

Who is “Normal”? The Elusive Correspondent of *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*

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Historical research is a field often filled with intrigue and mystery. This is especially true when an event’s finer details are lost to the sands of time. With crucial facts missing, historians are forced to conjecture for a likely answer. This is a common occurrence in the study of the nineteenth century’s most prominent abolitionist, Frederick Douglass. Douglass’s life is extensively documented through his output of personal correspondence, newspaper articles, and public orations. However, a day-by-day account of Douglass’s whereabouts is one of the chief focuses of the Frederick Douglass Papers project.

To aid in the investigation of where Douglass was each day of his life, historians can find a wealth of information in his newspapers. One of which, the weekly *The North Star* began in 1847; the paper was filled with news on upcoming abolitionist lectures, reports on atrocities committed on Black Americans, and excerpts from other abolitionist papers. In 1851, *The North Star* changed its name to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper (FDP)* and lasted until 1860. The contents of *FDP* offer historians an invaluable window into the world of antebellum abolitionist thought.

One of the many intriguing mysteries of Frederick Douglass, and by extension *FDP*, is the identity of a semi-frequent contributor who penned numerous letters to Douglass under the pseudonym “Normal” and was labeled by Douglass as “Our Philadelphia Correspondent.” The “Normal” letters, of which twelve are known to exist from 1857 and 1858, cover a period when primary sources on Douglass’s whereabouts are scant. Analyzing the correspondence by “Normal” can give historians a fresh perspective not only on Douglass’s activities, but also on the political, social, and cultural dynamics of the abolitionist movement in the 1850s.

“Normal” is not the only pseudonymous contributor to *FDP*; there was “Communi-paw” (James McCune Smith), “Rock” (John Stewart Rock), “Ethiop” (William J. Wilson), “Philo” (George T. Downing), and numerous others. In this era, it was a common practice to use a pseudonym; this was done to “create and signal belonging to what was becoming a well-defined and inter-connected Black print community within a single newspaper as well as between newspapers across multiple regions.”¹ “Normal,” however, appears to be one of the last correspondents to remain unidentified—leaving us asking, who is “Normal?” Despite the semi-regularity of these letters, an extensive search for the identity of “Normal” has never been attempted in the history of the Frederick Douglass Papers’ five-decade existence.

A newfound vigor for this mystery began when undergraduate researchers Jake Williams and Avery James Lester were hired through the Frederick Douglass Papers’ summer MURI project. MURI, or the Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Research Institute at Indiana University Indianapolis, is a program that gives undergraduate students an opportunity to gain research experience in several disciplines—in this project’s case, the historical field. Working closely with faculty advisors Jack Kaufman-McKivigan and Jeffery Duvall, Williams and Lester were originally tasked with chronicling Frederick Douglass’s whereabouts—day by day—throughout the year of 1857. A lack of primary sources, such as correspondence or newspaper reports, detailing Douglass’s location persisted in each of the year’s twelve months.

This changed when Williams rediscovered an issue of *FDP* from April 1857. This issue contained a letter from a “Philadelphia Correspondent” called “Normal,” in which the author

¹ Derrick R. Spires, “Alienated Americans: Pseudonymity and Gender Politics in Early Black Social Media,” *African American Review* 55, no. 1 (Spring 2022), 33, Doi.org.

provides detailed descriptions of Douglass’s trip to Philadelphia in February 1857.² The details in the letter caught Williams’ attention; “Normal” remarked on seemingly banal items including Douglass’s appearance and the day’s weather. When Williams inquired to Kaufman-McKivigan about the identity of the letter’s author, Kaufman-McKivigan explained he was not sure either—it has been a question eluding historians for decades. After discussion with Williams and Lester, Kaufman-McKivigan elected to have his research assistants explore the identity of “Normal” intensively.

The Contents of the Letters

To assess the identity of “Normal,” we will first explore the contents of the twelve known letters, as their details might potentially provide insight into their sender’s identity.

The earliest letter, dated 3 April 1857, reports on disagreements at a Philadelphia abolitionist meeting in the aftermath of the Dred Scott decision—a landmark Supreme Court ruling that denied citizenship to Black Americans and declared Congress unable to prohibit slavery in U.S. territories.³ A week later, this is followed by a letter from 11 April; “Normal” recounts Douglass’s rainy arrival in Philadelphia, noting his tired countenance compared to the healthier appearances of his companions, William J. Watkins and J. P. Morris. “Normal” uses this dichotomy as potential evidence that Douglass was clearly overworked.⁴

Several weeks later, on 27 April, “Normal” penned a letter to Douglass, now apparently moved on from Philadelphia, that reported a recent three-day debate at an antislavery meeting in the city.⁵ The main topic of this debate was the U.S. Constitution and its perception: should it be viewed as proslavery or antislavery? This was an ongoing rift among abolitionists of that era and one of definite interest to *FDP* readers.

The next surviving letter comes a month later, on 30 May. In this one, “Normal” writes about themselves and provides clues to their identity, a rarity in his correspondence with Douglass. “Normal” elaborates on the mistreatment they faced upon entering a lecture hall that was reserved for White people, thus indicating that “Normal” was Black. The letter goes on to explore Philadelphia’s pervasive racism at public venues.⁶ So much so, that it even starts off with “Normal” writing that Philadelphia is “the most intensely negro-hating city in the Union.”

Nearly a month later, we encounter an unusual interruption in the correspondence. On 19 June, Douglass wrote in *FDP* that a letter from “Normal” had been misplaced, making it impossible to publish in time for that week’s issue.⁷ Despite promising to publish the letter in the following week’s paper, the 26 June 1857, edition of *FDP*, has not survived and the fate of the letter remains a mystery.

Unfortunately, there are additional missing issues of *FDP* in the second half of 1857. The surviving “Normal” correspondence does not resume until 14 December. In that letter, “Normal” discusses how the “colored men” of Philadelphia were not willing to meet for military drills unlike the Boston Liberty Guard militia who had recently marched in a parade. “Normal” doubts that a comparable Black militia could operate publicly in Philadelphia, regardless of its ability, because of local racism. Despite this, “Normal” seems to actively support such an initiative. “Normal” also states that Black men have the same right to bear arms and join militia units as White men do; “Normal” uses the words “we” and “us” in this sentence, thus indicating he is male as well as African American. “Normal” elaborates on the status of various Blacks in

² Although this was the first issue discovered by Williams, this is the second confirmed “Normal” letter.

³ Normal to FD, 3 April 1857, *FDP*, published 17 April 1857, p. 3, c. 3–5.

⁴ Normal to FD, 11 April 1857, *FDP*, published 24 April 1857, p. 3, c. 1–2.

⁵ Normal to FD, 27 April 1857, *FDP*, published 8 May 1857, p. 3, c. 1–2.

⁶ Normal to FD, 30 May 1857, *FDP*, published 5 June 1857, p. 3, c. 5–6.

⁷ 19 June 1857, *FDP*, p. 2, c. 3.

Philadelphia, wishing many more of them would “wake up” by gaining an education, building wealth, character, sensibility, and religiosity.⁸

Eleven days later, on 25 December, “Normal” briefs Douglass on Jacob Dupen, a fugitive slave denied legal representation in Philadelphia courts.⁹ “Normal” notes the irony of Dupen’s arrest, which happened at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Fair, “one of the longest and most successful of the many antislavery fairs in the 1850s.” The letter then critiques the personal character of specific attendees at the fair such as Calvin De Wolf, Robert Purvis, and Charles Lenox Remond, ruling these men out as “Normal” suspects.¹⁰

The first letter from “Normal” dated in 1858 appears on 11 January. This letter reports on the Black abolitionist lecturer William J. Watkins’ visit to Philadelphia.¹¹ Watkins was also an assistant editor for *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. Therefore, this letter offers insight into the multitudes of tasks undertaken by antebellum Black American abolitionists; in this case acting as an orator *and* a newspaperman. In fact, it was during this very time in Philadelphia where Watkins would use his oratory abilities to lecture about the Anti-Slavery Movement, specifically the “objections urged against it.” Given that “Normal” mentions Watkins in this regard, and the fact that Watkins seems to have no problem presenting himself to the public, it is reasonable to rule Watkins out as “Normal.”

Approximately two months later, on 5 March, “Normal” travels to New Haven, Connecticut and talks about how the weather is “particularly refreshing to a Philadelphian.” Then he provides readers with an account of political disputes between the supporters of Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas and sitting President James Buchanan at the Democratic State Convention in the city.¹² The two politicians sparred over how popular sovereignty should be applied to the dispute over whether slaves should be permitted in the Kansas Territory. Perhaps he was originally a Connecticut native or read Connecticut abolitionist newspapers. More than likely, however, it appears “Normal” attended the Convention to observe abolitionist sentiment outside Philadelphia.

A month later, on 17 April, “Normal” describes his perception of the era’s growing political corruption, as well as the mounting hostility towards free Black citizens in Philadelphia. He often quotes Latin phrases and explains religious concepts as well.¹³ On 30 July, the tone of the “Normal” correspondence shifts from the philosophical notes of the previous letters. Here he simply documents the annual commencement ceremony at Yale College in New Haven, Connecticut.¹⁴

The last known “Normal” correspondence appears in *FDP* on 2 October 1858. Within this letter there is another report on abolitionist activities in Philadelphia. “Normal” describes various debates occurring in the city.¹⁵ Importantly, the letter gives no indication “Normal” planned to discontinue contributing to the newspaper. Possibly more “Normal” letters could have been published, however Many *FDP* and *Douglass’ Monthly* issues from 1859 and 1860 have not survived.

⁸ Normal to FD, 14 December 1857, *FDP*, published 25 December 1857, p. 2, c. 5–6.

⁹ Escaping from Baltimore, Maryland, Dupen was caught in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. After failing to provide documentation, he was left without legal representation and lost the case. He was returned to his owner, William M. Edelin. See *The New York Times*, Article 4-No Title, 21 December 1857, p. 3, c. 2., Timesmachine.nytimes.com.

¹⁰ Normal to FD, *FDP*, 25 December 1857, published 1 January 1858, *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Correspondence*, Series 3, Vol. 2: 1853–1865, ed. John R. McKivigan (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018), 217.

¹¹ Normal to FD, 11 January 1858, *FDP*, published 22 January 1858, p. 2, c. 6.

¹² Normal to FD, 5 March 1858, *FDP*, published 19 March 1858, p. 3, c. 2–3.

¹³ Normal to FD, 17 April 1858, *FDP*, published 23 April 1858, p. 3, c. 4–5

¹⁴ Normal to FD, 30 July 1858, *FDP*, published 6 August 1858, p. 3, c. 3–4.

¹⁵ Normal to FD, 2 October 1858, *FDP*, published 15 October 1858, p. 3, c. 2–3.

The Remaining Candidates

One of the obstacles encountered in investigating the identity of “Normal” is that he does not provide many clues in these letters regarding his personal life—leaving historians with little to go on. We can infer, from the contents of the letters, that “Normal” possessed an elevated vocabulary and presumably was educated (albeit, perhaps, self-educated) as well as being male and Black. By 1860, 20,000 African Americans resided in Philadelphia, comprising nearly four percent of the city’s population.¹⁶ Given that a sizable portion of the city’s Black population was illiterate, however, our “Normal” search has taken us into the world of Philadelphia’s male “Black elite.”

When examining this “elite” circle, most roads usually lead to the Institute for Colored Youth (ICY), the only private school in Pennsylvania with an all-Black faculty.¹⁷ Since its founding in 1837, several notable Black Philadelphians passed through the Institute’s halls, either as an educator or a student. One of these men was Charles L. Reason, who served as the school’s first principal—but he returned to his hometown of New York City in 1855, two years before the first “Normal” correspondence.¹⁸ This fact alone rules him out as “Normal.”

Ebenezer Bassett (1833–1908), an educator, is another story. Born in Connecticut, Bassett was admitted into the Connecticut Normal School in 1853 and began teaching after graduating at the ICY. He had extensive knowledge of mathematics and the classics.¹⁹ By 1856, at the age of twenty-three, he became the principal of the school, replacing Reason. If Bassett is “Normal,” it has been theorized that Bassett used his Connecticut roots and connections while reporting on conferences at Yale College (there are two “Normal” letters on this subject). He also had two children by 1858; but a dead end begins, however, when looking into Bassett’s career post-1860: throughout the 1860s, Bassett began delivering public addresses.²⁰ He does not appear to have written into any publication. Apart from his erudition and connection to Connecticut, there is not much indicating that Bassett is our man (the “Normal” School connection seems more of coincidence than an implication as a Normal school is merely a place for people to be educated in the ways of teaching others). More noteworthy are his two children: Bassett would probably not have found time for extensive correspondence with Douglass if he was a new father.

Another potential suspect was one of Bassett’s brightest students: Octavius V. Catto (1839–71). Catto had lived in Philadelphia since he was five.²¹ He graduated from the ICY in 1858 but returned to the school the next year as a teacher.²² It is clear that Catto was well-educated, but, again, a roadblock presents itself: letters from “Normal” appear from 1857–58, while Catto was still a student in school. His age probably makes him too young to be a viable candidate for “Normal.” Catto would have a successful career in education and civil rights activism. Sadly, he was murdered in 1871 while attempting to exercise his newly won right to vote.²³

Another possibility for “Normal,” of a more appropriate age, is Isaiah C. Wears

¹⁶ Christopher Teal, *Hero of Hispaniola: America’s First Black Diplomat, Ebenezer D. Bassett*, (Praeger, 2008), 39.

¹⁷ Teal, *Hero of Hispaniola*, 41.

¹⁸ *Encyclopedia of African American History 1619–1895: From the Colonial Period to the Age of Frederick*.

¹⁹ Teal, *Hero of Hispaniola*, 37, 41.

²⁰ Teal, *Hero of Hispaniola*, 48.

²¹ Harry C. Silcox, “NINETEENTH CENTURY PHILADELPHIA BLACK MILITANT: OCTAVIUS V. CATTO (1839–1871),” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 44, no. 1 (1977): 54.

²² Silcox, “OCTAVIUS V. CATTO,” 57

²³ Silcox, “OCTAVIUS V. CATTO,” 53.

(1822–1900). Wears, a freeman born in Baltimore in 1822, moved to Philadelphia as a child.²⁴

Wears' family soon became regular attendants at the Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church; this was the largest Black church in the city, and it was where Wears' "family life was centered," according to one historian.²⁵

The only clues we have regarding Wears possibly being "Normal" comes from the correspondence to Douglass in April 1857. There, "Normal" refers to A.M.E. Church as "old Bethel."²⁶ The use of "old" here carries a connotation of familiarity, which Wears certainly was with the Church. However, this is a weak link at best.

After reading about the aforementioned candidates, if you are feeling frustrated at the lack of evidence in the search for "Normal," you are not alone; historians do not have concrete evidence to base their claims for any of the above-mentioned suspects. This lack of evidence changes, however, when examining our final potential candidate: one of the most well-known Black abolitionists in Philadelphia, William Still.

An Underground Correspondent: The Case for William Still

The son of escaped slaves, Still was born free in late 1821 in New Jersey. He grew up performing agricultural duties for his father's forty-acre farm, and he even contracted his labor to neighbors. Early on, Still devoted himself to expanding the abolitionist cause. A formative experience occurred while living in New Jersey: the young Still witnessed a band of slave catchers trying to track down a runaway slave. When they found the slave and began attacking him, Still's Quaker neighbor, Thomas Wilkins, flung hot embers from a shovel at the catchers. This action bought enough time for the runaway to escape.²⁷

Busy working in the fields, Still, along with his seventeen siblings, did not find time for education.²⁸ Still moved to Philadelphia at twenty-three years old, however, and soon became literate.²⁹ After arriving in the "city of brotherly love," Still worked odd jobs to support himself. He eventually made the acquaintance of James Miller McKim, the White editor of the abolitionist newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*.³⁰ McKim recommended that Still apply for a job at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (PASS) office. He was hired in September 1847.

In early 1849, the PASS office (located at 31 North Fifth St.) received a large wooden crate in the mail. Having shipped himself from Richmond, Virginia, an escaped slave named Henry Brown was inside.³¹ This appears to be one of, if not the first, experiences Still had working with the Underground Railroad. He would continue sheltering runaway slaves for the next several decades. In 1872, he published a book of collected stories and interviews called *The Underground Rail Road*.³² After its publication, Douglass was upset that Still had not

²⁴ Teal, *Hero of Hispaniola*, 42; Harry C. Silcox, "The Black 'Better Class' Political Dilemma: Philadelphia Prototype Isaiah C. Wears," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 113, no. 1 (1989): 47, Jstor.org.

²⁵ Silcox, "Isaiah C. Wears," 51, 47.

²⁶ Normal to FD, 3 April 1857, *FDP*, published 17 April 1857, p. 3, c. 5.

²⁷ William C. Kashatus, *William Still: The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2021), 23.

²⁸ Kashatus, *Still*, 13, 22.

²⁹ Kashatus, *Still*, 23. This claim is disputed by Still's daughter, claiming he was reading and writing as a child.

³⁰ Kashatus, *Still*, 27.

³¹ Kashatus, *Still*, 29.

³² Its full title was longer: *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, &c.; Narrating the Hardships of Hair-breadth Escapes and Death Struggles of the Slaves in Their Efforts for Freedom, as Related by Themselves and Others, or Witnessed by the Author; Together with Sketches of the Largest Stockholders, and Most Liberal Aiders and Advisers, of the Road* (Porter & Coates, 1872).

acknowledged him sufficiently. Indeed, Douglass is only mentioned in Still’s book in passing references.³³

Recollecting the situation twenty years later, Douglass wrote to historian Wilbur Siebert explaining he took umbrage with Still’s treatment of runaway slaves on the Underground Railroad; the specifics of this situation are not known.³⁴ Retrospectively, Douglass claimed this was the reason for his exclusion in the book.³⁵ When this falling out with Still occurred, again, is not known; although it most likely occurred in the late 1850s and early 1860s (the period Still wrote the book). Still died in 1902 at the age of eighty.³⁶

Like other “Normal” suspects, there is no smoking gun linking Still with the correspondent’s identity. However, we have numerous clues that pinpoint Still’s likelihood. The most apparent element in “Normal”’s correspondence to Douglass is the scale of detail included in the writing. “Normal” includes information on the weather in Philadelphia, calling 20 February, the day Douglass arrived in the city for a speaking engagement, a “rainy and disagreeable day.” He goes on to describe Douglass’s appearance: “Frederick Douglass . . . accompanied by his friends . . . looked especially hale and hearty.”³⁷ Attention to detail is a hallmark of letters from “Normal.”

Still was also a detail-oriented man, honing his skills on meticulous record keeping while working for the Underground Railroad. Historian Larry Gara notes the following:

One of Still’s duties was to ask the newly arrived slaves their names, and the names of their masters and where they had come from, and to question them about their escape experiences and the severity of their servitude . . . Still not only recorded the data but carefully preserved the records. In his book he wrote that he had kept the documents for possible use in helping to reunite relatives and friends.³⁸

Given Still’s ability to document events for private use, it is reasonable to surmise that he could have earlier employed those abilities in potential correspondence with Douglass in *FDP* (there is no surviving private correspondence known to exist between Douglass and Still).

In his correspondence, “Normal” was well spoken, displaying a wide vocabulary in English and Latin. In April and October 1858 letters, respectively, “Normal” uses phrases “*O mores, O tempora!*” (Oh the times, of the customs!) and “*Fiat iustitia ruat caelum*” (Let justice be done though the heavens fall).³⁹ He also used sophisticated English words like “claimant,” “physiognomy,” “direful,” and he described Philadelphia’s press organs as “austral-eyed.”⁴⁰ “Normal” using above-average vocabulary indicates some educational background—whether

³³ E.L. Stevens to William Still, 8 July 1857, in *The Underground Rail Road*, 155; J.W. Loguen to William Still, 5 October 1856, in *The Underground Rail Road*, 158. Still’s book is largely a collection of letters written to him about the Underground Railroad. When Frederick Douglass is mentioned, it is in the context of others writing to Still about him. Still, alone, did not say much about FD. Herein lies Douglass’s reasons for feeling slighted.

³⁴ It has been speculated that Still was charging runaways a fee for room and board, turning escape from slavery into a business. However, this hypothesis has not been confirmed.

³⁵ FD to Wilbur Siebert, 27 March 1893, Wilbur H. Siebert Underground Railroad Collection, Ohiomemory.org.

³⁶ Kashatus, *Still*, 218.

³⁷ Normal to FD, 8 April 1857, *FDP*, published 24 April 1857, p. 3, col. 4.

³⁸ Larry Gara, “William Still and the Underground Railroad,” in *Blacks in the Abolitionist Movement*, eds. John H. Bracey, August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick (Wadsworth, 1971), 46.

³⁹ Normal to FD, 17 April 1858, *FDP*, published 23 April 1858, p. 3, c. 5; Normal to FD, 2 October 1858, *FDP*, published 15 October 1858, p. 2, c. 3.

⁴⁰ Normal to FD, 17 April 1857, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series 3, *Correspondence*, Vol. 2 (1853–1865), ed. John R. McKivigan, 217; Normal to FD, *FDP*, 17 April 1858, published 23 April 1858, p. 3, c. 4; Normal to FD, *FDP*, 3 April 1857, published 17 April 1857, p. 3, c. 3.

that be self-education or schooling. In this respect, Still also possessed a considerable vocabulary. He knew Latin phrases: he used “vice versa” in his book, *The Underground Rail Road*.⁴¹ Still was also described by a patron of his boarding house in 1858 as a “highly intelligent host.”⁴² After becoming literate, Still acquired a reputation as a “great reader of books, especially history and geography.”⁴³ If Still is “Normal,” it is possible he translated his elevated vocabulary into his correspondence with Douglass.

One of the strongest clues for Still being

“Normal” is Still’s history of corresponding with other abolitionist newspapers. Still authored several articles in the Canadian-based *Provincial Freeman* from 1854 and 1855.⁴⁴ Importantly, in at least one November 1854 article, Still signed his name at the end as “W.S.” not “Normal,” nor is he labeled as a “Philadelphia Correspondent.”⁴⁵ Although the presentation of his name might not help our case, Still’s history of writing into publications does.

Another aspect of this search for “Normal” is pinpointing Still’s home. Still, one of the city’s wealthiest African Americans, owned several real estate properties—all made possible by his successful coal and iron businesses.⁴⁶ Still also kept a boarding house at “374 South St., below 9th, south side;” this address was regularly advertised in *FDP* in 1857 and 1858, corresponding with the same period the “Normal” letters are found. The last known advertisement appears in December 1858, corresponding with the same period the “Normal” letters are found.⁴⁷

In 1860, once *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* changed its name to *Douglass’ Monthly*, there was an October article published “From the Philadelphia press,” not a “Philadelphia Correspondent.”⁴⁸ In it, the author, who never introduces himself, describes an encounter with a “well known colored gentleman” at his home on “South St. near Eighth.”⁴⁹ The author seems to go out of their way to never identify the man by name, instead referring to him as “one of the leading public men among his people, and has much of the ease and polish peculiar to the well bred Caucasian.”⁵⁰ Given the address and noted reputation of the man, it is reasonable to suggest the author is referring to William Still.

The series of “Normal” letters ended abruptly in October 1858. As aforementioned, Still’s falling out with Douglass, which more than likely occurred in the 1860s, could explain the end of the correspondence; perhaps, even, Douglass and Still sparred circa 1859–60, and Douglass did not want to continue printing “Normal” letters—and likewise, Still did not want to continue writing for *FDP*. This is conjecture; however, it is the only explanation we have that could possibly explain the end of the “Normal” correspondence. It should also be noted that the advertisements for Still’s boarding house end the same time as the “Normal” correspondence.

Concluding the Search

We are not alone in considering Still as the most likely “Normal.” Historian Elizabeth

⁴¹ Still, *Underground Rail Road*, 4.

⁴² *FDP*, 12 August 1858, p. 4, c. 5.

⁴³ Kashatus, *Still*, 23.

⁴⁴ Kashatus, *Still*, 310n22.

⁴⁵ William Still, “Welcome to Wm. Wells Brown,” *Provincial Freeman*, 11 November 1854, p. 1, c. 6.

⁴⁶ Kashatus, *Still*, 24.

⁴⁷ *FDP*, 24 December 1858, p. 2, c. 6.

⁴⁸ “From the Philadelphia Press,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, October 1860, p. 347, c. 3.

⁴⁹ “From the Philadelphia Press,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, October 1860, p. 347, c. 3.

⁵⁰ “From the Philadelphia Press,” *Douglass’ Monthly*, October 1860, p. 348, c. 1.

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Varon offers the same conjecture.⁵¹ Nevertheless, all of this remains an *educated guess*. It is crucial to note that we are not claiming that Still is definitively “Normal,” only that Still is the most likely out of the many candidates we have examined. A wider investigation should be conducted to track down Frederick Douglass’s most elusive correspondent. Despite our uncertainty in tracking down “Normal,” we remain confident in the research presented. Regardless of the true identity of “Normal,” this individual contributes greatly to our understanding of Douglass’s travels in 1857–58. Even more so, students or scholars of Philadelphia history can find a treasure of information in the “Normal” correspondence. For now, at least, historians will have to continue to ask: “Who is ‘Normal’?”

⁵¹ Elizabeth Varon, “‘Beautiful Providences’: William Still, the Vigilance Committee, and the Abolitionists in the Age of Sectionalism,” in *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love*, eds. Richard Newman and James Mueller (Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 230. Varon only states that it was “perhaps . . . William Still?” There is no greater explanation in the text or footnotes about her hypothesis.