



Abolition's Public Sphere

Robert Fanuzzi

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Echoes of Thomas Paine and Enlightenment thought resonate throughout the abolitionist movement and in the efforts of its leaders to create an anti-slavery reading public. In *Abolition's Public Sphere* Robert Fanuzzi critically examines the writings of William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Henry David Thoreau, and Sarah and Angelina Grimke and their massive abolition publicity campaign-pamphlets, newspapers, petitions, and public gatherings-geared to an audience of white male citizens, free black noncitizens, women, and the enslaved. Including provocative readings of Thoreau's *Walden* and of the symbolic space of Boston's Faneuil Hall, *Abolition's Public Sphere* demonstrates how abolitionist public discourse sought to reenact eighteenth-century scenarios of revolution and democracy in the antebellum era.

Fanuzzi illustrates how the dissemination of abolitionist tracts served to create an "imaginary public" that promoted and provoked the discussion of slavery. However, by embracing Enlightenment abstractions of liberty, reason, and progress, Fanuzzi argues, abolitionist strategy introduced aesthetic concerns that challenged political institutions of the public sphere and prevailing notions of citizenship. Insightful and thought-provoking, *Abolition's Public Sphere* questions standard versions of abolitionist history and, in the process, our understanding of democracy itself.

Robert Fanuzzi is an associate professor of English at St. John's University, New York.

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