world” (n.d., p. 25). It is this commonality – their shared position at the center of a conflict for liberation – that becomes the defining characteristic of the analogy and the foundation of the key claim of similarity. Douglass notes that both men were called “Father” and were trusted

by their people, they were both admonished for joking, and they both died at the hand of an assassin (pp. 25-27).

After claiming that William “died invoking mercy and pardon for his guilty murderer” (Douglass n.d., p. 27) – an assertion that conflates a myth about a 1582 assassination attempt against William with the successful attempt in 1584 – Douglass uses a quotation from Lincoln’s Second Inaugural to invent a new death scene for Lincoln.**[ix]** He says: “Could our own Lincoln have spoken after the assassin[’]s bullet went crashing through his brain, it would have been entirely like him to have implored mercy for his merciless murderer. ‘Malice toward none, charity toward all,’ was his motto in life and in death” (n.d., p. 27).**[x]** This passage demonstrates the ways that historical analogy offers inventional resources for the creation of memory: continuing the claims of similarity between William and Lincoln, Douglass draws on William’s purported response to an attack against him in order to extend the comparison and to reiterate his assertion of the two men’s similar characters. Lincoln’s own phrase, extracted from its inaugural context, supports Douglass’s interpretation. The passage is grammatically marked as hypothetical, but yet it provides a new means for comprehending the character and the legacy of the martyred president, one entirely in keeping with popular, familiar hagiography. Yet at the same time, this invented deathbed scene offers Douglass himself a challenge to his own interpretations of Lincoln’s assassination as a manifestation of a spirit of slavery. Showing mercy to a misguided individual is different from reconciling with a disembodied slave power. At this point Douglass’s own rhetorical choices subtly present him with the dilemma of the war’s inconclusive end.

Despite my choice of emphasis in this paper, Douglass’s “William the Silent” is not *primarily* an extended historical analogy. In fact, a chronicle of the actions of Philip II and William of Orange, absent the intrusion of explicit analogy, occupies the greater proportion of the lengthy lecture. Even in the passages without analogical claims, however, Douglass was working with historical resources that, via unexpressed analogical linkages, may well have affected the development of his assessment of Lincoln. For example, Douglass defends William against charges of an overweening ambition and the employment of spies, and he explains in some detail William’s slow shift to support of the Protestant Reformation (n.d., pp. 28-31). Attentive auditors – and Douglass himself – may have imaginatively elaborated the analogical claims to perceive this defense as it correlated to the

life of Lincoln, who was frequently accused of excessive ambition, castigated for his deployment of harsh presidential powers during wartime, and denounced by frustrated emancipationists – including Douglass – for being so slow to adopt emancipation as a war aim.

Although the specific historical conditions experienced by William of Orange and by Abraham Lincoln were too varied for a point-by-point comparison, Douglass's later characterizations of Lincoln in the Freedmen's Monument address, which exhibit a considerable degree of retrospective understanding of Lincoln's difficult political choices, can be read in light of the history of the 16th-century Dutch prince that Douglass details in "William the Silent." It seems likely that in generating the analogies of his lyceum lecture, Douglass found the linkages to be substantive and credible, and hence the precedent of William could modify Douglass's perspective on the faults of Lincoln, which now could be explained by political circumstances, just as Douglass explained William's case (see Zarefsky 2010). Furthermore, the language that Douglass used to speak of the two men's significance was similar. In the lyceum lecture, Douglass said of William, "Happily, the character required by the crisis, was readily supplied by the country. The hour and the man were well met" (n.d., p. 20). Of Lincoln he would remark in 1876 that, "in the light of the stern logic of great events . . . we came to the conclusion that the hour and the man of our redemption had met in the person of Abraham Lincoln" (Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, p. 434).**[xi]** In Douglass's vision of greatness, men such as William of Orange, the American revolutionary leader George Washington, Haiti's Toussaint L'Ouverture, and Abraham Lincoln were renowned less because of intrinsic personal qualities and more because their characters were appropriate for pivotal moments of world liberation. Historical analogies thus support an argument of classification, folding several sanguinary wars and several historical figures under a broader rubric of world historical events and individuals who fostered freedom.

#### *4. "William the Silent" and Its Influence*

Douglass's "William the Silent" thus reveals the conjunctions of history and memory: the historical record, particularly as that record generates a basis for productive analogies, provides resources for and limitations on the development of remembrance. Further, analogical claims about varied characters across space and time create networks of comprehension, and Douglass's portrayal of William of Orange augments and is augmented by his depiction of Abraham Lincoln.

Douglass characterizes Lincoln in ways compatible with narratives about the 16th-century Dutch leader, and the elements from Motley's story of William that Douglass selected for "William the Silent" often correspond to topics salient in the mid-19th-century United States. The two figures are not collapsed into one – the analogy steers well clear of a claim of identity – but the meanings attached to each man affect what is possible in interpreting the other. The identification of similarities as well as differences, and the selection of analogical similarities that support broader classificatory claims, permit the analogy to function as a tool with which to construe the distant and the recent past.

Whereas Douglass's "William the Silent" can be read as a developmental stage in his generation of a complex and compelling narrative of Lincoln and the U.S. Civil War, the evidence of its public reception constrains us from claiming too much about its influence on others. Highly variable opinions characterize the extant commentary. Although some reporters praised the lecture, it appears that some of Douglass's contemporaries found it dull and that he himself regarded it as a popular failure. The woman's rights activist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a lyceum lecturer herself, wrote in 1869 that "we hear [Douglass's] lecture on 'William the Silent' much praised" (1869, p. 178), but she later recalled that "some of his friends said he might as well be silent, as none of his old-time fervor was ever roused by that lecture" (1884, p. 5). The *Boston Advertiser* found the topic of 16th-century Dutch history overly familiar, since it had been covered "remarkably well . . . by great writers before" ("Frederick Douglass" 1868). Douglass, in a later lyceum lecture called "Our National Capital," poked fun at his "William the Silent" for making audiences drowsy (Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, p. 445). The lecture did provoke public controversy, not about its assessments of the U.S. Civil War but instead about its critique of 16th-century Catholicism (see Sprague 1869; Bower 1869a,b,c; Douglass 1869a,b). Douglass's statements comparing William and Lincoln were noted in newspaper reports of the lecture (e.g., "Frederick Douglass" 1868; "Lecture Season" 1869; "William the Silent" 1869; "Hon. Fred. Douglass" 1885), but currently available evidence does not suggest further public circulation, adaptation, or reuse of Douglass's analogical claims about 16th-century Dutch history and 19th-century American experience.

Nonetheless, despite the dismissal of many of Douglass's contemporaries and the neglect of subsequent scholars, it may well be that the shade of William of Orange lurks as a silent shadow behind Douglass's assessment of Lincoln and, to the

extent that we accept Douglass's evaluation, to our own understanding of the wartime president and the struggle for racial justice in the United States. The primary utility of historical analogy, in this case, lies in its power to generate new mental frameworks for Douglass, frameworks that supported his social and political goals. By parsing the analogical relations that are present in "William the Silent" – some expressed directly and others more allusively – and then by contextualizing those linkages within the development of Douglass's postwar discourse and the conditions of his time, we can better understand the power of analogy in creating structures of thought. George N. Dionisopoulos and his colleagues note that "rhetoric designed to move others *also* works to propel the rhetor along a certain course of symbolic action" (1992, p. 95). In Douglass's generation of memory of the U.S. Civil War, the analogy to a 16th-century European conflict and its assassinated leader provided the resources for him to make a usable history. If the U.S. Civil War could be understood as a war of liberation of world historical importance, then a postwar situation that restored or reproduced prewar conditions would be a failure of world historical dimensions.

The utility of historical analogy in this case lies more in its capacity to aid the development of individual thought than in its ability directly to capture popular imagination. Douglass's analogy posits similarities but explores differences, and it lacks a defining term or phrase – a sound bite – that might crystallize complexity into a simplified form. Indeed, it is the retention of complexity and the enacted commitment to thoughtful comparison and contrast that likely explain the power that the analogy seems to have had in the development of Douglass's own thought. At the same time, these features may also help to explain the lack of public uptake. For present-day scholars of analogical reasoning, this case suggests the importance of assessing historical analogies according to form (e.g., simple, casual, detailed, elaborate), function (e.g., to suggest policy decisions, to rally support, to create structures of thought), and key audiences. Historical analogies are ubiquitous, and it is inevitable that human beings will look to the past to make sense of the present. Those who study and teach such processes of reasoning can help to explain the multiplicity of ways in which historical analogies can prove powerful, can generate new cognitive structures, can lead us astray, or can fruitfully make meaning.

## NOTES

**[i]** Seven folders containing undated texts of Douglass's "William the Silent" –

some complete, some partial – are in the Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, and several stenographic reports appear in newspapers, especially from 1868-69. The text quoted in this essay is a complete version from the Douglass Papers. Some internal evidence suggests that it is likely a later version of the speech, although its content closely matches that described in newspaper reports of the late 1860s.

**[ii]** William the Silent's own public discourse has received some analytic treatment by scholars of argumentation (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 1999, 2000).

**[iii]** John W. Cromwell, a historian present at the 1876 dedication, recalled that Douglass made one extemporaneous remark about the monument that did not appear in the text of his address. Cromwell reported that Douglass said that "he did not like the attitude [of the monument]; it showed the Negro on his knees, when a more manly attitude would have been more indicative of freedom" (quoted in Murray 1916, p. 199).

**[iv]** Motley, an 1831 Harvard graduate, held U.S. diplomatic posts in Russia in 1841, Austria in 1861-67, and Great Britain in 1869-70 ("Motley" 2005). In addition to *The Rise of the Dutch Republic*, Motley published *History of the United Netherlands* in four volumes (Motley 1860-67).

**[v]** The Prince of Orange most commonly discussed in history courses in the United States today is William the Silent's great-grandson, William III (1650-1702). William III, a stadtholder of the United Provinces of the Netherlands, was king of England, Scotland, and Ireland. He reigned jointly with his spouse, Queen Mary II, until her death in 1694. The namesakes of William III in the United States include the town of Williamsburg, Virginia, and the College of William and Mary.

**[vi]** It is possible that Douglass alludes to Lydia Huntley Sigourney's 1859 poem memorializing Sarah Spencer Morton. Sigourney writes of physical pain that "with a barb'd and subtle weapon stood / Between the pilgrim and the promised Land" (Sigourney 1862, p. 163).

**[vii]** Lincoln had connected the divine right of kings to a reverence for slavery in his 1854 speech at Peoria, Illinois, and in his 1858 debate with Stephen Douglas at Alton, Illinois (Basler 1953-55, 2:278, 3:315). His links were general rather than historically specific.

**[viii]** Seward was U.S. Secretary of State in the presidential administrations of Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson.

**[ix]** Jardine (2005, pp. 52, 65) notes that the tales about William's words are likely apocryphal (compare Motley 1856, 3:539, 609-10).

**[x]** The precise Lincolnian phrase is “with malice toward none; with charity for all” (Basler 1953-55, 8:333).

**[xi]** Douglass made similar remarks about U.S. abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (see Holland 1895, p. 43; Blassingame & McKivigan 1991, p. 508).

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