

'Treat the coloured people as your equals'

Charles Lenox Remond in Limerick and the failure of the Anti-Slavery Irish Address (1841)

by Liam Hogan

To what purpose should I trouble myself in searching out the secrets of the stars, having death or slavery continually before my eyes?

– Anaximenes

...slavery recedes, but the prejudice to which it has given birth remains stationary.

– Alexis de Tocqueville

Charles Lenox Remond's family history is, like countless other African American families, one that is rooted in the struggle for freedom and equality. His father John Remond was born in the Dutch slave colony of Curaçao¹ in 1788 and immigrated to the United States when he was just ten years of age. It was John's mother, who apparently held the status as a free black in Curaçao, who put him on board the *Six Brothers* brig to start his new life in America. While education is the specific reason offered by John Remond to explain his childhood migration from Curaçao, perhaps the slave revolt there in 1795 was also a factor. Members of the free black population played a part in both supporting the slave uprising and its subsequent violent suppression.² This would no doubt have left them in a precarious position, distrusted by both the slaves and slave-owners.

Once the *Six Brothers* landed in Salem, Massachusetts, the Master of the ship John Needham entrusted Remond into the care of his brother Isaac. Isaac Needham was a baker and John Remond worked for him as a delivery boy.³ John eventually became a hairdresser and caterer of some renown. He met his future wife, Nancy Lenox, also a free black, while training to be a hairdresser in Boston. Nancy Lenox was talented in the culinary

arts; she later influenced their decision to get involved in the catering business. Both were active in the anti-slavery cause and in school desegregation campaigns. Their home was a busy 'station' on the 'Underground Railroad', acting as a safe house for fugitive slaves who were provided with 'nourishment, clothing and shelter'.⁴ This activism influenced their children. Both their son Charles Lenox and daughter Sarah Parker grew up to become internationally respected anti-slavery lecturers and civil rights activists.

Charles Lenox Remond was born free in Salem, Massachusetts on the 1 February 1810. He joined the abolitionist movement in the early 1830s after attending one of William Lloyd Garrison's anti-slavery lectures. Garrison was the owner and editor of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*, which Remond then began to support through promoting its circulation and sale. Garrison was a frequent visitor to the Remond home; indeed he had much to discuss here as Charles was a founding member of the New England Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society. Evidently Remond's early exposure to abolitionism and hearing fugitive slaves tell of their experiences greatly informed his lifelong commitment to social justice.

An eloquent and powerful orator, Remond was employed as an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in 1838. He was the first paid African-American anti-slavery lecturer in the U.S.⁵ In one instance he 'lectured in four different places on four successive evenings for one and a half hours each time'.⁶ One gets the sense from reading the text of his speeches that an immense and justifiable anger against racial prejudice was always simmering just below the surface. Arguably his strongest impulse to challenge the status quo was a



Charles Lenox Remond (c. 1870) courtesy of Peabody Essex Museum

reaction to his own personal experiences of racism.

In 1840 Remond was chosen to be one of the delegates representing the American Anti-Slavery Society at the inaugural World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. However, due to the sexist exclusion of female campaigners from active participation at the convention, Remond protested by refusing to be seated with the male delegates. In a display of solidarity he took his seat with the female abolitionists in the balcony. He explained that his trip to the convention had been sponsored by three different female anti-slavery societies and it was with 'much sorrow' that Remond recognised this prejudice at the heart of the anti-slavery movement in Britain.⁷ It was for this reason that he did not address the delegates until the convention ended. He was selected to follow Daniel

O'Connell's powerful address at the first annual meeting of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society at Exeter Hall on the 24 June 1841. O'Connell's speech that day had a profound impact on Remond. Less than a week later he wrote to Charles B. Ray, the editor of the *Colored American* newspaper, wherein he surmised his experience in London. His new found awe of O'Connell is expressed as an epiphany.

My Friend, for thirteen years I have thought myself an abolitionist, but I had been in a measure mistaken, until I listened to the scorching rebukes of the fearless O'Connell, [...] when before that vast assemblage, he quoted American publications, and alluded to the American declaration, and contrasted theory with practice; then I was moved to think, and feel, and speak [as an abolitionist]..⁸

Remond's journey across the Atlantic to Britain had been a disturbing experience. He was forced to travel in the steerage of the ship due to his skin colour, but attending the meeting "more than compensated [...] for the sacrifice and suffering".⁹ Garrison wrote that once O'Connell's speech finished there was "a storm of applause that almost shook the building to its foundations. The spectacle was sublime and heart-stirring beyond all power of description on my part". Remond then embarked on an ambitious eighteen month speaking tour of Britain and Ireland to raise awareness of the horrors of slavery in the U.S. and to elicit transatlantic support for its complete abolition.

After his extensive tour of Britain, Remond arrived in Dublin during the summer of 1841. This was a crucial part of the tour as there was a significant, and rapidly increasing, Irish population living in the United States. Remond was determined to influence them to oppose the slave system once they began their new life there. He was aware of the challenge that lay before him, and he was full of admiration and sympathy for the small anti-slavery groups toiling in Ireland. Shortly before arriving he wrote from Newcastle how 'nobly do our Irish friends contest for truth and justice'.¹⁰

His lectures in Dublin were a success, garnering large crowds. On some

occasions 'numbers had to go away, being unable to gain admittance'.¹¹ As part of a theme that ran through the content of his lectures in Ireland, he alluded to O'Connell's leadership on the slavery issue, describing him as a "good and mighty man, who has put himself forth the undaunted and fearless champion of liberty and rights of man in every clime the sun adorns".¹² Leaving Dublin, he lectured in Wexford, Waterford, and by August he had arrived in Limerick city accompanied by Richard D. Webb where they were 'kindly received' by Benjamin C. Fisher, a local merchant.¹³

Richard Davis Webb was a Quaker, a prominent abolitionist, publisher, pacifist, temperance advocate and bookseller. He was educated at the famous Quaker school at Ballitore, County Kildare. Webb described this school as "a little Quaker Athens".¹⁴ He was a critical thinker from an early age, and he unafraid to challenge orthodoxies. He was admonished on one occasion by his former schoolteacher Mary Leadbetter to be more careful in expressing his frank opinions about the Quaker religion. In 1837 he co-founded the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society (H.A.S.S.) along with Richard Allen (Quaker) and James Haughton (Unitarian).

These three social justice activists were labeled the 'antieverythingarians' by the Dublin press, which as Riach aptly commented, is 'curiously inappropriate for men with such a positive conception of what sort of society they would like to live in'.¹⁵ Webb represented H.A.S.S. as a delegate at the aforementioned World Anti-Slavery Convention alongside his brothers Thomas and James, not to mention other influential members such as Daniel O'Connell and R.R. Madden. He wholeheartedly subscribed to his abolitionism, and after many years of correspondence Webb was in turn highly regarded and befriended by William Lloyd Garrison.

Excerpt of letter from Susanna Fisher of Lifford House, Limerick, to fellow abolitionist Maria West Chapman in Boston which mentions the visit of Remond to the Fisher home, 1 April 1842. Credit: Boston Public Library Rare Books Department.

With J. A. Collins in Dublin with
C. L. Remond at our own home we have
had the pleasure & privilege of spending
a short time - they have written
themselves down in our memories in
indellible lines - we feel towards them
the most kind & grateful remembrance

Among the Quakers resident in Limerick at this time were some committed anti-slavery advocates. Most active among them was the Fisher family of Limerick.¹⁶ These Fishers were relatives and friends of Richard D. Webb, his brother Thomas was married to Mary Fisher and his first cousin once removed, James Webb married Mary's sister, Susanna Fisher.¹⁷ Mary and Susanna were the daughters of Benjamin Clarke Fisher and Mary Fisher (née Unthank), successful linen merchants in Limerick, who lived at Lifford House.¹⁸ The Fishers had eleven daughters and two sons and at least four of their daughters were involved in abolitionism.

Benjamin C. Fisher supported the anti-slavery movement for decades. At a Quaker meeting in Limerick in 1821 he was selected alongside William Alexander to collect subscriptions in support of the 'total abolition of the slave trade'.¹⁹ The subscriptions collected by Fisher and Alexander were forwarded to another Irish abolitionist, Joseph Bewley of Dublin.²⁰ Twenty copies of a pamphlet 'respecting the present state of the slave trade' posted from Dublin were also distributed at this meeting. This is one the earliest examples of organised anti-slavery activity in Limerick.

The Fisher family, like the Remond family before them, followed their parents' example. Three of Benjamin's daughters, Susanna, Rebecca and Charlotte were named by Richard D. Webb as being founding members of the Limerick Anti-Slavery Society, an auxiliary of the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society, and like H.A.S.S. they were also in league with Garrisonian abolitionists in the U.S.²¹ Another Limerick Quaker, Samuel Evans of Corbally Cottage, was the Society's secretary. The Limerick Anti-Slavery Society had links with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and for many years the Fishers sent over presents and homemade gifts to be sold at Anti-Slavery Bazaars for the

purpose of raising funds to support their efforts.²² Rebecca Fisher also married a fellow Irish abolitionist and member of H.A.S.S, Robert Rowen Ross Moore in 1845.²³ The Fishers' anti-slavery interest and support led to the development of transatlantic relationships between them and like-minded progressives; this widened their perspective on the world as well as providing a form of escapism. In their view, the culture to openly challenge social and institutional norms which led to anti-slavery views was uncommon in Limerick at this time. Underlining this, and possibly also alluding to the social dominance of the Church of Ireland and Roman Catholicism, Rebecca and Susanna Fisher wrote to Maria West Chapman how:

We live in a land of apparent freedom - but alas; how chained in its most important aspect - mind is held in bondage and the chains are held sacred...but the prospect is different when we look across the waters that connect us with you - in America we see light breaking.²⁴

In compliment to such sentiments, another Fisher family in Limerick was seen as an oasis of intellectual activity. Gerald Griffin, the novelist, poet and playwright, addressed the then Quaker family of James Joseph and Lydia Fisher of Richmond as, 'dear people, all of you' who were to him, 'a literary oasis in what I thought a desert of utter and irreclaimable dullness! So much for my native city'.²⁵ These Fishers were supporters of the anti-slavery movement, although in a more passive sense. Thomas Fisher, a brother of James Joseph Fisher, was educated at Ballitore and lived for many years with Richard and Hannah Webb in Dublin. It is thus not a surprise that Charles Lenox Remond's first lecture in Limerick was held in the Quaker's meeting house, which was then located on Cecil Street.

Present at this lecture was a journalist with the *Limerick Reporter* newspaper. The Reporter's editorial stance was Catholic, pro-repeal, pro-O'Connell and anti-slavery. It was the only newspaper in Limerick to cover Remond's visit, with the more established and Unionist *Limerick Chronicle* ignoring these events.

Remond was introduced to the audience by Samuel Evans and Richard D. Webb and at eight o'clock on Monday 23 August 1841 this 'young man of colour' delivered a lecture on the cruelties, injustices and iniquities of American slavery'.

The meeting was attended by a dense crowd of men and women from across the religious and political spectrum of Limerick.²⁶ The *Limerick Reporter* was impressed with Remond's 'address, manner, accent and delivery' as he outlined the inherent wrong of slavery. It also reflected that some of the interest generated in Limerick by Remond's visit was because 'the subject is a novel one in this country', but reassures that it is, not the less important or interesting, because of its novelty'. This introductory lecture was general and Remond's subsequent lectures in Limerick concentrated on the specifics of slavery. They were held at a different venue; the Independent Chapel, located at 6 Bedford Row.²⁷

Remond hosted by Limerick's Congregationalists

The Independent Chapel in Limerick was described by a contemporary as a 'plain substantial building, well suited for the purpose for which it is intended'.²⁸ It was a Congregationalist place of worship. Its minister at that time was Dr. Townley. Congregationalists, like the Quakers, have a notable tradition of anti-slavery advocacy which goes back to the eighteenth century. Rev. Samuel Hopkins, a Congregational minister from Newport, Rhode Island denounced the institution of slavery in 1776 when he published *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans*. His abolitionist sermons, based

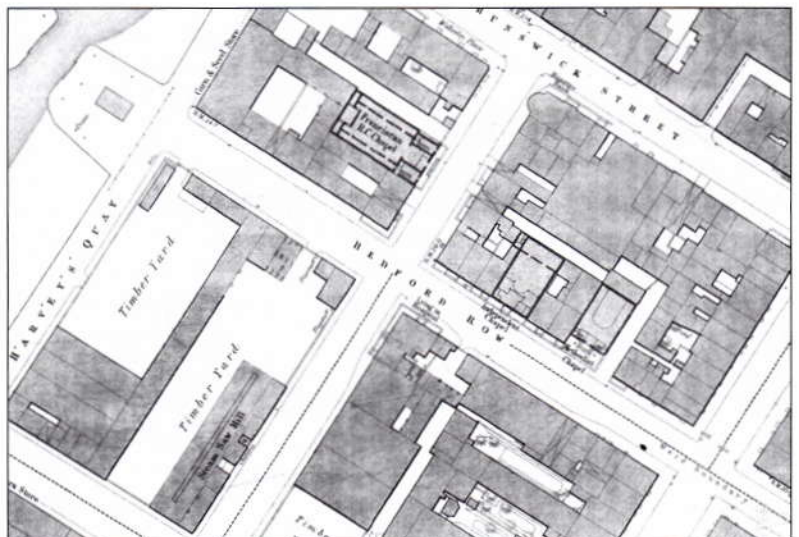
on Isaiah 1:15, inform those who owned or traded slaves that:

Even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong.²⁹

Members of the New England Congregational Church helped found the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833.³⁰ Josiah Conder, a Congregationalist from London, was a founding member of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and helped organise the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. Such anti-slavery views were also shared by the serving Independent ministers in Limerick, with the result that the Independent chapel was the most popular city venue for visiting anti-slavery lecturers for the next fifteen years.

Rev. Charles Gostling Townley was originally from Ramsgate, Kent. He was a Congregational minister in Limerick from 1816 until 1844 and was a lifelong member of the Irish Evangelical Society.³¹ It is not difficult to imagine how Rev. Townley became politicised on the subject of slavery. Congregationalists in Britain were among the most active, and yet most overlooked, Christian denominations pushing for abolition in the nineteenth century. An anti-slavery article entitled 'Christianity and Slavery Contrasted' appeared in *The Evangelical Magazine* in 1832, and perhaps more pertinently, Josiah Conder addressed the Irish Evangelical Society on the subject of slavery at their Annual General Meeting in 1833. *The Evangelical Magazine* was a vocal supporter of the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act that same year,

OSI map of Limerick city (1870) showing the location of the Independent chapel at 6 Bedford Row.



putting forward the radical suggestion that instead of compensating the slave owners, the British government should instead give state compensation to the slave 'for his loss of liberty and imprisonment in a strange land'.³²

And so at Dr. Townley's Independent chapel, on Wednesday evening the 25 August, Remond delivered his second lecture in Limerick city. Word had evidently spread around Limerick about the black abolitionists' previous performance and so:

the house was thronged in every part, even the stairs leading to the galleries [...] were crowded with anxious groups, impatient to hear the gifted tongue of this interesting person.³³

The *Limerick Reporter* suggests that 'the 'popular error' of linking skin colour with intelligence was, entirely demolished by the undoubted talent and acute and tutored judgment of Mr. Remond'. This lecture emphasised the contradiction at the heart of the United States, with Remond exposing the "incongruities and inconsistencies of the Americans in such a point of view as to disabuse the most skeptical and disarm the most prejudiced in their favour" with slavery being "the ugliest blot on the history of nations".

It was at this lecture that Remond once again made an allusion "in forcible and complimentary terms to the energetic exertions of O'Connell, to put an end to this cruelty by the thrilling power of his unmatched eloquence". This lecture lasted over an hour and a half and Remond ended it by confirming a third lecture on the 27 August.³⁴ The *Limerick Reporter*, comparing the Repeal movement to the Anti-Slavery cause, called on 'every honest Christian patriot' to attend.

Remond's fourth and final lecture in Limerick was again held at the Independent chapel on Tuesday the 7 September 1841. According to Richard Webb, this was "the most crowded and the most attentive meeting" he had attended up to this point. The *Limerick Reporter* was effusive in its praise, stating that it was 'one of the most powerful, eloquent, and effective [lectures] delivered in this city'. Remond in return singled out the "independence and humanity" of the *Limerick Reporter*

for "noticing" his lectures. In a steely reference to the *Limerick Chronicle*, he said that he was mindful of the other newspaper in Limerick which decided to pass over his exertions in silence.³⁵ It was then that Benjamin C. Fisher proposed the following resolution which was seconded by acclamation:

Resolved - That it is the opinion of this meeting, from the facts laid before it by Mr. Remond, in his various lectures, that but little general information exists amongst the people of this country in reference to the workings of the horrible and inhuman system of Slavery; and that best thanks be given to the Limerick Anti-Slavery Society for having brought Mr. Remond to this city to expose the iniquity of a system disgraceful to a generation confessed enlightened, and that we pledge ourselves to aid in forwarding the extinction of this degrading and unchristian system by every legitimate means in our power.³⁶

The resolution was passed 'amid the loud and long-continued applause of a crowded and most respectable audience'. This acknowledgement by the Limerick Anti-Slavery Society that most of their neighbours were unaware of the depravities associated with chattel slavery helps to explain their on-going work.

Remond in County Clare

Charles Lenox Remond's stay in Limerick was not all business. The Webb family visited the seaside town of Kilkee each summer, meeting up with their Limerick cousins, the Fishers and the Goughs. On this occasion Richard Webb decided to take Remond along to show him another side to Ireland. What ensued is a rare occasion of a free black man, conversing, and interacting with rural people of mid-nineteenth century Ireland. Webb describes it thus,

...a piper happened also to be of the party. He carried a set of Highland pipes, and such a wild halloo as his music and Remond's aspect set up in this primitive district we travelled, nobody could conceive. Men, women, and children followed us along the cliffs, along the roads and into the

cabins - for there are no houses. The people are chiefly remarkable for beautiful hazel eyes, fairly divided among the sexes - and a great profusion of lovely faces among the women - bare legs, battered garments, great poverty, wonderful good humour, an original simplicity and ignorance of the rest of the world.³⁷

The timing of Remond's visit to west Clare coincided with the implementation of the hated Poor Law Act. This Act sought to centralise the relief for the destitute, forcing the rural poor, when desperate, into towns and cities. It was ostensibly a cost saving measure, hoping to reduce the 'burden' on ratepayers. The extremely wealthy MP for Limerick, William Roche, voted for its introduction (albeit with some reservations) with his party leader, Daniel O'Connell, voting against it. Limerick's workhouse opened its doors in May 1841.

Webb and Remond's relationship

Richard D. Webb publicly praised Charles Lenox Remond's efforts in Ireland, describing his tour as a "triumphant one" that would be "long remembered".³⁸ But afterwards he was disappointed that Remond did not correspond with anti-slavery activists in Ireland who had sent him letters but received no reply. In a letter to Maria Chapman, sent six years after Remond left Ireland, Webb inquired how Remond was 'in mind, body and estate' as 'we never hear anything of him, from himself'.³⁹ While Remond did not keep in touch with Webb, he was greatly appreciative of his efforts and hospitality. Writing to Nathaniel P. Rogers from Richard Allen's home in Dublin, Remond felt that Rogers was:

too well acquainted & appreciate the Dublin friends [Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society] too highly to make it necessary that I speak or write their praise.... in fact no language could be in too high commendation of such men & families as those of Richard Allen, James Haughton, Richard D. & James H. Webb. May their numbers increase.⁴⁰

These relationship issues aside, Webb wrote to Garrison how 'no one has ever

yet done more as a lecturer, [on] behalf of your [abolitionist] efforts in America' as Remond. There is no record of any letters from Limerick which refer to the lasting effect Remond had on anti-slavery activity there, but if reports of abolitionists in Cork and Wexford are an indication, then his visit was a boon to their efforts. The Cork Ladies Anti-Slavery Society enthused how the 'lectures of our friend Charles L. Remond have been productive of much good; no one could listen unmoved to his appeals'. They believed that if Remond had visited years before then he would have long dispelled the ignorance 'with which we were surrounded' and that the sympathy of the Irish people 'would not have been so long withheld'.⁴¹

A note of realism however is struck by Sarah Poole, a Quaker, abolitionist and also a cousin of Richard D. Webb, who wrote from Wexford on how Charles Lenox Remond's 'eloquent appeals' there had 'aroused transient zeal' in support of the cause but that this had 'quickly vanished' two years later. She explained this by referring to the Irish as 'mercurial' and that perseverance was important and added 'we must only hope that as information spreads, hearts will be gained - and hearts can never desert it, until its triumph is complete'.⁴²

Webb's letters to Garrison also offer a glimpse into the mental state of Remond as he toured Ireland as well as an insight into the psychology of the Irish audiences he met. Remond was evidently weighed down by the pressures of such an extensive tour, homesickness, financial difficulties and his constant guardedness against racism and discrimination. His lectures in Limerick were without opposition or controversy but Webb warned against drawing a general conclusion from this:

Remond has, hitherto, had no battle to meet in Ireland - neither unkindness, nor persecution. Prejudice and ignorance have barred his way in England. The same elements exist in Ireland, but they have not been suffered to come in his way.⁴³

He is apt to trouble himself with the apprehension of evils he has not encountered [in Ireland]. I wish he would let the day take care for itself and he need not be so depressed as I see him at times.⁴³

The frank acknowledgement by Webb that the 'same elements exist in Ireland' is an important detail that challenges the popular sociological assertion that the Irish had to consciously "became white" upon landing in America. The

reality is that they were always legally and socially 'white', meaning 'not-black', and their socialisation in the U.S. was them asserting this identity in this context for perhaps the first time. As Eric Foner put it:

No one had tried to prevent Irish immigrants from voting on the grounds that they were not white, hauled them into court for marrying white persons, or claimed that the law prevented them from becoming naturalized citizens. Immigrant groups suffered severe discrimination, but being discriminated against did not make them non-white.⁴⁴

Foner argues that we should resist this 'elevation of whiteness to an all-purpose explanation for political, social, and cultural behavior' as it ignores the fact that the 'white' category 'contains within itself many kinds of inequality. Not all white people share the same interests or class status. One can be white and still disempowered in the United States'.

Webb's account of Remond's tour also reveals that they did meet some general resistance to the progressive politics associated with abolitionism. In Wexford, some slight opposition' was shown at

DEAR FRIENDS: You are at a great distance from your native land! A wide expanse of water separates you from the beloved country of your birth—from us and from the kindred whom you love, and who love you, and pray for your happiness and prosperity in the land of your adoption.

We regard America with feelings of admiration: we do not look upon her as a strange land, nor upon her people as aliens from our affections. The power of steam has brought us nearer together; it will increase the intercourse between us, so that the character of the Irish people and of the American people must in future be acted upon by the feelings and dispositions of each.

The object of this address is to call your attention to the subject of slavery in America—that foul blot upon the noble institution and the fair fame of your adopted country. But for this one stain, America would indeed be a land worthy your adoption; but she will never be the glorious country that her free Constitution designed her to be, so long as her soil is polluted by the foot-prints of a single slave.

Slavery is the most tremendous invasion of the natural, inalienable rights of man, and of some of the noblest gifts of God, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." What a spectacle does America present to the people of the earth! A land of professing Christian republicans, uniting their energies for the oppression and degradation of three millions of innocent human beings, the children of one common Father, who suffer the most grievous wrongs and the utmost degradation, for no crime of their ancestors or their own! Slavery is a sin against God and man. All who are not for it must be against it. None can be neutral. We entreat you to take the part of justice, religion, and liberty.

It is in vain that American citizens attempt to conceal their own and their country's degradation under this withering curse. America is cursed by slavery! WE CALL UPON YOU TO UNITE

WITH THE ABOLITIONISTS, and never to cease your efforts until perfect liberty be granted to every one of her inhabitants, the black man as well as the white man. We are all children of the same gracious God; all equally entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We are told that you possess great power, both moral and political, in America. We entreat you to exercise that power and that influence for the sake of humanity.

You will not witness the horrors of slavery in all the States of America. Thirteen of them are free, and thirteen are slave States. But in all, the pro-slavery feeling, though rapidly decreasing, is still strong. Do not unite with it: on the contrary, oppose it by all the peaceful means in your power. JOIN WITH THE ABOLITIONISTS EVERYWHERE. They are the only consistent advocates of liberty. Tell every man that you do not understand liberty for the white man, and slavery for the black man; that you are for liberty for all, of every color, creed, and country.

The American citizen proudly points to the National Declaration of Independence, which declares that all mankind are born free and equal, and are alike entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Aid him to carry out this noble declaration, by obtaining freedom for the slave.

Irishmen and Irishwomen! treat the colored people as your equals, as brethren. By all your memories of Ireland, continue to love liberty—hate slavery—CLING BY THE ABOLITIONISTS—and in America you will do honor to the name of Ireland.

[Signed by] DANIEL O'CONNELL,
THEOBALD MATHEW.

And sixty thousand other inhabitants of Ireland.

one of the meetings and in Waterford a few 'high professors' attacked Remond for being associated with Garrison and other 'pestilent fellows' for their 'strange doctrines' of women's rights and non-resistance. Webb felt that many in Ireland struggled to understand the principle of chattel slavery. This undermined their efforts to garner sympathy for their cause. Remond was even asked "what are going to do for the white slave?" during one of his lectures in Dublin. Webb explained that Irish people were 'so used to abject want and enormous luxury, that slavery is not readily looked on so much in the robbery of rights, as a privation of advantages' and thus

the wickedness of man's holding property in man is forgotten in the description of the supply of food, the imposition of labour, the quantity of clothing, and the animal wants of the man....Slavery being unknown amongst us, we are tempted to confound it in our minds with the lowest position of humanity with which we are familiar. This is perfectly natural, but extremely fallacious.⁴⁵

Remond carries the 'Irish Address' across the Atlantic

The most important aspect of Remond's time in Ireland was his role in collecting signatures in support of the anti-slavery 'Address from the people of Ireland to their countrymen and countrywomen in America'. This Address, which was drafted by Richard D. Webb and James Haughton, was eventually signed by over sixty thousand Irish people, the majority of which were Catholic.⁴⁶ The list included the names of Daniel O'Connell, Fr. Theobald Mathew, the famous temperance campaigner, and the celebrated Catholic abolitionist Dr. R.R. Madden. Displaying the close relationship between the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society and the Repeal movement, O'Connell had allowed his Repeal agents to also collect signatures at their political rallies. The Address implored the Irish in the U.S. to 'treat the colored people as you equals, as brethren' and warned that 'none can be neutral' on the issue of slavery.⁴⁷ The dual cause of Repeal and Abolitionism appears have been taken up with enthusiasm in Ireland, and the working classes in Ireland were now

engaged, albeit briefly, in both campaigns. The Dublin correspondent of Garrison's *The Liberator* newspaper posted this anecdote of how:

A young lad, about thirteen, had been most indefatigable in collecting signatures. I heard the other day, he was going from house to house in the more genteel neighbourhoods, rapping at hall doors.... the other day he came for five sheets more. He told me he was going to school the next week, and that before he left, he must do all he could to liberate the slaves. ... Another young man brought me in four sheets, containing amongst other names, those of forty-three Roman Catholic clergymen, of whom one is a bishop, and eleven parish priests.⁴⁸

Another source, who wished to remain anonymous, wrote to Richard Allen that he had collected the signatures of one Catholic bishop and seventy two priests who signed with the 'greatest willingness' once told of the purport of the Address.⁴⁹ While there was far less at stake, the support of the Catholic clergy in Ireland is interesting because of the belligerent reaction the Address provoked among many of their counterparts in the U.S. While the petition roll no longer survives, it is almost certain that it contained hundreds of signatures from those who attended Remond's lectures in Limerick. The Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society reported that 'names were being rapidly obtained' at the lectures and that they had collected 10,000 signatures by October.⁵⁰ Remond carried the Address across the Atlantic and presented it to the great anti-slavery meeting in Faneuil Hall, Boston on 28 January 1842. When it was unrolled, it stretched spectacularly from the speaker's platform to the entrance door of the hall.⁵¹ It was received 'by the large assemblage with cheers and loud acclamations of applause'.⁵² There were over 4,000 present and many stood up to respond to this Address. Garrison, referring to the "[petition] roll which lies here before me", stated it was a "gift of glorious Old Ireland to America" and "an incendiary document" that would "burn up nothing but slavery." A common theme on the night was the parallel drawn between anti-slavery and the Irish Repeal movement. The abolitionist Col. J.P. Miller of Vermont stated that:

[Ireland] lies near the heart of all who love liberty, for she is oppressed. Nearer still must she be to our hearts, when we see her amid all her own toils and sufferings for relief, raising a voice of cheer and sympathy for those who groan beneath a still deadlier despotism...I care not who turn their faces from me at the announcement [that] I am a Repealer.⁵³

He then turned towards the section of the vast hall where loud applause was emanating in response to his pro-Repeal words. This section of the crowd was apparently made up of Irish or Irish-American attendees. Addressing them directly he said:

I have Irish blood in my veins, and I know the condition of your oppressed land, and I trust the day of her redemption draws night. I know your Daniel O'Connell. In all the earth there is not a greater man than he. [Miller then pointed to the Address] He speaks to you tonight. And with his voice have sixty thousand Irishmen united theirs, adjuring you to act with the American abolitionists, and liberate the American slave.

The Irish in the crowd, which the abolitionist Anne Warren Weston aloofly described as 'peasants' because of their dress, responded with vigour; they shouted "We will! We will!"⁵⁵ George Bradburn, was next introduced to the crowd by Garrison. Bradburn, a Unitarian minister and abolitionist, referred to the, seven thousand slaves in the District of Columbia' and called on 'every Irishman' to listen to O'Connell and never 'vote for a man who sustains slavery' and that by doing so 'will sweep away this disgrace from the capital of your adopted land'.⁵⁶ James Cannings Fuller, who was pro-Irish independence and an active abolitionist, then addressed the meeting, stating that he knew:

what feelings and sufferings bring an Irishman to America. What did you come from the other side for? Oppression drove you here, and you came for universal liberty!

He expressed hope that the Irish in America would labour for the anti-slavery cause. At this point in the proceedings an unnamed Irishman came up to the platform and shook Fuller's hand. "I knew you would!" Fuller replied, amidst loud cheering. Four months later, James Canning Fuller was no longer so enthusiastic about widespread Irish American support for abolition. In April 1842 he wrote that:

...however true to liberty an Irishman's heart is, when it beats on his own native soil... on his emigration to America, circumstances and influences by which he becomes surrounded, in too many cases warp his judgment, and bias his heart.⁵⁷

Much to the abolitionist's dismay, the famous Address and its sixty thousand signatures, was opposed by influential Irish-American political leaders and clergy. The Archbishop of New York, John Hughes of County Tyrone, denounced the Address as fraudulent and claimed that it if it was genuine it was an unwanted "interference" in U.S. affairs. He wrote a counter Address that declared that "it is the duty of every naturalised Irishman to resist and repudiate the Address with indignation".⁵⁸

Hughes even brought the matter up with Daniel O'Connell in person, castigating his outspoken views on slavery in the U.S. which he felt were "too severe upon an institution for which the present generation, or present government of America, is by no means responsible - I mean slavery." O'Connell replied: "that it would strange indeed, if I should not be the friend of the slave throughout the world - I, who was born a slave myself".⁵⁹ But O'Connell's sympathy for the plight of the slave did not convince Hughes.

In support of Fuller's view, that a man's judgment may be affected by living in a state where slavery is normalised, Hughes had grown more defensive of slavery as the years passed. Hughes wrote a poem *The Slave* in 1824 which condemned slavery, and yet during a visit to Cuba in 1853 he was an apologist for slavery believing 'that emancipation would be a very bad thing for the negroes as well as for the planters'.⁶⁰ His view was generally representative of the Catholic hierarchy

in the U.S. at this time, which in general, 'defended property rights over labour, including the right to own slaves'.⁶¹

Despite Pope Gregory XVI's condemnation of the slave trade in 1839, there is no account of a Catholic bishop in the U.S. denouncing slavery while it remained legal, ergo none called for its abolition. During the New York Draft Riots of 1863, which included the lynching of African-Americans by Irish-Americans, attacks on the homes of abolitionists and the destruction of the Colored Orphan Asylum, an ailing Archbishop Hughes attempted to quell the violence by addressing a crowd of over five thousand people. At one point during his speech a person in the crowd shouted up to him "Let the nigger stay in the South!". Hughes did not respond to this directly but instead told the crowd that their grievances were temporary. The following day he wrote to Secretary of State Seward and expressed the view that the 'misguided' rioters were against the move by 'a few here and elsewhere' to make 'black labour equal to white labour'.⁶² This contrasts with the statement by the French-born Bishop of Cleveland, Louis Amadeus Rappe, who called specifically on Irish Catholics to obey the law and to:

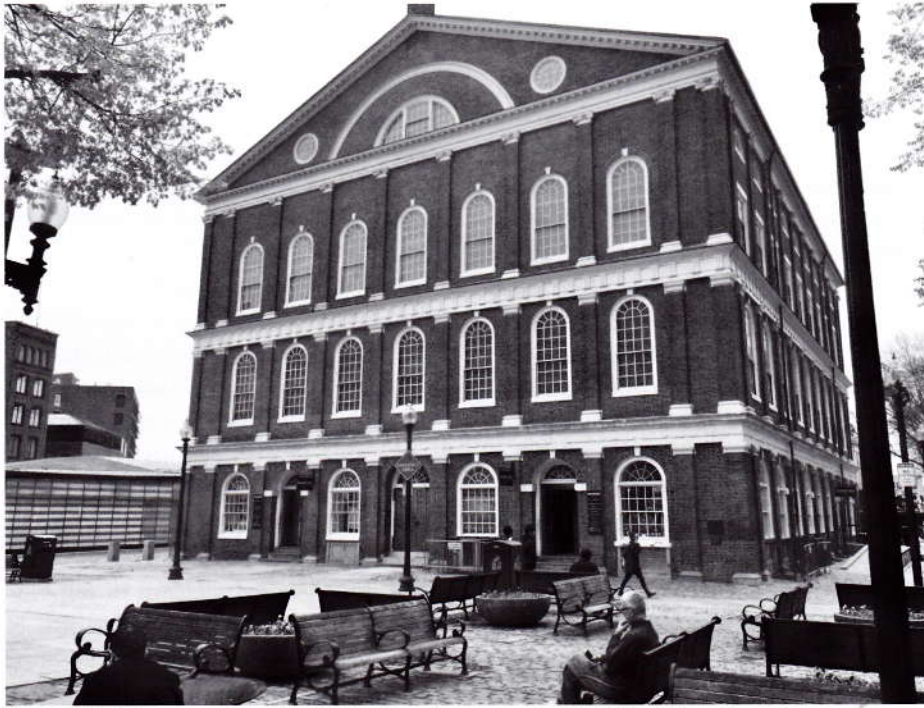
..Not ill-treat the colored people. A colored man had as much right to live and to labour for his living as a white man had, and their right must be respected. It was cowardly and sinful to molest these people because their skin was of a different colour.⁶³

During the American Civil War, Hughes called on his fellow Catholics to "pray to God that it be brought to an end", yet we do not find a similar call from him in relation to the emancipation of slaves.⁶⁴ Theodore Allen's research posits that the 'labour competition' explanation for the anti-black violence committed during the 1863 riot is not a sufficient historical explanation, but rather the repetition of the self-justification offered by the perpetrators themselves. Despite immense competition for jobs between the various groups of European immigrants, none were lynched, set on fire, or collectively punished in this way, this often. The most plausible explanation for the racial violence appears to have been racism, encouraged and inflamed by the same intolerant anti-

emancipation Copperhead⁶⁵ press as well as by prominent Irish-American leaders in the U.S. Both had previously attacked the abolitionist Address and they now wished to uphold, via the pro-immigrant pro-slavery Democrat party, the white supremacist status quo for their own benefit.⁶⁶

It is useful to note that at the time of these riots the Cincinnati Telegraph was the only Catholic newspaper in the U.S. that welcomed Lincoln's emancipation proclamation.⁶⁷ At the other extreme, the *New York Freeman's Journal and Catholic Register*, [a newspaper popular with the Irish American population in New York] called for organised violence in response to the draft and the emancipation of slaves. During the riots it told its readers that 'those [negroes] that float hither from the South' should be 'driven away, imprisoned, or exterminated'.⁶⁸ Some of their readers duly obliged. This disgraceful editorial was at the extreme end of Democratic rhetoric which for the previous few years had warned white labourers in New York that free blacks would stream north and take their jobs. But we also need to be careful in how we remember this dark chapter in the history of the Irish diaspora and not use too broad a brush stroke. Among those attempting to suppress the Draft Riots were many Irishmen serving as police officers and soldiers who undoubtedly shot and killed many of their rioting countrymen. They were also among those lynched by the Irish mob, as in the gruesome death of Colonel Henry F. O'Brien of the 11th New York Infantry.⁶⁹ Irish fire-fighters worked to put out the flames across the city and one group of Irish street-car drivers led by Paddy McCaffrey helped to secure an isolated group of children who escaped the burning 'Colored Orphanage', and despite being pelted with stones by the rioters, escorted them to safety.⁷⁰

Politically, the majority of Repeal associations rejected the call to ally with abolitionists, stating that slavery was constitutional, and that abolitionism was a plot by the British to damage the unity of the United States. Garrison wrote to Webb shortly after the unveiling of the Irish Address and he sorrowfully described how 'Irish papers in Boston sneer at the Address, and denounce it and the abolitionists in true pro-slavery style.



Faneuil Hall, Boston, where the 'Irish address' was unrolled in 1842. (Liam Hogan).

I fear they will keep the great mass of your countrymen here from uniting with us'.⁷¹ While the anti-slavery address failed to fulfill its primary purpose, the historical record should not omit or downplay such a unique message of transatlantic solidarity between the politically oppressed and the enslaved.

Also present at the Anti-Slavery meeting at Faneuil Hall that evening, was a fugitive slave named Frederick Douglass. Douglass addressed the crowd, in dramatic fashion "I stand here a slave...my back is scarred by the lash". He proceeded to deliver a short speech on what he called the "mockery of religion" that was preached in the Southern states. Afterwards Garrison drew a direct analogy between the life of Frederick Douglass and the history of Ireland. Slave-owners, he said, made the argument that "slaves cannot take care of themselves" but "you have listened to one of their victims tonight...is it your opinion that he can take care of himself?" Shouts of "Yes!" were heard in reply. "Then he does not need their whips, and chains, and branding irons, and slave laws to help him". Garrison then made the same argument with respect to Ireland:

England, in true slaveholding style, says that Ireland cannot take care of herself, and therefore *she* will look after the interests of the Emerald Isle. But Ireland has about made up her mind, and she will no longer be the

vassal of England, to be subjected to famine, oppression and misrule.

Frederick Douglass was to become arguably the most famous and influential slave in American history. He was also the next black abolitionist lecturer to visit Limerick in 1845.⁷²

Endnotes:

1. Curaçao is an island in the southern Caribbean Sea, about 70 km north of the Venezuelan coast.
2. Junius P. Rodriguez (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion, Volume 1*, (New York 2007) p. 102
3. Dorothy Burnett Porter, The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts: A Nineteenth Century Family Revisited, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 95 (2), 16 October 1985, p. 263.
4. *ibid.* p. 274.
5. He was also evidently a man of great style. William Wells Brown referred to him as the 'County D'Orsay of the anti-slavery movement'. See William Wells Brown, *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements*, (North Carolina, 1999) originally published in 1863.
6. *ibid.*
7. The three societies that sponsored his trip to Britain were the Bangor Female Anti-Slavery Society, the Portland Sewing Circle and the Newport Young Ladies Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society.
8. Charles Lenox Remond to Charles B. Ray, 30 June 1840. This letter was published in the *Colored American* (New York), 3 October 1840
9. Christopher L. Webber, *American to the Backbone: The life of James W. C. Pennington, the fugitive slave who became one of the first black abolitionists*, (New York, 2011), Ch. 12, n.p.
10. *The Liberator*, 21 May 1841.
11. *The Freeman's Journal*, 5 August 1841.
12. Elisa Joy White, *Modernity, Freedom, and the African Diaspora: Dublin, New Orleans, Paris*. (Indiana, 2012), p. 32.
13. *The Liberator*, 24 September 1841.
14. Richard D. Webb to Anne Warren Weston, 11 March 1851, Boston Public Library Anti-Slavery Collection.
15. Douglas C. Riach, 'Richard Davis Webb in Ireland', *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, Perry & Fellman (ed.), (Louisiana, 1979), p. 151.
16. The Fishers were initially based on Rutland Street. (Benjamin married into the Unthank's business), but as the family and the drapery business grew, they moved outside Limerick city to Ballinacurra, where they built Lifford House.
17. John Creedy (ed.), Ursula Hicks: *My Early Life (up to the Age of 12)*, Research Paper No. 1126, (Melbourne 2011), pp. 5-8.
18. Their sister, Isabella Fisher, married Samuel Alexander, also a Quaker from Limerick. They are the great-grandparents of Ursula Kathleen Webb (1895-1985), an economic scholar, who married Sir John Hicks (1904-1989) a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 1972.
19. Religious Society of Friends (Quakers): Limerick Papers, MM/IX/A1 Part 19, August 1821.
20. This is the same Bewley family that established the famous tea and coffee house in Dublin.
21. R.D. Webb to W.L. Garrison., Dublin 11/2/1841, Ms.A.1.2.v.11, p. 61, Anti-Slavery Letters to Garrison. The term 'Garrisonian' is used for the followers of W.L. Garrison, to distinguish them from other groups of abolitionists.
22. Annual Report Presented to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Volumes 8-13, p. 165.
23. Notes on the Unthank family of Limerick, Noel Murphy, Limerick City Library, Accessed 09/11/2013. <http://www.limerickcity.ie/media/limerick%20families%20104.pdf>
24. Douglas Cameron Riach, Ireland and the campaign against American Slavery, 1820-1860, PhD Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, August, 1975, p. 132.
25. Rev. M. Moloney, Limerick and Gerald Griffin, in *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, Vol. II, 1940-1941, p. 10. These Fishers were either expelled from (or left, of their own accord) the Quaker circle in Limerick, as they apparently stopped attending meetings.
26. *Limerick Reporter*, 24 August 1841.
27. Bedford Row is named after John Russell, the 4th Earl of Bedford and a former Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. Bedford County, also named after Russell, had one of the largest slave populations in the state of Virginia; there were 10,176 slaves in bondage there in 1860. Russell's grandson, the 6th Earl of Bedford is also on record in the House of Commons as opposing the abolition of slavery.
28. Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; Its History and Antiquities, Ecclesiastical, Civil, and Military*, (Limerick 1866), p. 689.
29. Jonathan D. Sassi, This whole country have their hands full of Blood this day: Transcription and Introduction of an Antislavery Sermon Manuscript Attributed to the Reverend Samuel Hopkins, *American Antiquarian Society*, 112.1, June 2004, p. 29-92.
30. Joseph M. Flora (ed.), *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movements and Motifs*, (Louisiana, 2002), p. 1.
31. *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle*, Vol. 24, p. 227

32. *ibid.*, Vol. 11, p. 190-195.
33. *Limerick Reporter*, 27 August 1841.
34. There is no report of this third lecture.
35. Samuel Evans published a letter in the *Limerick Reporter* which attacked the *Limerick Chronicle* for taking a belated anti-slavery stance. 'It will not do to allow him [the *Chronicle* editor] to take credit for services never rendered, and of the nature of which the anti-slavery world has yet to learn the value' (19 Oct 1841).
36. *Limerick Reporter*, 10 September 1841.
37. *The Liberator*, 24 September 1841 (as cited in Richard Davis Webb: Dublin Quaker Printer (1805-72), Richard S. Harrison, (Skibbereen, 1993, p. 26).
38. *Annual Report Presented to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society by its Board of Managers*, Volumes 8-13, p. 67.
39. Richard Davis Webb to Maria Chapman, 18 November 1847. Boston Anti-Slavery Collection.
40. Charles Lenox Remond to Nathaniel P. Rogers, 2 October 1841. Haverford College. Rogers Papers, reprinted in the *Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. 1*, Peter Ripley (ed.), University of North Carolina, 1985.
41. Jane Jennings [Secretary of the Cork Ladies Anti-Slavery Society] to Maria West Chapman, 1 December 1841, Boston Public Library Anti-Slavery Collection.
42. Sarah Poole to Maria West Chapman, 25 February 1843, Boston Public Library Anti-Slavery Collection.
43. *The Liberator*, 24 September 1841.
44. Eric Foner, Review of 'The History of White People' by Nell Irvin Painter, *Harper's*, September 2010.
45. *The Liberator*, 24 September 1841.
46. Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Vol. 1*, (London, 1994), p. 177.
47. Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society, *Address from the people of Ireland to their countrymen and countrywomen in America*, 1841.
48. Gilbert Osofsky, 'Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and Romantic Nationalism', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 80 (4), Oct 1975, p. 897.
49. *The Liberator*, 8 October 1841.
50. *ibid.*
51. Parker, p. 277.
52. Great Anti-Slavery meeting in Faneuil Hall, *Annual Report Presented to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society by its Board of Managers*, Volumes 8-13, p. 11.
53. *ibid.* p. 15.
54. *ibid.* p. 15.
55. Osofsky, p. 899.
56. Great Anti-Slavery meeting in Faneuil Hall, featured in the *Annual Report Presented to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society by its Board of Managers*, Volumes 8-13, p. 17.
57. Allen, *ibid.*
58. John Hassard, *Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, First Archbishop of New York*, (London, 2008), p. 435
59. *ibid.* p. 216.
60. *ibid.* p. 435.
61. Don MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1750-1939*, (London, 2010), p. 206.
62. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. Series 1*, vol. XXVII, part 2, (Washington, D. C. 1889), pp. 938-939.
63. Reprinted from the *Cleveland Herald in the New York Tribune*, 23 July 1863.
64. Archbishop Hughes, 'A Sermon on the Civil War in America', 17 August 1862.
65. The 'Copperheads' represented the more extreme wing of Northern Democrats in the 1860s, who opposed the American Civil War.
66. Albon P. Man, Jr, 'The Church and the New York Draft Riots of 1863', *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, LXII, No. 1 March, 1951, p. 49; and Allen, pp. 179-199.
67. *ibid.*, p. 42.
68. *Freeman's Journal and Catholic Register*, 18 July 1863.
69. Damien Shiels, Irish Colonels: Henry F. O'Brien, 11th New York Infantry, *Irish in the American Civil War*, URL <https://irishamericancivilwar.com/2012/02/25/irish-colonels-henry-f-obrien-11th-new-york-infantry/>. Published: 25 February 2012.
70. Lawrence Lader, *New York's Bloodiest Week, A Social History of Racial Violence* (1969) ed. Grimshaw, 39.
71. William Lloyd Garrison to Richard D. Webb, Boston, 27 Feb 1842, Boston Public Library.
72. For more on his life; see: Liam Hogan, Frederick Douglass and his Journey from Slavery to Limerick, *Old Limerick Journal*, Vol. 49, Winter 2015.



The Anti-Slavery Society Convention, 1840, by Benjamin Robert Haydon. Credit: National Portrait Gallery, London.

Richard Davis Webb, co-founder of the Hibernian Anti-Slavery Society and a relative of the Fisher family from Limerick, can be seen in the centre background, wearing glasses, to the right of the speaker, Thomas Clarksobn. Charles Lenox Remond was at the same convention but in protest at its exclusion of women delegates he sat in the gallery with them in a show of solidarity. His trip to Europe was funded by women's activist groups in Massachusetts.

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