

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: Panel D - UoA 27: English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Our bondage and our freedom: The Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass family and their intergenerational fight for social justice		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: August 2016 – December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): 1. Professor Celeste-Marie Bernier 2. Dr Andrew Taylor	Role(s) (e.g. job title): 1. Personal Chair in United States and Atlantic Studies 2. Senior Lecturer	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1. 2016 - present 2. 2002 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2016 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>By the early twenty-first century, the African American freedom fighter Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) had become a heavily mythologised figure. Research led by Professor Celeste-Marie Bernier, in collaboration with Dr Andrew Taylor, has changed perceptions of Douglass, making him what a leading collector describes as “<i>a humanized and accessible figure... in whom we can more easily relate to our contemporary struggles and see our contemporary selves</i>”. In one of the first studies of the Black presence in nineteenth-century Scotland, the research has situated Douglass as part of an intergenerational Black resistance movement on both sides of the Atlantic. It has underpinned exhibitions visited by over 34,000 people, an award-winning book, free digital assets, a widely-screened documentary and around 100 talks, tours and interviews – helping curators, archivists, charities and educators to expand and diversify their audiences and to present slavery and abolitionist material in vastly more sensitive and nuanced ways.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>As the most famous author and activist of African descent in United States history, Frederick Douglass is often presented as an exceptional individual working in isolation. Funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Leadership Fellowship (AH/R007195/1; GBP202,125), <i>Our Bondage and Our Freedom</i> is the first project to reinterpret Douglass’s activism and authorship in relation to that of his wife Anna Murray, daughters Rosetta and Annie and sons Lewis Henry, Frederick Jr. and Charles Remond, as well as hundreds of other nineteenth-century Black campaigners on both sides of the Atlantic. The project is part of a body of research across disciplinary and geographical boundaries undertaken by Bernier, who joined the University of Edinburgh as Personal Chair in United States and Atlantic Studies in 2016. Much of its early phase was spent recovering, digitising and contextualising over 1,000 documents and artefacts, drawing in particular on the collection of the US-based collector and conservator, Walter O. Evans.</p> <p>Marking the 200-year anniversary of Douglass’s birth in Maryland, <i>Our Bondage and Our Freedom</i> brings to maturity the alternative critical language with which Bernier does justice to the full gamut of realities – physical, psychological, emotional and imaginative – experienced by Black women, children and men, enslaved and free. Using Black acts and arts of authorship and agency as her organising intellectual principles, she has contextualised Evans’s extensive collection of previously unexamined narratives, poems, speeches, songs, oral testimonies, correspondence, essays, photographs, drawings, paintings and sculptures relating to the Murray Douglass family and their networks, as well as objects in the collections of the National Library of Scotland (NLS) and other museums and archives. In contrast with earlier dominant portrayals of Douglass as a flawless icon, this research has recast him as a fallible individual working as part of an intergenerational Black resistance movement that operated far beyond the USA, including in Scotland, where Bernier has uncovered the role played by hundreds of nineteenth-century Black antislavery campaigners. In this way, the project marks a significant departure from prevailing</p>		

exclusionary approaches to the study of Black lives and transatlantic and chattel slavery, wherein the iconic and exceptional few are theorised over the invisibilised many.

The project's most extensive and publicly-accessible printed output is the 2018 book *If I Survive: Frederick Douglass and Family in the Walter O. Evans Collection* (3.1), co-authored by Bernier and Taylor, and winner of the 2019 International African American History and Genealogical Society Maryland Book Award for Non-Fiction/Social Change. Other publications arising from the research include two new scholarly editions of Douglass's autobiographies, recontextualised by Bernier to reflect the intergenerational freedom struggle and Black literary tradition (3.2; 3.3), *The Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass Family Papers 1813-1960* (forthcoming in 2022), and the first ever literary biography of Douglass (also forthcoming). Of particular importance to the project's programme of site-specific UK and US exhibitions, which launched in October 2018 at the National Library of Scotland, is Bernier's examination of Douglass's complex relationship with his mass-reproduced image (3.4), in which he sees literary and visual forms as weapons of self-empowerment through which to wage war against the racist depictions that dominate white mainstream culture. From these public exhibitions, a range of online material (3.5), and further scholarly publications (including 3.6), the Murray Douglass family emerges as a case study for subsequent generations of African American and African diasporic resistance, using every means necessary in the fight to have an imaginative inner life away from dominant forms of textual expression and iconographic representation.

The Our Bondage and Our Freedom team

The project's Principal Investigator and AHRC Leadership Fellow is Professor Celeste-Marie Bernier, University of Edinburgh (UoE). Together with Dr Andrew Taylor (UoE) and Walter O. Evans, the team comprises academics, archivists, artists and activists from the National Library of Scotland; the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site; Maryland State Archives; the Black Studies Research Center and the Multicultural Center at the University of California Santa Barbara; the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.; and the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia.

3. References to the research

3.1 Bernier, C-M. & Taylor, A. (2018). *If I Survive: Frederick Douglass and Family in the Walter O. Evans Collection*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. ISBN 9781474439725. (Submitted in REF2 under Taylor)

3.2 Bernier, C-M. (Ed.). (2019). *Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 9780198820710. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.3 Bernier, C-M (Ed.). (2018). *Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press. ISBN 9781554813421. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.4 Bernier, C-M. & Lawson, B. (Eds.). (2017). *Pictures and Power: Imaging and Imagining Frederick Douglass (1818-2018)*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press. ISBN 9781786940575. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.5 Bernier, C-M and Willson, N. (2018). *Our Bondage and Our Freedom*. ourbondageourfreedom.llc.ed.ac.uk/

3.6 Bernier, C-M. & Willson, N. (Eds.). (2020). "Black Acts and Arts of Radicalism, Revolution and Resistance Past, Present and Future" (special issue). *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies*, 7(1). Includes Bernier, C-M. & Willson, N. "Workers + Warriors: Black Acts and Arts of Radicalism, Revolution and Resistance Past, Present and Future", 7-21. [doi:10.15367/kf.v7i1.294](https://doi.org/10.15367/kf.v7i1.294); and Bernier, C-M. "Any Leadership

Would Have to be the Type of Frederick Douglass': Black History, Black Heroism and Black Resistance in Jacob Lawrence's *Frederick Douglass* Series (1938-1939)", 109-18.
[doi:10.15367/kf.v7i1.311](https://doi.org/10.15367/kf.v7i1.311)

4. Details of the impact

Scotland profited from the historic trafficking of enslaved people, but also played a key role in the abolition movement. Research led by Bernier, in collaboration with Taylor, has helped the National Library of Scotland raise public awareness of this significant effort, focusing for the first time on the work of Black social justice campaigners, as opposed to more well-known, white men. While establishing the importance of nineteenth-century Black abolitionists in Scotland, the research has also transformed understanding of Frederick Douglass in the United States, where the author and activist had become heavily mythologised. In the words of Walter O. Evans, whose previously unseen collections have been widely used in *Our Bondage and Our Freedom*, "*Bernier's scholarship... has added a new dimension to the narrative of Douglass*", translating him from "*the historic, monolithic character the world has come to know*" into "*a humanized and accessible figure... in whom we can more easily relate to our contemporary struggles and see our contemporary selves*" (5.1).

The first exhibition based on the research was the *Strike for Freedom: Slavery, Civil War and the Frederick Douglass Family* "Treasures" display at the National Library of Scotland (NLS). It was the Library's first ever exhibition on Black transatlantic histories. It attracted more media coverage (including in *Scotland on Sunday* [print circulation approximately 11,000], *Edinburgh Evening News* [approximately 14,000], *The National* [approximately 9,000], and the BBC [5.2a]), and higher visitor numbers (17,820 people over 18 weeks in 2018-19 [5.2b, p.31]), than any other NLS Treasures display. As well as "*conceiv[ing] and shap[ing] Strike for Freedom*" and being "*involved in every aspect of the curation*", Bernier delivered most of its "*substantial events programme developed from, and featuring, her world-leading research*" (5.2b, p.30). Events for 450+ people included three guided tours, five Black History city tours and two public lectures, all booked to capacity, an Education Pack, and bespoke tours for schools, adult learners and community groups, including homeless people and people living with dementia. Extensive visitors' comments (5.3) included: "*Shocked to find how ignorant I am regarding the history of anti-slavery from the black viewpoint... I stand corrected and chastened*" (pp.1 & 19); "*I spent an hour transfixed. Delighted to have seen this rare chunk of history in Edinburgh*" (pp.1 & 20); "*I had no idea about the connection with Scotland. This is a really excellent and informative display that fills in so many gaps*" (pp.1 & 20); "*It's exciting and moving to learn of the connections between the abolitionist movement in America [I'm originally from Boston MA] and in my adopted home*" (pp.5 & 28); "*important and moving... a lesson for us all*" (pp.4 & 25); "*Never more necessary than now*" (pp.6 & 29).

Reflecting on the NLS's use of the research, the Lead Curator of US and Commonwealth Collections remarks on an "*exceptionally positive impact*" of "*permanent benefit to the Library*" (5.2b, p.30). With particular reference to changes in curatorial practice and understanding, the Curator reports that the research helped the NLS to reappraise its existing physical and online content on slavery and anti-slavery and, in the exhibition, to "*present a complex, vitally important subject in a sensitive, accurate, powerful way. Prof Bernier greatly enhanced the sensitivity of the Library's work and the sophistication of our story-telling*" (5.2b, p.30). Linking into her work on the *Strike for Freedom* Black History city tours and Education Pack, Bernier successfully nominated Douglass as the first person of colour to be recognised by Historic Environment Scotland with a commemorative plaque on his former Edinburgh residence, which was unveiled during the exhibition's run in November 2018. This event became the focus of a documentary by social justice filmmaker Parisa Urquhart, which has since been publicly screened and discussed with several hundred viewers in Scotland and the USA, including as part of Black History Month (UK, October 2019 and 2020 and USA, February 2020) by hosts such as the Coalition for Racial Equality

and Rights (at Glasgow City Chambers) and the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown University, Rhode Island. Most recently, it has screened at festivals, including the New York African Diaspora International Film Festival (its official US premiere) (5.4).

As testified to by the Frederick Douglass Honor Society (Maryland), the research has widened understanding of Douglass and his family in the United States to incorporate *“the connection from Scotland to America and the relationship and work Frederick Douglass did to speak out against injustice everywhere”* (5.5). To date, the research has underpinned three US exhibitions: a permanent display in the Maryland State House, and temporary shows at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (April to June 2019) and the SCAD Museum of Art at Savannah College of Art and Design in Savannah, Georgia (October 2019 to January 2020). The National Gallery of Art (NGA) has written that *“Professor Bernier has inspired and made possible more Gallery programming than any other outside scholar”* (5.6a), noting that her research enabled the venue to arrange the first ever library loan exhibition in its 80-year history, attracting 789 visitors to the “special-focus” display during its short run (5.6b). Additionally, by the end of December 2020, the NGA’s recordings of two of Bernier’s talks on the research (now permanent digital resources) had been played over 11,000 times (5.6c).

Curators and art historians at SCAD Museum of Art have referred to the “exceptional” and “assiduous” research as *“an invaluable resource”* in what has been a *“rare opportunity to extend our educational initiative... beyond the present era. With Professor Bernier’s knowledge, we were able to enhance our display of great artwork with a historical foundation that served to give context to contemporary concerns of race and the legacy of slavery”* (5.7a). Writing in October 2019, just after the exhibition launched to over 1,300 people (of 14,232 visitors overall [5.7b]), the Museum’s Assistant Curator noted that, as well as having an *“overwhelmingly positive response”* from Savannah College of Art and Design students and faculty, the show had *“engaged citizens of the city... in a way we have not before seen”*, helping audiences *“move beyond the understanding of Douglass as an isolated public figure”* (5.7a). Likewise, the Maryland State Archives, which installed the public, permanent display in the Maryland State House as part of its Legacy of Slavery in Maryland programme (1,829 visitors until the building closed due to COVID-19 [5.8a; 5.8b]) has noted that *“Bernier’s continued Douglass research, often of a personal nature, expands the [programme’s] ability to instill humanity to a man whose iconic status sometimes obscured it”* (5.8a).

Beyond the partner venues that have collaborated in Our Bondage and Our Freedom, the research has been used by numerous other stakeholders, from teachers and community groups to libraries and charities. Bernier has personally delivered around 100 public talks and radio and television interviews on both sides of the Atlantic, and the posters she produced using digitised materials from Evans’s collection have been – as Rochester Public Library noted in an email to her – *“such a great teaching tool; they allowed us to tell a story about the Douglass family that [we] never could have done without them – and without your work”* (5.9). Politically, Maryland State Archives has reported that activities based on the research have *“increased awareness among the members of the Maryland General Assembly, who... will be unveiling statues of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman... the first African American figures installed in the State House, which dates back to 1772”* (5.8a). On the basis of her *“extensive achievements as an internationally respected scholar”*, together with her *“contribution to the celebration of Black History Month and the bicentennial of*



“increased awareness among the members of the Maryland General Assembly, who... will be unveiling statues of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman... the first African American figures installed in the State House, which dates back to 1772” (5.8a). On the basis of her *“extensive achievements as an internationally respected scholar”*, together with her *“contribution to the celebration of Black History Month and the bicentennial of*

the birth of Frederick Douglass", Bernier has been awarded a State of Maryland Governor's Citation presented to her during one of her many public talks by Lieutenant Governor Boyd Rutherford (5.10; pictured page 4).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Testimonial from the Walter O. and Linda Evans Foundation.

5.2 *Strike for Freedom: Slavery, Civil War and the Frederick Douglass Family*, National Library of Scotland (NLS)

- a. Media coverage (*Scotland on Sunday*, *Edinburgh Evening News*, *The National*, BBC).
- b. Testimonial from the Lead Curator of US and Commonwealth Collections at, and on behalf of, the NLS. Includes visitor numbers for the exhibition and participant numbers for the various associated events.

5.3 Comments from Scottish, UK and international visitors in books held by the NLS.

5.4 Selected *Strike for Freedom* film screenings in the UK and USA, 2019 and 2020.

5.5 Testimonial from the Frederick Douglass Honor Society.

5.6 *In the Library: Frederick Douglass Family Materials from the Walter O. Evans Collection*, National Gallery of Art (NGA), Washington, D.C.

- a. Testimonial from the NGA.
- b. Visitor numbers for NGA exhibition, April – June 2019.
- c. Figures for audio/video plays of NGA lectures up to end of December 2020.

5.7 *Frederick Douglass: Embers of Freedom* at the SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah College of Art and Design, Savannah, Georgia

- a. Testimonial from the Assistant Curator at, and on behalf of, SCAD Museum of Art.
- b. Visitor numbers for SCAD exhibition, January – March 2020.

5.8 *Strike for Freedom: Slavery, Civil War and the Frederick Douglass Family in the Walter O. and Linda Evans Collection*, Maryland State Archives

- a. Testimonial from Maryland State Archives including visitor numbers for April – June 2019.
- b. Visitor numbers for Maryland State Archives exhibition for January – March 2020.

5.9 Email from Rochester Public Library, 31st May 2019.

5.10 State of Maryland Governor's Citation.