

**BLACK INTELLECTUAL CULTURES AND IDEALS
EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AFRICAN
AMERICAN LITERATURE, 1856-1910**

by

Sarah Lynn Patterson

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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ABSTRACT

Black Intellectual Cultures and Ideals: Educational Philosophy in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature, 1856-1910 explores how the goals of educational and moral attainment undergirded Black intellectual-activists' racial uplift initiatives and notions of leadership. Examining Colored Convention minutes, Charlotte Forten's *Life on the Sea Islands* (1864) and Serena A. M. Washington's little-known *Biography of George T. Downing* (1910), among other texts, I argue that Black women writers' rhetorical practices, organizational activism and publication histories empowered their calls to challenge professional marginalization and racism, while also shaping ideas about the future trajectory of Black leadership classes. Freeborn northern Black women, who were groomed by Black male social networks and who viewed teaching and authorship as interconnected forms of educational advocacy, utilized urban spaces and narratives to engage in American social reform, particularly the Abolition, Colored Conventions and Freedmen's Education movements. Rather than solely examining traditional sites of education such as the classroom, this study interrogates a broad scope of Black women's education-themed collaborative writing practices and cultural criticism that operated to historicize Black leaders' advancements and future goals.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: BLACK WOMEN WRITERS AND BLACK ACTIVIST THOUGHT

Black Intellectual Cultures and Ideals: Educational Thought in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature explores how the goals of educational and moral attainment undergirded Black intellectual-activists' racial uplift initiatives and notions of leadership. Examining Colored Convention minutes, Charlotte Forten's *Life on the Sea Islands* (1864) and Serena A. M. Washington's little-known *Biography of George T. Downing* (1910), among other texts, I argue that Black women writers' rhetorical practices, organizational activism and publication histories empowered their calls to challenge professional marginalization and racism, while also shaping ideas about the future trajectory of Black leadership classes. The ethos of Black activist womanhood and manhood embedded in organizational proceedings, biographies, newspaper fiction and political essays reflects Black women's interest in conveying cultural solutions to issues stemming from Black inequality, slavery and sexism. Freeborn northern Black women, who were groomed by Black male social networks and who viewed teaching and authorship as interconnected forms of educational advocacy, utilized urban spaces and narratives to engage in American social reform, particularly the Abolition, Colored Conventions and Freedmen's Education movements. Rather than solely examining traditional sites of education such as the classroom, this study interrogates a broad scope of Black women's education-themed collaborative writing practices and

cultural criticism that operated to historicize Black leaders' advancements and future goals.

This study examines notions of guardianship and activist identities that emerge in educational, domestic, urban and print spaces. Connecting threads throughout the study, what I call, “professional respectability” and “moral economies” are simultaneously labor and assimilation concepts that attend to the ways Black women educator-activists approach upward mobility in reference to nineteenth-century Black leadership practices, cultural ideals and the spaces out of which agendas for activism developed. My study establishes the Northern Black intelligentsia as self-determined political representatives, while paying close attention to their methods of collaborative authorship, as well as their rhetorics of political identity. I include case studies that examine convention proceedings in order to critically survey antebellum convention demography, which brokered real and imagined relationships among Black leaders, communities and public spectators. Four daughters of famous Black convention leaders published biographies to assert an ethos of Black leadership for emerging generations of Black men. While Josephine Brown’s antebellum *Biography of An American Bondman* (1855) enjoyed more popularity than H. Cordelia and Florence Rays’ *Biography of Charles B. Ray* (1887) and Serena Washington’s *George T. Downing* (1910), the palpable ideological connections between the three represent activist-minded, feminist epistemologies. Regarding the periodical press as a key intellectual space for women’s political thought, Charlotte Forten’s *Life on the Sea Islands* (1864), published in *Atlantic Monthly*, illustrates the conflicting feelings of an abolitionist contractually bound to the Port Royal Experiment. Her exposé frames Black loyalty to the Union from the perspectives of South Carolinian freedmen and a

moral economist. Black women teachers also achieved professional respectability in the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church newspaper *The Christian Recorder*. Reading works such as Mary Still's "An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" (1857), Sarah Woodson's "Address to the Youth...Before the Colored Teachers' Association" (1863) and Julia Collins' novel, *Curse of Caste* (1865), this study examines ideals of womanhood, national progress and moral values by contextualizing philosophies, public reception and parallel debates that explicitly and implicitly regarded democratic ideals as central conduits for social transformation, even as such intellectual and cultural work is frequently attributed to more popular, Black occupational idealists such as John Mercer Langston.

Using literary and historical approaches, *Black Intellectual Cultures and Ideals* examines Black educational forums and literary genres connected to social reform activities in which Black women educators were active. This study argues that Black women educators' pedagogical practices and political expression emerged within, but also departed from, broader educational debates among their peers in communities of the Black intelligentsia. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought about powerful changes to the legal status of Black Americans. But, even as social movements and federal legislation dramatically altered their sense of national belonging, Black women's educational advocacy reveals ongoing struggles with racial and patriarchal oppression. As such, Black women's political interventions touched a number of communities that would meet across venues in public and private spaces, including in classrooms, churches and homes, at Colored Education Conventions and within books, news literature and print ephemera.

Tapping into a number of venues beyond traditional educational spaces allows the study to critically explore Black women's political engagement in public platforms of protest, political solidarity and community-based instruction. These aspects of their engagement are in turn reflected in their publication histories, reader reception and the larger cultural landscape that provoked and supported Black activism. In viewing organizational and textual platforms as sites in which Black women articulated the values that undergirded their educational advocacy, we encounter trends in Black reform thought. We especially encounter the ways their professional careers as educator-activists interacted with larger beliefs about the role of Black leaders and how those beliefs gained traction at antebellum and Civil War-era Colored Conventions. I argue that the Black women writers and activists included in this project rhetorically defied gender- and race-based divisions of power within Black and White communities of activists. In doing so, they appropriated and challenged contemporaneous tropes of womanhood and Black respectability politics. They espoused moral messages that conveyed their investment in empowering Black communities across class.

By appropriating the spirit of U.S. democracy and the citizenship rights U.S. democracy granted to American citizens for their own political purposes, African American writers promoted moral values derived out of experiences serving African American communities in various capacities. Black activists such as James Forten, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown and Frances E. W. Harper became well known for publishing literature and addressing audiences on the subject of American democracy and the condition of Black Americans in the U.S. Josephine Brown and Charlotte Forten, among other Black women writers featured in this project, also

sought to identify, define and analyze popular ideals to support racial uplift projects and ideals. Citizenship rights outlined in the U.S.'s chief dictum, the Constitution of the United States (1789), often became the basis for how many African American intellectuals understood American democratic ideals. The opening clause to the U.S. Constitution assigned a purpose that the U.S. government should unfailingly endeavor to fulfill:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.¹

The U.S. Constitution's purposeful investment in "a more perfect Union" is one way by which we may conceive of the difference between ideas about democracy and Black intellectual ideals as a practice in U.S. democracy from Black writers' perspectives. America's constitutional language was more than a strategy or idea to consolidate governance across states and territories. It represents an ideal because it declares that Americans citizens are to continuously pursue improvement on behalf of the United States. A democratic ideal pleads for an unending pursuit of national unity based on mutually agreed-upon principles that undergird citizenship rights. A democratic idea might simply suggest a way forward. The U.S. Constitution as a text and as a representation of American democracy inherently admits imperfection. But, the U.S.' implementation of federal, state and local laws during the nineteenth century regularly and willfully dislodged Black Americans from citizenship rights and

¹ "The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription." N.d. *National Archives*. www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript.

connected democratic ideals. Furthermore, the government's implementation of constitutional rights often disregarded Black Americans' attempts to pursue democratic ideals along with more empowered U.S. citizens.

Examining the differences between ideas, democratic ideals and Black intellectual cultures allows scholars to bring attention to the ways nineteenth-century Black activism responded to mass disenfranchisement in American society. According to Ivy Wilson in *Specters of Democracy*, during the mid-nineteenth century, "[T]he escalating debate about slavery put increased pressure on ideas of citizenship and saw the return of the concept of the shadow as a metaphor for the predicament of liberal democracy."² In responding to disenfranchisement surrounding the topic of slavery and issues surrounding free Blacks' experiences in America, Black intellectuals created cultures of resistance, debate and authorship that sought to raise the educational capacities of Black people. They regarded education as a tool for Black people's continual empowerment and resistance. For this reason, I argue that Black intellectual cultures developed as protest measures seeking to better couple U.S. democratic ideals that are represented in the Constitution of the United States with Black people's actual legal status and social treatment in America. Such work was an intellectual and cultural endeavor.

As an intellectual endeavor, Black activists needed to learn, define and analyze the status of Black people in America in relation to the U.S.' statements on citizenship rights. People, places, literature and attitudes surrounding this work constitute an

² Wilson, Ivy. *Specters of Democracy: Blackness and the Aesthetics of Politics in the Antebellum U.S.* Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2011. 4.

intellectual culture in which Black women writers were active. This critical framework allows scholars to address additional barriers beyond enslavement that complicated the development of Black intellectual cultures, including problematic gender-based behavioral roles and political, educational and professional exclusion. “Professional respectability” and “moral economies” reflect beliefs and rhetorical strategies that help us to better understand Black women writers’ engagement in aspects of Black intellectual cultures and connected ideals.

The term “respectability politics” is a precursor to notions of professional respectability that appear in this study. Scholar of African American studies Evelyn Higginbotham coins the term in the seminal *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (1993). Higginbotham argues “that women were crucial to broadening the public arm of” Black churches, thus “making it the most powerful institution of racial self-help” within African American communities.³ Her work seeks to recover Black churchwomen as feminist theologians connected to “the movement that brought into existence the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.”⁴ Higginbotham’s articulation of the politics of respectability connected to Black churchwomen is an important precursor to notions about the ways nineteenth- and early-twentieth century Black women educators espoused ideas about intellectual growth and the interconnected nature of activism and employment.

³ Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. 1.

⁴ Higginbotham, 2.

Higginbotham describes the ways public decorum formed a basis for Black churchwomen's ideas about racial uplift:

They felt certain that “respectable” behavior in public would earn their people a measure of esteem from white America, and hence they strove to win the black lower class's psychological allegiance to temperance, industriousness, thrift, refined manners, and Victorian sexual morals.⁵

Problematically, Black women's investment pushing Black communities to rise to their concepts of white society's social standards created “tensions” within these communities that “disavowed” and “opposed” cultures Black churchwomen considered beneath their lifestyle standards for middle-class respectability.⁶ As this project shows, types of respectability politics existed among Black women educators across political and religious affiliations who were engaged in the public sphere before and during the late nineteenth century. Departing from Higginbotham's term in significant ways, my study of Black women writers' professional respectability refers to the belief that racial uplift could be achieved when Black people's professional and political labor were conceived and rendered in tandem.

By focusing on Black women educators who sought to position their literature in the public sphere for Black and white readers, this study focuses on a broader group of Black women writers who embodied and promoted professional respectability within and apart from conventional structures of educational attainment. Because the role of educator was inherently instruction-based, Black women writers and speakers

⁵ Higginbotham, 14.

⁶ Higginbotham, 15.

were able to claim authority in the public sphere based on the credentials they had gained as teachers with traditional licenses or significant experience. In turn, educational leadership and teaching roles allowed Black women to espouse visions for Black people's access to moral and educational improvement. They believed that teaching and public activism as joint endeavors were immensely important strategies by which Black women gained respect from their peers and, in many cases, individuals outside of their race. However, their vision for gaining respectability was not limited to the teaching profession. They promoted the notion that one's employment status—even those that did not include elite professions—could bolster one's status in the world and help improve the image of Black people in American society.

Black women writers' promotion of professional respectability allowed them to broaden concepts of professional and activist credibility. Throughout the nineteenth century, Black people were regularly excluded from institutions that offered professional credentials such as degrees, certificates and religious ordination. Black women were often excluded from leadership positions in Black organizations and institutions that engaged in the educational and public works that interested them. By promoting the idea that all members of the Black race could be activists and gain employment despite former condition by way of self-improvement and public engagement, Black women writers who embodied and espoused professional respectability often resisted traditional leadership and professional structures. However, the ideals connected to notions of professional respectability conflicted with the experiences of individuals who struggled to gain specialization in a skill or profession, to gain educational access or could not gain employment in their preferred

area of interest due to racial and/or gender discrimination. To counter such responses, Black women who promoted professional respectability resisted standards of living based on rigid middle-class standards of living for Black individuals and communities. Their interest in celebrating the pursuit of upward mobility as well as their investment in promoting activism as a form of skills-building allowed Black people from diverse backgrounds, especially lower-class backgrounds, to find purchase in their philosophies for moral and educational uplift. Not only did Black women writers that appear in this study view forms of activism as a labor endeavor, they sought to acknowledge and celebrate diverse talents and skills that were gained outside of traditional educational and professional institutions such as schools, colleges and universities.

Professional respectability as a framework is not limited to Black women. It reflects a larger discourse prevalent among Black political thinkers, educational philosophers and organizations interested in improving the condition of Black people in America through engagement in the public sphere. From teachers, preachers, barbers and mechanics to clerks, craftsmen and artists, nineteenth-century African Americans participated in a variety of labor roles. Commentators and public followers often remarked upon and celebrated the professions and political positions held by lauded men and women such as the successful businessman James Forten, the author, editor and lecturer Frederick Douglass, the novelist and activist William Wells Brown and the author and teacher Frances E. W. Harper. Many African American intellectuals in activist-intellectual spaces, such as at Black intellectual forums like the 1843 National Colored Convention held in Buffalo, New York, promoted notions of professional respectability. For example, notions of professional respectability

appeared in demographic and sociological reports in convention literature. Given in narrative and numerical form, convention literature regularly promoted, described and encouraged Black Americans to pursue professions and trades. Convention minutes hosted debates about which trades could best serve the overall condition of Black people in America. As the latter suggests, convention records highlighted the positive effects Black employment had on one's ability to promote and represent the cause of Black equality. To this end, convention documents noted participants' labor activities and professional successes, especially those of its officers, delegates, committee members and attending audiences. The purpose of my study is to better understand how Black women's literary production, teaching activities and public reception impacted their ability to communicate their educational philosophies to various audiences. In connection with professional respectability, the term moral economies represents the moral ideals that Black women writers articulated.

The term "moral economies" in this study reflects a belief among Black women intellectuals that Black people could achieve citizenship rights and improve their quality of life in America, in part, through their attention to principles of morality, activist engagement and purposeful endeavors to improve class status through efficacious educational attainment. While Black women writers regularly promoted traditional standards of morality connected to self-improvement and temperance values, their vision for moral improvement also significantly departed from traditional standards. For example, Black women writers in this study often promoted temperance values and some aspects of behavioral codes for women that included domesticity, piety, and purity. However, their own work as authors and their engagement in professional and organizational cultures defied traditional roles of

political and professional subservience that Black women often occupied in American society and as part of Black communities. Their notions of moral economies were not predicated upon Black women remaining docile to men or white society nor did they position moral leadership as a status limited to upper-class Black thinkers, speakers, writers and professionals. By achieving positions of educational leadership and publically discussing the merits of Black women's contributions to racial uplift platforms, they expressed an unconventional paradigm for Black women's instrumentality to educational uplift that centered on Black women's contributions as professionals, collaborators, peers, organizational leaders and political thinkers alongside Black men and white Americans.

Furthermore, Black women writers' notions of moral economies sought to empower other Black women and Black Americans at-large to pursue education as a means of individual and collective uplift. Firstly, Black women writers in this study viewed public spaces as arenas wherein education took place. They also viewed public activities, especially advocacy work, as a basis for educational learning. Doing so undermined traditional barriers of educational and profession attainment and encouraged Black people with diverse class statuses and learning aptitudes to seek out public engagement with a host of organizations, events and advocacy activities as a part of their intellectual growth. Secondly, Black women moral economists' interest in public engagement as an economy—a system of ordered parts that function to achieve a desired outcome—allowed them to ground their notions of morality within a larger positive and inspiring vision for Black people. Through rhetorical engagement with universal and specific themes connected to human struggle and Black empowerment,

Black women writers and educational advocates in this study often centralized the monetary and social value connected to Black activism.

The subjects that appear in this study reflect a strain of political messaging that emphasizes three important monetary and abstract currencies surrounding Black reform thought and educational advancement. Firstly, they believed that reform movements based on moral values were connected to real monetary currency that took the form of donations and organizational funding such as for benevolence societies that supported Black vulnerable populations and freed people. Money connected to moral reform activities and movements could result in building or supporting a number of reform-orientated entities such as schools, teaching programs, newspapers, societies and literature. Secondly, they framed their work as teachers, writers and activists connected to Black reform movements as an example of not only achieving respect in society, but also as an example of how to gain actual monetary and otherwise lucrative dividends. They encouraged Black people to see chosen areas of work and activism as joint endeavors wherein one could perform labor to earn money that improved their own lives while also using their talents and professional skills to advance messages of racial uplift as activists. Thirdly, they suggested that practicing moral values in public spaces was an important part of self-improvement and an important aspect of being a positive part of American society. Thus, participating as a part of the whole of American society as a worker would strengthen white Americans' perception of the race but would also inevitably improve Black individuals, Black communities and their institutions and American society as a whole. In another way, moral living could result in moving the race closer to freedom in America—an outcome with a high social value. Their philosophy suggested that a likely outcome of

Black people's improved moral and employment statuses in public society would include access to full citizenship rights and improved treatment in society. Education was at the foundation of notions of professional respectability and moral economies. Viewing reform environments as spaces of collaboration and activist identity formation, Black women attempted to amplify their political messages through the inherent authority and didactic rhetoric fundamentally connected to their roles as educators and public figures.

Education, Public Activism and Reform in the Nineteenth Century

What constitutes Black women's educational leadership? African American women have long been part of efforts to shape American history. Educational leadership is often examined through material production like curricula and other school literature, learning facilities and school funding. It is also examined through the monetary and social response to such materials. The number of books sold and cultural commentary surrounding literary production tends to shape scholarly perceptions of political influence and reading habits among certain communities. Likewise, the design, curriculum and consumer base associated with schools, Black and colored schools, particularly, play key roles in documenting the relationship between Black women and educational reform during the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. Indeed, these approaches often provide compelling evidence of socio-political impact and historical context. But, a number of gaps in what we know about nineteenth-century Black women's educational activism remain.

The nineteenth century hosted some of the most transformative reforms in American education. As such, the history of education in America is decidedly a

complex story with many actors across race, gender, class, creed and geographical locales. Alongside the Abolition movement, the Colored Conventions movement and a variety of Black educational uplift activities emerged the institutionalization of democratized education as a leading national conversation. One of the most significant reform movements in education, the common school campaign, often associated with Horace Mann, launched in the late 1830s and extended to the mid-century. It resulted in the establishment of local public school systems that citizen tax dollars funded. While the larger public's acceptance of common schools constituted a major act in nation building, common schools in the North and in new territories in the West largely excluded African American students and teachers from their ranks. This was more than a matter of segregation. Black teachers struggled to find fair employment, safe living environments and social support systems. Black students endured unprovoked violence, intimidation and social exclusion, which in turn helped codify bias and systematic discrimination on the basis of skin color.

Exclusionary blockades in every sector of public life led to an outpouring of social thought among African Americans and a multifaceted approach to activism among elite Black leadership communities. Free and fugitive Blacks living in northern hubs such as New York City, Boston and Philadelphia had access to civic, intellectual, social and economic activity that made accessible streams of ideas, goods, industries and opportunities through national and global avenues. Many found industrialization and migration patterns to be beneficial channels through which to craft visions and launch informed action ventures that symbolically and practically unified Black northern and emerging western Black communities for social justice causes. Public activism challenged the young nation's application of citizenship ideals outlined in the

U.S. Constitution. Black public activism promoted cultural self-preservation among Black communities. It highlighted practical steps to address local-level issues affecting Black communities through education-based efforts. In another way, many Black leaders employed moral values and citizenship rights imparted by the U.S. Constitution to form a basis for rhetorical and organizational platforms that revolved around improving the outlook of Black life in America.

Locating Black Women's Educational Thought

Although Black women were active participants in educational advocacy, their intellectual histories are often positioned in historical literature and in contemporary scholarship as ligaments to more popular Black writers and organizations that benefited from more financial sponsorship, public attention and social empowerment. Still, Black women educators expressed confidence in their ability to help lead Black people into freedom and to formulate value systems that would sustain African Americans in freedom. For example, in 1857, Mary Still released an invocation titled, "An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church" in pamphlet form. In it, the A.M.E. churchwoman and educational activist concluded that "the moral or degraded condition of society depends solely upon the influence of women" and that slavery was responsible for drowning the "sensibilities of our whole race."⁷

⁷ Still, Mary. "An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church." *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. Eds. Richard Newman, Patrick Rael and Phillip Lapsansky. New York: Routledge.

Black women believed education would allow African Americans to better understand the social and political infrastructure upon which society was built; that it would enable them to form their own social codes and political agendas in defense of their race, morals and potential; and that it would grant them the tools to create self-sustaining and self-governing institutions so as to subvert social inequality in a nation predominately controlled by the interests of people of Anglo-Saxon descent.

Not every Black teacher practiced the same agenda for educational uplift, and the term *educational uplift* has often been conflated with racial uplift. Historian Bettye Collier-Thomas contends that educational and racial uplift are recognized as interrelated platforms because many of the issues that suppressed the intellectual development of Blacks directly coincided with broader legal, social and economic impediments to equality.⁸ For example, by the Civil War, every slave state had outlawed reading and writing among Black people. Moreover, Black teachers who organized to build schools and create curricula in free states encountered resistance from Whites who wanted to control the funds and educational materials used to educate Black people.⁹ As African Americans began to publicize versions of educational uplift platforms in sermons, newspapers, (auto)biographical narratives and fiction in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it became part of their practice of professional respectability to act in a way that reflected the need for Black men and

⁸ Collier-Thomas, Betty. "The Impact of Black Women in Education: An Historical Overview." *Journal of Negro History* 51:3 (1982): 173-180. *JSTOR*.

⁹ Williams, Heather Andrea. *Self-taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. 69.

women's involvement in public society to bring about social change. Even as educational advocacy resisted many aspects of widely-accepted American social norms, some Black women attempted to conjoin their passion for political engagement with notions of "true womanhood." From feminine appeals for ethical womanhood and the social economy of moral values (re: moral economies) in speeches by teacher-activists Mary Still and Julia C. Collins to book titles that foreground woman's authorship and intellectual leadership—*Biography of A Bondman, By His Daughter*—Black women writers worked to refine their public personas as they resisted the oppression of their sex, of their moral character and of their race.

Black teachers practiced a hybrid construction of womanhood and respectability so as to craft and maintain moral authority in society, particularly in public spaces. Black women were often judged and reviewed on the merits of their physical presentation as much as the content of their speech, if not more. For example, London-based teacher Josephine Brown and author of *Biography of A Bondman, By His Daughter* (1856), travelled the American northeastern anti-slavery lecture circuit in the mid-1850s addressing the relationship between literature, periodicals and movements such as the temperance cause. Besides "her extensive acquaintance" with these subjects, her "prepossessing" appearance and vocal eloquence also drew attention, according to a *Liberator* review of a lecture Brown gave at the Millbury Lyceum in Boston.¹⁰ The reviewer writes: "The charm of all was her chaste and clear enunciation, which acted like a spell upon that large audience."¹¹ This is an example

¹⁰ *The Liberator*. 25 January 1856. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹¹ *The Liberator*. 25 January 1856. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

of the ways audiences valued both intellect and physical presentation as a mode by which to understand the intellectual thrust and racial uplift messages of Black female public figures.

The scholarship that informs this study's analyses of Black professional respectability as a merger of conventional notions of true womanhood and the ethos of Black public activism in nineteenth-century cultural parlance include Hazel V. Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), Joanne Braxton's *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (1989), Frances Smith Foster's *Written By Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (1993), Ann du Cille's *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (1992), Carla Peterson's "*Doers of the Word*": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North, 1830-1884* (1995), and Gabrielle Foreman's *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (2009).

Several important works critically address the intersection between the public sphere and Black women's literary production. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990), Patricia Hill-Collins theorizes about feminist epistemologies to understand Black women's knowledge production. Martha Jones's *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (2006) examines the ways schools and societies represented Black cultures of public life and engaged the "Woman Question." Recent scholarly works examine Black social reform cultures and women intellectuals as a means to theorize about Black women's presence in the public sphere. The co-edited volume *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women* (2015),

Brittney Cooper's *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (2017) and Ashley Farmer's *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (2017) further reflect a diversity of approaches to recovering, expanding and more critically engaging with Black women's intellectual contributions to American literary, activist and political history. These works regard Black women intellectuals as serious thinkers alongside White male philosophers and cultural critics whose writings often form the foundation for the ways scholars examine topics surrounding identity, culture and intellectualism. These scholars also bring attention to fallacies and limitations surrounding the utility of nineteenth-century respectability politics as historical and conceptual paradigms through which to understand Black women's self-representation and epistemological contributions.

Hazel Carby's groundbreaking study *Reconstructing Womanhood* continues to shape the ways in which we theorize and read literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries' "black women's renaissance."¹² Carby contextualizes her analysis of Harriet Jacobs, Frances E. W. Harper, Anna Julia Cooper and Pauline Hopkins' literature by arguing that the historical period during which they wrote was heavily defined by White men, that cultural institutions were controlled by a patriarchal order of White men and that White women's suffrage activism was often aligned with White patriarchal ideals, not with issues pertaining to Black women. As a result, women of color found themselves in a "highly contradictory position" between Black uplift and

¹² Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. 7.

White-led women's suffrage.¹³ This paradoxical situation forced them to develop a unique set of feminine ideals, which simultaneously aligned with—and departed from—White women's notions of true womanhood.

Despite the fact that Black women often developed practices of proper femininity apart from their White counterparts, Black educational uplift concurrently developed alongside White education and the White-led Women's Rights movement in America. Over the course of the nineteenth-century, urbanization and industrialization shifted many White American families' experiences and educational priorities from the self-sufficiency of colonial life to the opportunities available through city life. The 1820s through the 1840s brought about a palpable spike in educational opportunities for White Americans at local levels; the U.S. government expanded the rise of educational opportunity for White men and women through the Morrill Act of 1862, which spurred the creation of land-grant colleges and universities beyond the Northeast where many elite colleges were concentrated. Still, White women's acceptance into seminaries and colleges was often predicated upon their acceptance of the values of the cult of true womanhood. This behavioral code—sometimes known as “republican motherhood”—placed them in the private sphere (the home) as wives, daughters, companions and governesses where they were to practice a set of characteristics that were unlikely for most women to embody and that were crafted in relation to middle- and upper-class White women's social cultures: domesticity, piety, submissiveness, and purity. According to Linda M. Perkins in “The

¹³ Carby, Hazel. *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. 6.

Impact of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ on the Education of Black Women,” “such education reinforced the idea of women’s natural position of subordination and focused upon women being loving wives and good mothers.”¹⁴ This cultural framework for womanhood discounted the quickly expanding roles of women in society as workers, activists and public intellectuals.

With the exception of progressive admission practices at institutions such as Oberlin College, educational and professional training were largely closed to Black women before the 1860s. Oberlin admitted women and Black men beginning in 1833, with the first Black woman, Mary Jane Patterson, earning a college degree in 1862.¹⁵ For this reason, this dissertation focuses on a wide swath of educators and sites of education, from self-taught cultural editors, such as Serena A. M. Washington, to the formally educated, such as the freeborn teaching missionary Charlotte Forten. For those who did receive what was considered to be a proper education in civility and domesticity, Josephine Brown and H. Cordelia and Florence Ray, for example, their subsequent professional work as teachers and activists was deeply informed by what they had learned from networks of the Black leadership intelligentsia and the vision they had for women’s instrumentality to educational uplift. However, beyond formal education, women that appear as subjects in this study were taught the ways of civic society, institutional infrastructure and Black intellectual histories through early-

¹⁴ Perkins, Linda M. “The Impact of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ on the Education of Black Women.” *Journal of Social Issues* 39.3 (1983): 17-28. 17. *JSTOR*.

¹⁵ Perkins, Linda M. “The Impact of the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ on the Education of Black Women.” *Journal of Social Issues* 39.3 (1983) 17-28. 19. *JSTOR*.

century leadership platforms, namely the antebellum and postbellum Colored Conventions movement. This study recognizes the latter as one of the premier, yet under recognized educational platforms for Black leaders and communities between 1830 and 1900. As participants in Black-led social justice causes and as commentators on the state of Black cultural ideals, Black women who appear in this study recognized authorship and activism as ways to formally enter social debates and positions of influence.

While nineteenth-century educated men entered “professional” occupations in law, medicine, trade and commerce, women often simultaneously pursued careers in writing, editing, and teaching as Mary Kelley notes in *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (2006).¹⁶ According to Kelley, the rise of women’s educational opportunities in the nineteenth century was directly related to the influx of women’s academies and seminaries that acquainted women with civic society and classical education. Through the practice of writing and public speaking, “women addressed the larger meanings of the knowledge they were pursuing, practiced the art of persuasive self-presentation, and instructed themselves in the values and vocabularies of civil society.”¹⁷ Once in the world “as educators, as writers, as editors, and as reformers, (women) entered the ‘public sphere,’ or the social

¹⁶ Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. 5.

¹⁷ Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. 14.

space situated between the institutions of the family and the nation-state.”¹⁸ However, this sort of education was largely confined to middle class and wealthy African Americans who could afford elite educations, or those who worked continually to cover the costs of their daughters’ instruction, as William Wells Brown had done for daughters Josephine and Clarissa Brown.

Historical records such as newspapers, diaries and organizational minutes show that Black women educators in the North and South raised funds and formed committees with the goal of founding schools and supporting other teachers, parents and learning communities. African American communities, White patrons and organizations such as the American Missionary Associations, A.M.E. churches and the Union army, funded the construction of schools and auxiliary educational projects, such as the Port Royal Experiment. As studies such as Dorothy Sterling’s *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1984) make clear, many African American women reported back to newspapers including editor James Russell Lowell’s *The Atlantic Monthly* and editor Elisha Weaver’s *The Christian Recorder*. They also penned private letters that would later appear in abolitionist papers, such as William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator* about their experiences. These reports and letters often note a severe lack of funds, horrible learning environments, an extreme lack of educational materials and great learning disparities among multigenerational student bodies. Despite these challenges, African American women taught multigenerational learners in homes and in churches; they acted as headmistresses and

¹⁸ Kelley, Mary. *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006. 2.

missionaries under employment contracts; and a large portion held multiple teaching posts over time, sometimes in new cities every couple of years. What is important to gather from such work, as Stephanie Evans notes in *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954* (2007), is that “these women made significant contributions at a time when women’s leadership was not readily acknowledged or accepted.”¹⁹ As a byproduct of their experiences and the ideological conflicts that arose therein, they often published their experiences and political insights to further encourage readers to get involved in social causes for Black educational uplift. Their efforts sought to confirm that Blacks not only had within them a capacity for moral and mental improvement but that they also deserved as much as Americans.

The Black Public Sphere

Black women teachers’ authorship and circulation of literature in the public sphere are political acts. Racial and gender implications of women’s participation in nineteenth-century public affairs continues to be site of inquiry of among scholars. As Mary Ryan in *Women in Public* (1990) argues, “[T]he power of the terms *public* and *private* in language and in our imagination is reflected in [women’s] continuing ability to shape and comprehend social behavior, albeit in very untidy, historically specific ways.”²⁰ For Black women, “proper” masculine and feminine social behaviors

¹⁹ Evans, Stephanie. *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850-1954: An Intellectual History*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007. 27.

²⁰ Ryan, Mary. *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. 7.

historically associated with public and private spaces necessarily broke down in the face of mass social degradation and racial violence.

Both men and women were needed for a host of tasks that included contributing to the financial stability of the family, spreading a gospel of racial uplift, and documenting Black people's progress and challenges as they witnessed or sought to represent them. In *All Bound Up Together*, Martha Jones argues that leading nineteenth-century movements shaped the ways in which women, particularly Black women, approached political expression through activism: "Black women's prospects for public engagement were bound up with the revolutions and reforms that transformed American society over the century: slavery and abolitionism, women's rights, war, emancipation, institution building, the Fourteenth Amendment, and Jim Crow."²¹ That is, the historical environment in which they lived forced Black women to work outside of the home, to speak up in defense of their race and to offer solutions to social problems that directly impacted their lives, their loved ones and their communities. This study takes into account the historical, racial and gender dynamics that shape the ways in which Black women teachers approach the topic of educational uplift.

African American women educators' literature acknowledges that camp meetings, abolitionist bazaars, teacher's conventions and newspapers, as well as real and fictional sites of Black activism, were gathering places for the articulation of

²¹ Jones, Martha. *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007. 2.

educational goals, moral values and professional respectability. However, it is impossible to statically label locations such as the newspaper, the forum or the home as a public or private site. The public sphere is commonly considered to be an open forum within a nation wherein citizens and denizens share, debate and act on ideas. The private sphere, on the other hand, is often defined as the antithesis of a public space. That is, if the public sphere is the site of collective consumption and distribution of thought, then the private sphere includes spaces wherein individualism is practiced and wherein one's belief system is concretized. This study demonstrates the ways public and private spaces converge, particularly as it relates to discussions about Black education and Black women's professional respectability. As such, notions about who counted as an intellectual and why, and the cultures of print production and marketing among African American activists, greatly impacted the ways in which African American women writers oscillated between public and private spheres to represent Black intellectual cultures and ideals.

The Figure of the Intellectual in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Culture

Scholars have used a number of frameworks to consider the historical and cultural dynamics that influenced the ways figures of the public intellectual appear in popular American culture. An intellectual might have been a reformer, a representative or one of exceptional talent with public appeal that allowed she, he or a connected organization to symbolize or signify in meaningful ways an idea, belief system or state of being. Thus, one or more individuals could act or be received as a proxy for groups of people, organizations and strains of thought. Such a representative framework might arise despite, or because of, the nuances of an intellectual's rise to public

notability, as was the case with former fugitive slaves Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown.

The role of race and gender in shaping the idea and reception of intellectual figures during the nineteenth century cannot be overstated, especially given the lower rates of educational opportunity and positive representation offered to Black women in popular culture. In describing Frederick Douglass as a canonical representative man in *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*, Wilson Jeremiah Moses contends that Douglass's ascension to the status of an internationally recognized public intellectual was due to his ability to appropriate "with stunning genius the Euro-American myth of the self-made man" and to conform for his own purposes "the rhetoric of Anglo-Saxon manhood as skillfully as did any of his White contemporaries, including such master manipulators as Abraham Lincoln, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Phineas T. Barnum."²² Douglass not only came to symbolize what we might call Black public manhood among reading publics, but he also performed an image of the public intellectual for diverse audiences. His intellectual activities included publishing autobiographies, keynoting for social justice lecture circuits, representing New York at Colored Conventions, editing periodicals such as the *North Star* and *Frederick Douglass's Paper* and, later in life, becoming a businessman and statesman—a long list of activities that enabled Douglass to form a public activist identity and appropriate performative modes of intellectualism that could grow, change and be replicated over time as his pursuits and political philosophies developed. Douglass' performance of

²² Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 46.

intellectualism increased for White and Black American publics an investment in his ascension story and increased awareness and support for Black justice causes he championed.

Black women writers such as the biographers featured in this study rhetorically engaged popular cultural images of the public intellectual as an activist-reformer, a representative, a self-made man and a public man. However, these writers had to navigate the fact that figures of the intellectual in popular American society were often White, male and associated with notions and displays of genius. An individual of exceptional quality and merit might be associated with the term genius in various capacities. While using such terminology could draw palpable social and monetary capital to one's literary production or political cause, Black women writers would need to negotiate the limitations of representing Black figures as exceptional individuals. In popular culture, the genius was often understood as possessing "precocious originality" and practicing mastery of a field of knowledge or skill set such as musical talent that advanced far beyond what could or would be expected from average individuals, especially at a young age. Tropes of exceptionality, genius and ideas about intellectual difference among Black people in general threatened to reiterate the popular culture fallacies that dominated American public discourse in relation to conversations about Black people's mental abilities.

Beliefs about Black people's intellectual inferiority were commonplace across classes and sexes of White Americans who consumed and interacted with American popular culture. These beliefs permeated even the upper echelons of educated, wealthy classes of White Americans in positions of power. In a 1791 letter to Benjamin Banneker, then-U.S. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson expressed a yearning to

encounter proof of Black talent and wit that would substantiate the notion that African Americans were indeed equal to other races:

No body wishes more than I do to see such proofs as you exhibit, that nature has given to our black brethren, talents equal to those of the other colours of men, & that the appearance of a want of them is owing merely to the degraded condition of their existence both in Africa & America.²³

At the time, it was socially unacceptable to provide formal education to enslaved Black people. States like South Carolina had codified Black people's exclusion from formal education as early as 1740. Black women writers who addressed Black intellectual cultures had to work against common perceptions of Black people's inherent intellectual inferiority. Moreover, Black women writers had to contend with the fact that to represent a Black man as an *exceptional* talent might convey to Black people the belief that intellectual worth was reserved for a very select few among Black people. They would also need to contend with other cultural stigmas that had developed around figures of exceptionality.

Social stigmas sometimes associated with figures of genius could doubly demean Black figures of exceptionality. In the 1891 pseudo-psychiatric study *The Man of Genius*, the celebrity psychiatrist and professor of legal medicine at University of Turin Cesare Lombroso argues that upon investigating the physical and intellectual strengths and weaknesses of the human species, it could be noted that a desirable strength is usually accompanied by what could be considered a form of degeneracy

²³ Jefferson, Thomas. "Thomas Jefferson: Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Banneker." Exhibition: *Thomas Jefferson* n.p. n.d. *Library of Congress*. www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/79.html.

such as madness even, but not always, among “literary and artistic mattoids.”²⁴ Lombroso’s nearly 400-page treaty on the connections between genius and mental illness was the first of its kind to appear in the nineteenth century, but reflected some American spectators, readers, commentators and cult followings’ long-held sentiments and curiosity. Lombroso’s study took as subjects famous men, such as Mozart and Michelangelo. His work describes both the timing of the appearance of genius and the long-term effects genius had on the careers and sanity of famous men. He implored searchingly at the beginning of *The Man of Genius*: “But how then does it happen...that one individual alone becomes a great painter or a great poet? And how is it that so many philosophers affirm, and quite truly, that genius consists in an exaggerated development of one faculty at the expense of others?”²⁵

As early as 1876, Lombroso’s scientific papers sought to address relationships between genetic intelligence, madness, crime and penal practices. On men of exceptional intellectual capabilities he writes, “[I]t is certain that there have been men of genius presenting a complete equilibrium of the intellectual faculties; but they have presented defects of affectivity and feeling; though no one may have perceived it, or, rather, recorded it.”²⁶ A mental affliction could have been conceived of in many ways, particularly in relation to Black men and women. As the literary histories surrounding

²⁴ Lombroso, Cesare. *The Man of Genius*. London: Walter Scott, 1891. *Hathitrust.org*. 5, 209.

²⁵ Lombroso, Cesare. *The Man of Genius*. London: Walter Scott, 1891. *Hathitrust.org*. Viii.

²⁶ Lombroso, Cesare. *The Man of Genius*. London: Walter Scott, 1891. *Hathitrust.org*. Vi.

exceptional women writers like Phyllis Wheatley and Jarena Lee demonstrate, spectators and detractors had publicly undermined Black women's talent, citing it as mimicry or suicidal hysteria at best.

Moreover, Black women writers who took up the subject of intellectual culture needed to contend with the ways public consumers received the artistic value, labor and economics associated with intellectual figures. In many cases, the social, political and economic currencies that emanated from public reception of the genius constituted a commodity in nineteenth-century literary, newspaper and lecture culture. Gustavus Standler, in *Troubling Minds: The Cultural Politics of Genius, 1840-1890*, connects theories and performances of genius by intellectuals of notability, such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown and Margaret Fuller in popular culture. Standler illustrates the ways actual and fictional figures of genius were involved in public forums of debate surrounding the term genius and "the implied question of judgment, a provocation to readers, writers, and critics to articulate their ideas about what made aesthetic or intellectual labor valuable, and for whom, within that situation."²⁷

Audiences held much more sway in determining who or what was genius than is often acknowledged. As Standler's study shows, and as I attempt to demonstrate, public interest in intellectual cultures and the ideals on which they functioned fed a strong consumer base; audiences wanted to witness, read and talk about the creation or oration of masterpiece, especially in real time. As such the popularity of lecture circuits and forums like Colored Conventions, for which genius artists headlined were

²⁷ Standler, Gustavus. *Troubling Minds: The Cultural Politics of Genius, 1840-1890*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. Xiii.

received by publics as formidable sites of intellectual exchange. They were rousing translations of cultural phenomenon for quotidian audiences. Audiences were especially fascinated with the idea of genius. According to Sandra Tomc in *Industry and the Creative Mind*, many Americans considered with fanatic interest Edgar Allen Poe a “crazed” genius, a madman with the power to summon and project the sublime.²⁸ However, the actuality of his madness did not always suit audiences and market expectations, particularly because Poe was aloof, often did not perform as audiences expected or did not show up for performances at all.

Some Black proponents of mass racial uplift in the U.S. addressed the limitations of the term *genius*, what it represented and its utility in connection with Black educational uplift. While the term genius tended to reference a person’s inordinate giftedness, the term also suggested profound intellectual ability available to very few individuals. It could also suggest that those exhibiting genius were profoundly socially unstable. Under such connotations, genius would not advance the status of Black Americans in a way that allowed genius individuals or genius organizations to stand as a proxy for the idea that Black Americans deserved educational opportunities to develop their intellectual faculties. In her 1862 address to the Ohio Colored Teachers’ Association in Cincinnati, published in *The Christian Recorder*, Sarah J. Woodson (Early) emphasized the inimical nature of genius as a useful ideological framework for mass Black uplift at the time of Emancipation.

²⁸ Tomc, Sandra. *Industry and the Creative Mind: The Eccentric Writer in American Literature and Entertainment, 1790-1860*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012. 144.

Woodson posits: “The excellencies [*sic*] of the mental powers are not the gifts of genius, or the intuitious [*sic*] of nature; but the precious book is obtained, or the shining goal reached, only by those whose care has been the most unceasing, and whose zeal has been the most untiring.”²⁹ Instead of touting exceptionality, Woodson rallied young Black learners to seek out “the education and training of each faculty” in order to ascend to “occupy a position among the higher orders of creation” as a “skillful architect, or physician, or mechanic.”³⁰ Such pragmatism was central to professional respectability and to the ideological frameworks that Black women applied to images and representations of Black intellectuals and ideals. In another way, the embodiment and representations of professional respectability discussed in subsequent chapters illustrate the ways in which Black women articulate the achievable outcomes that come from educational attainment. Their vision sought to empower other Black women and Black people across class to envision the positive and tangible outcomes related to labor, educational and activist endeavors. They highlighted the benefits of viewing these combined pursuits as a reflection of the material and social currencies connected to morality.

²⁹ Woodson, Sarah J. “Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers’ Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio.” 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

³⁰ Woodson, Sarah J. “Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers’ Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio.” 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

Black Print Culture

Another way by which we can understand Black women educator-activists' participation in educational uplift is through the print materials that spurred and documented Black political thought and provided forums for women to share their experiences and to construct notions of Black professional respectability and moral economies. Through printed literature, educators documented teaching successes and failures, and frequently offered provisional solutions to social and political problems of their time. Indeed, print literature is the medium through which this project chiefly studies Black women teachers as author-intellectual-activists. In *Early African American Print Culture* (2013), editors Lara Cohen and Jordan Stein refer to print culture as the intersection of print media and “the ways that print affects (and sometimes effects) personhood, circulates to unintended readers, (and) is subject to reiteration and reappropriation.”³¹ According to Frances Smith Foster, Black print culture refers to “periodical, broadside and pamphlet publishing, church and social documents, (and) commemorative, educational, or organizational literature written by African Americans for African Americans.”³² Such a definition does not suggest that Black-authored texts were written without a consideration of White audiences or international topics, but that they were designed to appeal to readers of African ancestry in America.

³¹ Cohen, Laura Langer and Stein, Jordan Alexander, eds. “Introduction: Early African American Print Culture.” *Early African American Print Culture*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. 7.

³² Foster, Frances Smith. “A Narrative of Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African American Print Culture.” *American Literary History* 17. 4 (2005): 714–740. 732.

In *American Reprinting*, Meredith McGill notes that books published in the early- to mid-nineteenth century mimicked the multi-faceted newspaper and magazine, making clear the importance of an author's engagement with the "climates of opinion and networks of readers constructed by...literary periodicals."³³ Indeed, the culture of reprinting or the practice of merging existing literature with new writing allowed professional author-editors such as William Wells Brown, as John Ernest states, to draw from "the materials of culture and then [to serve] as cultural editor, rearranging those materials in a revealing demonstration of cultural contradictoriness and tension."³⁴ In general, print culture refers to the ways in which printed materials are produced, defined, circulated and utilized by writers, editors, printers, publishers and audiences.

In addition to articulating Black experiences in nonfiction, Black women teachers often remarked upon Black communities' major issues of concern by alluding to the contemporary historical moment within fictional worlds. For example, Gabrielle Foreman's work on Julia Collins' civil war novel *Curse of Caste* serialized in *The Christian Recorder* examines the connections between the Black teacher's novel and essays and concurrently circulating information wanted ads.³⁵ Family members,

³³ McGill, Meredith. *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003. 2.

³⁴ "The Profession of Authorship and the Cultural Text: William Wells Brown's *Clotel*." *Resistance and Reformation in Nineteenth-Century African-American Literature*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011. 23.

³⁵ Heather Williams's *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (2012) offers an extensive study of information wanted ads published in nineteenth-century periodicals.

friends and associates posted these ads in an attempt to locate missing and fugitive loved ones that slavery and its supporters ripped away. Foreman's reading of Black women's novels offers a compelling histo-conceptual framework: the histotextual strategy or Black women novelists' use of "past and present referents to effect change in an as yet not determined future."³⁶ In another way, Black women crafted the historical novel so as to correlate real events and real people with fictional events and fictional characters. Doing so allowed these writers to either clandestinely or overtly communicate with Black readers who were likely to be aware of such references, while readers who were unaware of embedded allusions may have interpreted the novel on different registers of meaning. Foreman's study reveals that for one to fully grasp the cultural codes and embedded meanings in Black women's nineteenth-century historical fiction, one must take into account the actual cultural dynamics that shape the experiences of Black women in the U.S. This project builds upon print culture approaches and histotextuality to recover often-ignored genres and historical educational projects with which Black women writers were engaged.

Chapter Overview: Black Intellectual Cultures and Ideals in Nineteenth-century African American Literature

In examining Black women's representation of Black intellectual cultures and activist identities, subsequent chapters focus on the literary genres and educational forums through which Black women writers addressed multiple audiences. Chapters

³⁶ Foreman, Gabrielle. *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. 11.

seek to convey the importance of these forums to the writers' political commentary on education, racial progress and Black cultural ideals. They especially explicate the ways in which Black women created or participated in spaces that featured women's political thought connected to their teaching or instances of educational advocacy. Chapters examine moral values and frameworks for Black leadership derived out of Black women's literary production. They also consider parallel intellectual customs and organizations that engaged in activism to support Black educational uplift in a variety of ways. Each chapter addresses scholarly frameworks that advance our understanding of representative characteristics associated with figures of Black intellectual cultures as they were represented within nineteenth-century political and popular culture. My approach not only includes a variety of genres through which Black women expressed their political opinions on topics surrounding Black education; it also situates the importance of literary forms that appear in progressive newspapers. As such, serialized novels and teaching narratives are sites of analysis, alongside independently circulating organizational proceedings, petitions, political pamphlets and rarely-discussed biographical literature.

Throughout the following chapters, I contend with the merits and limitations of traits associated with terms scholars and nineteenth-century writers used to describe and examine public personas and political taxonomies associated with Black nineteenth-century organizational leaders and public intellectuals. I interrogate the ways popular terms like delegate, genius and self-made man have often privileged the professional and labor pursuits of public men to form depictions of public intellectuals. I argue that Black women's knowledge and experiences as part of social justice causes allowed them to advance notions of moral economies, while embodying

a form of respectability as professional women in the field of education. Notions of moral economies apparent in their work proposed that moral practices, education, industry and a sense of duty to Black uplift causes would reflect one's value in the public sphere.

Chapter one argues that, in the early 1860s, the Ohio Colored Teachers' Association's organizational resources, professional development opportunities and connections to the A.M.E. Church's newspaper, *The Christian Recorder*, empowered Black women teachers to achieve professional respectability. Before she became the first Black woman faculty member in the U.S., Sarah J. Woodson served as a committee member and keynote speaker at two Black education conventions (1861-1862). In these roles, Woodson challenged the predominately-male convention leadership by promoting a woman-inclusive vision of ideal Black leadership, by promoting a God-ordained view of spiritual teaching and by heralding moral economies as an uplift ideology accessible to Black men *and* women. I situate moral economies as an idealistic uplift platform integral to messages espoused by Black occupational-idealists such as Woodson and John Mercer Langston at Colored Education Conventions. I argue that the Ohio Teachers' Association conventions' intensive focus on Black pedagogy enabled Woodson's version of moral economies to operate on a number of practical and rhetorical levels.

In chapter two, I examine the ways in which Black women biographers appropriate the biographical genre to create multi-dimensional instructional guides expressing woman-centered perspectives on race, notions of Black (political) manhood and elite leadership classes. Between 1856 and 1910, daughters of famous Black activists—Josephine Brown, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray and Serena A. M.

Washington—published biographies that emerged during a time when Black men’s (auto)biographies achieved incredible successes within international book markets. Active in a culture of Black activist biographical writing, the books asserted an ethos of Black leadership for emerging generations of Black men, while also establishing and constructing the authors’ families’ places within the politics of Black reputation so important to their cultural ideals for racial progress. I contend that these activist biographies represent feminist epistemologies and a Black activist womanhood. Not only do the writers believe that Black public men’s foremost duty is to fight for racial equality, but they also articulate how Black women-activists play important roles in historicizing the advancements and future goals of Black leaders as collaborative writers and cultural critics.

In chapter three, I examine the importance of the periodical press to three Black women educators. In 1857, two progressive, commercial news venues, James Russell Lowell’s *The Atlantic Monthly* and the A.M.E. Church’s print organ, *The Christian Recorder*, launched and subsequently became sites of national discourse for Black women teachers who were subscription agents and content contributors. Mary Still, Julia C. Collin and Charlotte Forten’s publication histories reflect the varying ways Black women achieved professional respectability during the decades encompassing the Civil War. Mary Still’s pamphlet, “An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church” (1857) is a compelling example of early A.M.E. churchwomen’s advocacy for gender equality in the church’s publications, just as *The Christian Recorder* publication came into being. The subscription agent’s political dictum calls for Black women to utilize *The Christian Recorder* as a mouthpiece to discuss women’s roles in public society and at home.

By 1865, the small-town teacher Julia C. Collins had published political essays and a serial novel, *Curse of Caste; Or the Slave Bride*—thus, engaging Still’s call. I examine the links between Collins’ and Still’s ideals of womanhood, national progress and moral values. I seek to illuminate the ways their rhetorical practices orchestrate Black women’s place in public society, particularly as they envision women’s roles to operate in relation to, and apart from, the A.M.E. Church. That same year, reviews of the Union Army’s Port Royal Experiment (1862-1865) appeared in the White-run periodical *The Atlantic Monthly*. Charlotte Forten’s ethnographic-style teaching narrative *Life on the Sea Islands* captures her teaching experiences within the nation’s first freedmen’s wage-labor experiment. Her writing advances an image of the experiment that celebrates freedmen’s cultural traditions and progressive domestic policies. Forten’s writing also represents the conflicting feelings of a fiery abolitionist, contractually-bound to fulfilling the government’s values, even as she contends with the government’s view of freedmen as a burden and the freedmen’s severely limited literacy.

Chapter four traces the organizational politics surrounding Colored Convention demography leading up to the 1843 National Colored Convention, as well as the challenges that weakened convention reporting. A critical survey of convention population politics captures a development of rhetorics of socio-political guardianship, which brokered real and imagined relationships among Black leaders, participating communities and public spectators. Self-reporting processes anchored activist-delegates’ notions of leadership, allowing them to learn the condition and capacities of Black communities that individual delegates, such as James McCune Smith and David Jenkins later implemented through petition exercises. While Smith’s and Jenkins’

activist careers reflect practices in guardianship beyond (re: happening or continuing after) the dates during which Colored Conventions were held, this study also interrogates the politics of erasure embedded in proceedings that undermine Black women as a key population and as practitioners of convention values.

To do so, my study unpacks scholarly and historical terms and organizations associated with figures of (Black) intellectuals. I trace early developments of notions of Black socio-political guardianship and structures of self-representation beginning in 1830 at antebellum national Colored Conventions. Predominately led by Black men, Colored Conventions attracted a number of audiences. Many of its leaders constitute a body of Black elite intellectuals who held celebrity status among Black and White audiences in America and Europe. Such figures include A.M.E. Church founder Richard Allen, the novelist, travelling lecturer and fugitive slave William Wells Brown, the physician and petitioner James McCune Smith, the editor and reverend Charles B. Ray and the businessman George T. Downing. This approach makes visible the ways Black women author-educators later appropriated popular Colored Convention leadership tropes to craft, define, categorize and promote public images of intellectual, moral and professional decorum in ways that were accessible to men and women. Secondly, this approach defines the structures that regularly excluded Black women from political leadership positions that could advance their statuses as Black public intellectuals. Finally, this approach reveals the ways in which conventions' gender exclusion practices undermined delegate roles and the spirit of delegations appointed and elected to represent Black communities at the forums.

This dissertation seeks to make important contributions to how we understand Black intellectual cultures. Because Black women educators are rarely understood as

political thinkers, this project critically intervenes to illuminate their negotiation of racism and sexism within political forums important to educational thought, while also bringing attention to the ways in which Black men frequently created, approved of and practiced Black intellectual cultures with and without seeking the influence and ingenuity Black women intellectuals had to offer. This project seeks to demonstrate the ways professions in education proved for Black women a positive point of entry into professional, religious and political institutions invested in Black educational uplift. It advances historical notions of Black leadership, showing that Black women were invested in shaping notions of Black womanhood *and* notions of Black (political) manhood.

Chapter 2

"SPEAK BOLDLY FOR YOUR RIGHTS": SARAH J. WOODSON AND JOHN MERCER LANGSTON AT COLORED EDUCATION CONVENTIONS, 1862, 1869

“It is not by individual excellence a race so long held in bondage can be judged, and we must first give evidence of appreciation of our enlarged position before we can enjoy its benefits in their full fruition. We must not be content with one John Langston, we must have hundreds equal to him. One fitting man for a candidate is not enough; we must have others to fall back upon it should he fail. Our candidate must be supported and surrounded by his equals.”³⁷

—Unattributed letter published in *The Elevator*, 1867

In 1867, an unnamed contributor for the Ohio newsweekly, *Colored Citizen*, recommended the well-known Black education activist and statesman John Mercer Langston for the U.S. vice presidency as the 1869 election approached.³⁸ “Marketed as a regional paper for Blacks in Midwestern cities” and “a medium to speak, hear and be heard,” the *Colored Citizen* editorial board imagined the periodical to be a leader in the day’s Black political thought.³⁹ A writer for *The Elevator*, another popular Black

³⁷ “The Vice Presidency.” *The Elevator*. 16 August 1867. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

³⁸ A white politician would echo this endorsement of Langston as the nominee for the Vice Presidency in 1868. See Aimee Lee and William Cheeks’ “John Mercer Langston: Principles and Politics.” *Black Leaders in the Nineteenth Century*. Leon Witlack and August Meier, eds. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 118.

³⁹ Taylor, Nikki Marie. *The Black Frontier: Cincinnati’s Black Community, 1802-1868*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005. 132.

newspaper based in California, responded, contending that the time was not right for a Black candidate to hold the office. Arguing for a multitudinous display of Black successes and political presence thirty years before W. E. B. Du Bois would promote the “talented tenth,” *The Elevator*’s respondent suggested that a diversity of ideas, social activism and statesmanship above select figureheads would best represent Black people’s interests in the Reconstruction era. Black leaders were aware that by the 1860s, the vast majority of White Americans remained largely unconvinced that Black people had reached a sufficient level of economic, moral and intellectual advancement. White skeptics often contended that Black intellectual life was concentrated in the Northeast, where accomplished and exceptional Black people thrived. Even then, they would often argue that White men had played a significant part in these men’s successes. The debate, then, was not about whether or not Langston was a viable candidate for national office. The debate was about whether or not a Black man’s vice presidency was a viable strategy for mass racial uplift.

Competing arguments about how upward mobility could be achieved demonstrate that Black intellectual thought emerging out of Black forums was in no way monolithic, but was varied in its approach to questions concerning the premise, character and usefulness of Black leadership. The *Colored Citizen* writer represents the idea that a Black leader of singular accomplishment could provide a basis for White society to perceive Black people—beyond enslavement and abolitionist agitation—as equals and peers. With a Black man in national office, Black people’s position in the American body politic would expand to reflect their moral and economic value to Americans and to the world. *The Elevator*’s commentator, on the other hand, supports the idea that Black activists should concentrate on local issues to

raise the general condition of Black Americans. Many believed the latter strategy would produce scores of Black intellectuals and secure long-term elevation. The editorial also suggests that there would be limited success in leveraging accomplished individuals to attain civil rights. In this way, basing communal hopes on a disproportionately few Black intellectuals to pave a way for collective rights downplayed the possibilities that could emerge with a generally educated, politically active Black population. Black labor organizations and conventions in the 1860s mirrored such debates and attracted participants such as John Mercer Langston. Many organizations and conventions focused on the role specific occupations, like teaching, played in promoting racial uplift. Although Colored Education Conventions that took place during and after the 1860s were often less popular than national, state and regional Colored Conventions, they provide local and national contexts for the figures, debates and decisions connected to the topic of Black education.

When compared to antebellum Colored Conventions, education-themed forums were unique. They promoted educational uplift at local, state and national levels. They publicized events with education touted as the central concern and purpose for gathering. They were often organized and facilitated by Black men and women active in educational roles such as school teaching, school administration, educational programming, public speaking and writing for public publications. Many Black professional organizations launched, and conventions held, during the 1860s were sites where Black leaders gathered to define communities' economic and moral trajectories. Representing Black people's local, state and national interests, Black leaders touted political strategies and presented political action points that could meet the challenges of a new era dominated by White economic interests. The work of, and

political conditions surrounding, Black teaching and educational advocacy ruled the structure of Colored Education Conventions. Unlike White women and Black men, Bettye Collier-Thomas argues, “[B]lack women had no real status in the teaching profession until the late nineteenth century.”⁴⁰ In the first year that the federal government published occupational statistics on Black teaching, the 1890 U.S. census calculated 15,100 Black teachers and professors, half of whom were women; by 1900, the number of Black women teachers had nearly doubled.⁴¹ However, the 1860s is a pivotal decade through which to understand the ways Black women did in fact achieve public respect or professional respectability as educators and the ways they participated in professional organizations that validated their joint roles as educators and activists.

By and large, Black women were immersed in local and state teaching efforts in the 1860s. The advent of the Freedmen’s Bureau funneled funds and teachers into southern and border states, but many of these funds soon ran dry or were unevenly distributed. Uneven public funding for Black schools paired with disproportionate ratios of teachers-to-students made teaching a challenging endeavor. In an attempt to share strategies and consolidate knowledge accumulated in statistical and experiential reports, teachers and educational organizations regularly published reports in popular Black newspapers. They often voiced the political necessity of Black teachers as

⁴⁰ Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion*. New York: Random House, 2010. 255.

⁴¹ Collier-Thomas, Bettye. *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion*. New York: Random House, 2010. 255.

intellectual leaders, even as they noted severe lack of funds, horrible learning environments, extreme lack of educational materials and great learning disparities between multigenerational student bodies. In a review of an Ohio teachers' convention, the writer candidly remarks, "It is a well-known fact that the colored teacher has from two to three times the amount of work to perform that his White co-laborer has."⁴² Black education leaders hoped to offset these hardships by facilitating and compiling practical pedagogical approaches while also touting the abstract significance of Black professionalism to Black communities' long-term economic stability and moral improvement. The latter approach encouraged Black students to view singular achievement as a form of duty to a unified Black race. It also firmly integrated Black women's voices into public discourse about Black educational uplift.

Black education conventions' underlying organizational creed tended toward the belief that Black teaching could mass-produce a diverse labor corps. Convention leaders encouraged communities to pursue a variety of careers, believing Black students could become symbols for social justice and racial equality. Most Black education organizations believed the average Black American could achieve success by way of educational attainment, gainful employment, moral living, adherence to family values, cultural competency and some semblance of middle-class material possessions and/or behaviors. As the debate in *The Elevator* suggests, the production of intellectual figures, based upon the lives and accomplishments of men such as Langston, was an ideal pursuit that Black young people, especially, should strive for.

⁴² "Colored Teachers' Convention Springfield, O." *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*. 19 August 1881. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

This chapter brings into focus the ideologies of two such education advocates: Sarah Jane Woodson (Early) and John Mercer Langston, who addressed Colored Education Conventions in the 1860s. Woodson's and Langston's paradoxical mission as public Black intellectuals can be understood through the ideological tensions they confronted at the 1862 Ohio Colored Teachers' Association Convention and the 1869 Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention. Their speeches are representative of the Black educational thought for which they had and would later become famous. Likewise, their addresses illustrate the limitations of the speakers' national discourse in relation to issues that affected the local communities Woodson and Langston address. By understanding their speeches as representative of principles of what I term moral economies, scholars gain a stronger understanding of a type of emancipation-era Black intellectual—the Black occupational-idealist—as a temporally and politically constructed figure. In comparing their speeches, this chapter articulates a popular and intentional aspect of gender politics among Black intellectuals active in Colored Education Conventions in the 1860s. For Woodson and Langston, the rhetoric of Black womanhood and Black masculinity operates as a basis of their vision of social upward mobility.

Sarah Woodson, John Langston and Moral Economies: Black Intellectuals' Struggle to Consolidate Ideals with Educational Realities

As the postbellum moment emerged, Sarah Woodson's and John Langston's participation at two autonomous yet interconnected Colored Education Conventions helps clarify nineteenth-century Black public intellectuals' often paradoxical missions and perceptions of women's place in racial uplift. Woodson and Langston grew up in

Ohio among Black activist cohorts. After graduating from Oberlin College in 1854, Langston often returned to the campus where he was recognized as a model alumnus. He joined a ceremony honoring Woodson's 1856 graduation from the predominately White Young Ladies' Department where she received a literary degree.⁴³ In the years following, they joined education-themed lecture circuits; both of the learned activists rose to prestigious university faculty positions by 1870, he at Howard University and she at Wilberforce University. Likewise, they both vigorously promoted Black intellectual decorum or public presentations of Black thought. As Patrick Rael contends, "Black elites thought that while the advance of intellect represented the highest fulfillment of man's personal destiny," it was "insufficient" without "moral sense."⁴⁴ Woodson and Langston's speeches suggest that ongoing participation in social and political Black uplift rendered intellectual acumen susceptible to racial oppression.

Langston and Woodson attempted to confront Black people's limited access to economic and legal power by utilizing the language of moral economies at Colored Education Conventions in Ohio and Kentucky. As moral economists, Woodson and Langston focused on the positive byproducts of Black people's use of education to achieve respectable employment and their ability to act on moral principles that advanced racial uplift platforms. An important aspect of Woodson's and Langston's

⁴³ Wesley, Dorothy Porter and Uzelac, Contance Porter, eds. *William Cooper Nell: Selected Writings*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2002. 456-7.

⁴⁴ Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 128.

moral reasoning and notions of respectability was that one's personal destiny was insufficient without a sense of responsibility to Black people as a population instrumental to the U.S.' goals for democracy. In other words, African Americans constituted a body politic capable of relating gainful employment to social activism as a way to challenge notions of racial inferiority and better represent the upward trajectory of African Americans in the second half of the century. Still, competing beliefs aired at Black education forums exposed the tensions brought about by the emerging postbellum era. How were convention leaders to represent uplift as an achievable mission when the Black communities they addressed continued to face mounting social barriers to their success in Ohio and Kentucky? Black codes in these states had the potential to restrict essential citizenship liberties such as court and prison rights, property ownership, fair wages, entrance into schools and access to professional certifications, in addition to the financial hardships that arose on a quotidian basis due to racial discrimination. These tensions are especially apparent when prototypical Black-intellectual discourse is analyzed against the varied issues facing Black communities with oft-estranged relations to power and the empowered. I interrogate the ways in which moral economies as a Civil War-era political ideology sometimes fell short of addressing adverse social conditions that limited Black people's educational attainment, while also providing an important Black idealistic, nationalist perspective seeking to encourage and motivate Black people towards success.

Sarah Woodson and John Langston similarly promoted moral economies, a joint labor and assimilation theory for Black uplift through educational achievement, successful employment, moral decorum and positive public presence. Moral

economies revolves around individual and collective uplift to, in part bring, about a communal feeling among diverse groups of free and recently freed Blacks. However, moral economies also asks participants to function as a part of a great vision for racial uplift by engaging in personal improvement through efficacious education and gaining employment. It is a set of soft-power principles evoking ideals about the educated Black person's ability to positively shape public sentiment about Black people. It stresses the importance of Black intellectual cultures. It also places importance on the abstract and financial byproducts of moral economies, and the way they advanced Black people's fair treatment in society. It suggests that Black people can adhere to middle-class sensibilities, even as they occupy a diverse number of unevenly compensated and unevenly valued occupations. Despite the imaginative qualities of moral economies in relation to the state and rate of Black upward mobility after the war, the Black education conventions Woodson and Langston addressed represented an effort to inspire socio-economically diverse groups of Black people to associate Black teaching with a professional-activist endeavor that could elevate Black men *and* women. Secondly, the conventions represent the continuity of Black thought between the antebellum and postbellum eras, even as this organizational work strove to surpass the limited successes of previous decades. Thirdly, education conventions led by women and men proved a necessary break in how women were respected and supported as professionals in comparison with the vast number of national Colored Conventions held during the antebellum era. Woodson and Langston helped to popularize the tenets of moral economies among diverse audiences and in the Black press in the context of transformational federal policies and funding, particularly the

Emancipation Proclamation and the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

The 1862 Ohio and 1869 Kentucky Colored Education Conventions took place during one of most publically contentious eras in the century's political history. Abraham Lincoln issued the hotly debated Emancipation Proclamation in January of 1863. After the Union Army defeated the Confederate Army, and five years after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution of 1868 conferred citizenship upon all people born or naturalized in the U.S. and gave them equal protection under the law. In 1870, the newly passed 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution granted all men the right to vote. Despite these major political victories at the federal level for Black men, Black people across the nation nevertheless endured Black laws, or a host of discriminatory state laws and local policies that often rendered federal legislation moot. This legislation nominally sought to integrate Black people into society as citizens with equal access to the privileges of full citizenship such as property ownership, voting rights and due process in courts. The government would directly and indirectly rely on Black teachers and the educational spaces they sponsored to execute Reconstruction policy.

Colored Education Conventions were training grounds for Black educators. At least 14 Ohio state colored conventions were held between 1840 and 1871. Many of these conventions met in response to local and national issues related to slavery, fugitive laws, Black codes, emigration, suffrage, westward expansion and education. Ohio delegations or bodies of delegates, alongside Pennsylvanian and New York delegations, most frequently held known colored convention forums. Kentucky ran at least 6 known state conventions between 1866 and 1885. It would join a cohort of

state delegations that organized public conventions after the Civil War, alongside those representing Nebraska, Minnesota, Tennessee and North Carolina, among others. In addition to Colored Education Conventions regularly including the word “education” in the forum’s title, delegates centralized education as a vehicle through which to explore a host of other national and local issues. The roles of teachers, students and parents were also decidedly more emphasized at these events than at state colored conventions.

With community members and associates, Colored Education Conventions would teach and model social decorum for Black public life. The intellectual was considered to be so mainly because of his or her contributions to society such that a range of professions and activities tended to lead to such an assignation. Educators, artists, gifted orators, spirit-moving preachers, authors, poets, editors, politicians and community organizers found a home at Colored Conventions. Their talent surprised and invigorated family members, popular publics, readers, patrons and colleagues alike. What made these men and women so remarkable? The accumulation of a broad-ranging or specialized knowledge and a mastery of an effective form of communication to disseminate a type of thinking were considered the foundations of a Black intellectual’s success. For convention leaders, an intellectual’s status as such ensured that uplift strategies could reach larger audiences. They believed that paired with educational achievement, Black intellectuals would emerge as community leaders and reproduce their own efficacious labor. Practicing and asserting moral economies was often integral to Black education advocates’ vision for a Black intellectual.

Moral economies reflects popular antebellum racial uplift philosophy. It resembles a political philosophy of moral society. Robert Gordon argues for a concept

of moral society in the essay “Intellectual Culture,” which appeared in *Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859. A Black reverend, Colored Conventions delegate and teacher, and West Indies native, Gordon often travelled and wrote about issues concerning slavery and Black disenfranchisement in North America. With verbose candor he touted the idea that neither morality nor intellectual culture alone would prove a successful system of order for the nation. Gordon believed that moral worth undergirded “the intention to order things upon the best and surest foundation.”⁴⁵ He believed intellectual culture allowed men to “relish the social decencies of life, and to conform themselves and families to them” so as to “perform their duty to society.”⁴⁶ For Gordon, when combined and implemented on a national scale, Black intellectualism and morality provided a way to link family values, national values and social order. In many ways, his philosophical dictum succinctly presents a leading perspective among Black moral suasion activists. The notion of moral society that Gordon describes is the base of an augmented understanding of the ways his contemporaries favored the combination of efficacious labor and social justice-minded public decorum as a means to encourage a fair social order between Blacks and Whites.

Moral economies, as a practice, is the performance of moral decorum and the pursuit of material prosperity through efficacious education. If economics is concerned with the way currency and products are systematically exchanged—how they are

⁴⁵ “Intellectual Culture.” *The Anglo-African Magazine*. New York: Arno Press, 1968. 188.

⁴⁶ “Intellectual Culture.” *The Anglo-African Magazine* (New York: Arno Press, 1968. 188.

created, bought and sold— then moral economies is a science of how moral values and intellectual acumen factor into points at which individuals and groups pursue material possessions. Like Woodson and Langston, Gordon believed that skin color did not affect mental ability. Each believed that the “Common Father” offered to every man equal access to reason and that disciplined educational training drew any individual nearer to success.⁴⁷ But, where Gordon chooses the popular press to espouse a view of moral society as an intellectual inquiry, Woodson and Langston choose stages at Black education conventions to argue for the rise of socio-economic classes prompted by Black teachers’ leadership and pedagogy.

Even as they theorized about uplift ideology, Sarah Woodson and John Langston struggled to define an ethos of leadership that everyday Black communities could engage on their own terms. Through the lens of James McCune Smith’s values and writings, David Blight succinctly captures part of the plight of middle- and late-century Black thinkers: motivational speaking, rebuking notions of Black inferiority, promoting instances of Black success, and validating “his own role as both successful

⁴⁷ These thinkers’ notion of material success is a discussion unto itself. Nineteenth-century Black intellectuals tended to refer to success in general terms so as to appeal to a large number of readers. Success could be an inherent aesthetic, known to, and felt by, the disciplined student of a subject upon mastery of a study or skill. Success could be material possessions in the form of real estate, fine furnishings and access to leisure events. Success could simply mean gainful employment. In other words, success could and often did refer to a number of things, though Black thinkers often politicized success to relate to social change. Notions of success in Black intellectuals’ literary production would be a worthwhile subject of inquiry.

professional and Black leader.”⁴⁸ What many Black thinkers also dealt with was one of the more challenging aspects of intellectual leadership: effectively (re)producing more Black public intellectuals. Woodson and Langston believed that labor organizations were effective means toward this end. Their participation in Colored Education Conventions reflected the contemporaneous belief that socio-economic opportunities needed to expand beyond “school teaching, journalism, and the ministry, careers linked to segregated institutions” as viable occupations for an expanding body of nominally free Blacks.⁴⁹

In the post-Reconstruction era, Black people increasingly self-identified with middle-class sensibilities as a way to validate “a vision of racial solidarity uniting black elites with the masses,” as Kevin Gaines contends.⁵⁰ On the other hand, William Banks argues that Black political “conventions were more an expressive than an instrumental vehicle” and lacked the political power to enforce their resolutions and petitions.⁵¹ With these observations in mind, it is important to note that Black professional gatherings such as Colored Education Conventions were part and parcel

⁴⁸ Blight, David. “In Search of Learning, Liberty, and Self Definition: James McCune Smith and the Ordeal of the Antebellum Black Intellectual.” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 9 (July 1985): 10.

⁴⁹ Banks, William. *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998. 13.

⁵⁰ Gaines, Kevin. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. 2.

⁵¹ Banks, William. *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998. 17.

of popular uplift strategies among Black intellectuals that represent an intense and orchestrated attempt to convey complex notions of Black identity and encourage discussions about how various classes of Black people were formed. Visions for class formation necessarily needed to be portrayed expressively as their power, even as leading Black intellectuals, was limited. Indeed, Colored Education Conventions were the political antecedents of organizations and discourse for which W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington are best known. Sarah Woodson would celebrate Black people's practice of moral economies by way of collective agency and a universal view of human potential in the days leading up to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. By the post-Reconstruction era, Langston would pose similar arguments, but shift focus to notions of individual action, male responsibility and model men's ascension narratives in the context of Black public intellectual decorum. Both used moral economies to herald Black social activism and individual success. They serve as an example of the larger ways that Colored Education Conventions merged social protest thought, professionalization and racial unity.

What to the Black Student Is World History? Sarah Woodson and the Politics of Human Struggle

Sarah Woodson's labor and integration beliefs stemmed from her upbringing in the Ohio River Valley. Woodson was raised in a Black Ohio farming community that operated in line with principles of communal self-determination: "owning their own land, harvesting their crops, helping each other build their homes, worshipping in

their own church, and supporting their own school.”⁵² After graduating with an L.B. degree from Oberlin, she spent several years teaching in Ohio. Regarded as a “lady of fine material and acquired ability” among Ohio Black education activists, she served as a principal of a Black school in Xenia, Ohio and an activist within the Ohio Colored Teachers’ Association’s conventions in the 1860s.⁵³ Decades later, she traveled and directed initiatives as a superintendent to the Colored Division of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU); she served between 1888 and 1892, after Frances E. W. Harper had held the position. Woodson’s early accomplishments propelled her integration into communities of activist and religious thought.

Sarah Woodson’s ardent support for Black rights and her teaching career are difficult to separate. In 1868, when she was 44, Woodson became the first “Female Principle” of Wilberforce University in 1868.⁵⁴ She was the first Black woman to hold a faculty position in English and Latin instruction.⁵⁵ After marrying, Woodson relocated to Tennessee with her husband, Jordan Winston Early, where she continued to teach Black students; she extolled her husband’s ascension to religious leadership in

⁵² Lawson, Ellen N. and Marlene D. Merrill, eds. *The Three Sarahs: Documents of Antebellum College Women*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984. 152-3.

⁵³ “For the *Christian Recorder*. Wilberforce University.” *The Christian Recorder*. 7 April 1866. *Accessible Archives*.

⁵⁴ “For the *Christian Recorder*. Wilberforce University.” *The Christian Recorder*. 7 April 1866. *Accessible Archives*.

⁵⁵ Woodson’s brother, Rev. Lewis Woodson was a member of the Wilberforce University Board of Trustees. “For the *Christian Recorder*. Wilberforce University.” *The Christian Recorder*, 7 April 1866.

the post-war biography *Life and Labors of Rev. Jordan W. Early, One of the Pioneers of African Methodism in the West and South* (1894). She also engaged in religio-political action alongside her husband. Woodson reportedly gave over one hundred and thirty speeches across five states as an official for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, as a spokesperson for the Tennessee Prohibition Party and as a first lady and organizer within Early's church ministries.⁵⁶ Woodson would also win the title of "Representative Woman of the Year" at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair after a long career in service to Black communities and women's rights organizational work.⁵⁷

There is an unaccounted for temporal gap between Woodson's time under the intellectual tutelage of the Woodson men and the temperance work she performed later, as part of A.M.E. Church and predominately White women's temperance organizations. Surprisingly few scholars engage Woodson's activism as it was particularly constructed within the space of Ohio Colored Teachers' Association meetings. These meetings gave Woodson the floor to speak as a force apart from and in relation to her family, the Black church and temperance organizations. Scholars often situate Sarah Woodson in relation to her brother Lewis Woodson's radical activism and depict her as a temperance activist promoting religio-feminist thought. In *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad*, Cheryl LaRoche argues that

⁵⁶ Lawson, Ellen N. and Marlene D. Merrill, eds. *The Three Sarahs: Documents of Antebellum College Women*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984. 162-3.

⁵⁷ Lawson, Ellen N. and Marlene D. Merrill, eds. *The Three Sarahs: Documents of Antebellum College Women*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984. 162-3.

the Woodson family stood at an important regional and political intersection of Black political and religious activism, especially as the Woodson brothers worked to dispel “the thrilling and romantic myth of the Underground Railroad.”⁵⁸ In *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939*, Stephen Ward Angell and Anthony B. Pinn primarily associate Woodson’s religious, educational and women’s rights advocacy with postwar A.M.E. annual conventions.⁵⁹ In *I Am the Utterance of My Name: Black Victorian Feminist Discourse and Intellectual Enterprise at the Columbian Exposition, 1893*, Temple Tsenes-Hills argues that “before [Woodson’s] appearance at the Exposition, [Woodson] was wholly dedicated to her chosen arena of activism: the Black Church and the Temperance movement,” thereby representing “Black Victorian Feminist theory and methodology.”⁶⁰ As I show, Woodson gained voice and insight during her participation in Colored Education Conventions.

Woodson joined the Ohio Education Association when Black progressives increasingly championed a more diverse set of educational goals for Black youth and included Black women in organizational activities. By the time of Woodson’s address

⁵⁸ LaRoche, Cheryl. *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2013. 80.

⁵⁹ Angell, Stephen Ward and Pinn, Anthony B. *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000. 269.

⁶⁰ Tsenes-Hills, Temple. *I Am the Utterance of My Name: Black Victorian Feminist Discourse and Intellectual Enterprise at the Columbian Exposition, 1893*. New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2006. 43, 62.

on December 26, 1862, at the Ohio Colored Teachers' Association (OCTA)'s annual convention, the association had thirty-three active members almost evenly split between men and women. Believing "that such an organization was absolutely necessary," Black Ohio educators formed the OCTA to elevate Black people, to educate the state's Black youth and to advance teaching standards. The OCTA sought to attract good teachers and keep "parents and guardians properly interested in the education of their children."⁶¹ Annual meetings were held in schools, halls and churches in cities across the state, including Cincinnati, Springfield, Xenia, Columbus and Urbana, with voting members, special guests and the general public in attendance. To join, interested parties applied to the executive Board of Directors, received two-thirds of votes from standing members and submitted a membership fee according to a gendered pay scale: \$.50 for men and \$.25 for women.⁶² While OCTA's constitution nominally opened membership to "any person who is engaged in teaching private or public schools, giving lessons in elementary branches, or engaged in conducting high schools," the organization's rigorous nomination process tended to maintain a predominately Black membership.

The national political climate in the 1860s greatly affected OCTA discourse and programming. *The Christian Recorder* regularly published proceedings in the early 1860s. In one article, OCTA chairman John G. Mitchell referred to the state of

⁶¹ "The Ohio Colored Teachers' Association." *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

⁶² *Transactions of the First Annual Meeting of the Colored Teachers' Association Held at Springfield, Ohio, Dec. 25, 26 & 27, '61*. No publication information available. Print. *Hathitrust.org*. 6.

American politics as “unsettled,” arguing that Black teachers worked under “the severe pressure of the times.”⁶³ According to Mitchell, who was an Oberlin College graduate and a respected principle for the Eastern District School in Cincinnati before becoming a dean at Wilberforce University, the association’s mission was most fully met when “each teacher returned home, firmly resolved, during the year to qualify herself, or himself, better for the duties and responsibilities of the school-room, and to come up to the next annual meeting well prepared to perform every duty.”⁶⁴ Teachers were to meet the demands of Ohio’s expanding Black population and to lessen the impact of adverse labor conditions through educational training in a number of areas of study. At meetings, OCTA members presented essays about pedagogical approaches to teaching. Per the OCTA’s interest in collecting statistics about Black education in Ohio, members also submitted full reports of their school-wages, average attendance, and school-building initiatives. Conventions included intellectual and cultural exercises, such as formal addresses, prayers, choir singing, student recitations and formal presentations. Woodson served on the Financial Committee with Mitchell, while working as a teacher and school principal in Berlin, Ohio. But, her 1862 speech stands out as a defining contribution to the organization and to contemporaneous Black philosophical thought as the speech’s publication in the mainstay paper *The Christian Recorder* evidences.

⁶³ “The Ohio Colored Teachers’ Association.” *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

⁶⁴ “The Ohio Colored Teachers’ Association.” *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

Woodson approached Black educational uplift with futuristic positivity. In her speech, Woodson divides historical time into two discrete spheres: the darkness of the past and the light of the future. Delivered less than a week before Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Woodson's address, and the idea of political time embedded therein, focused on several tenets: a humanistic view of American racial relations that concentrated on human worth and that promoted unity between Blacks and Whites as a political necessity; a political treatise calling for pre-Civil War legal and social practices that disenfranchised Black people to be altogether undone; a revival of Black intellectual and economic cultures rooted in Black people's African heritage; a production of Black intellectual cultures that were accessible to everyone, especially free Black youth and the recently-freed. Central to Enlightenment political philosophies in America during the nineteenth century, Robert Butchart notes, was "the relationship between educated intelligence and the safety of a republican form of government."⁶⁵ We might consider the thrust of Woodson's reasoning to be concerned with Enlightenment discourse that attends to Black issues, but also creates a longer historical trajectory in which to understand Black identities and a sense of belonging within republican government. It asserts a view of universal time that ties known cycles of human oppression with uplift strategies such as moral economies.

Woodson's philosophy of Black educational uplift intertwines human ability, morality and political action to profess a way by which Black youth could become intellectuals in a God-ordained age of enlightenment. She argued that the "present

⁶⁵ Butchart, Robert. *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction: Freedmen's Education, 1862-1875*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980. 14.

age” demanded that Black youth view the present as a point at which humankind had awoken from a spiritual and intellectual slumber.⁶⁶ This slumber had been instigated, in part, by White Americans’ oppression of Black people since the nation’s conception, but had been disrupted by revolutionary ideas and social action. She believed that should young people gain “knowledge of the arts and sciences,” they would yield material profit through the acquisition of gainful employment.⁶⁷ Secondly, Woodson contended that Black people, like all people, possessed a divine spirit that God created. Black youth, then, had to undergo “a process of refinement” that “assimilate[d]” the human spirit to God’s spirit, which would in turn allow each to become “a representative of [God’s] infinite wisdom and goodness.”⁶⁸ Woodson professed that Black youths’ foremost duty was to become representatives of the highest forms of God’s divine will for human kind. They were to achieve this by grasping the age of enlightenment through work, moral living and political action, which she argued would pave a way to their financial security. Woodson’s enlightenment rhetoric sought to consolidate a pro-racial integration stance with the reality of the nature of European people’s oppressive authority over Black Americans.

⁶⁶ Woodson, Sarah. J. “Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers’ Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio.” *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

⁶⁷ Woodson, Sarah. J. “Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers’ Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio.” *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

⁶⁸ Woodson, Sarah. J. “Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers’ Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio.” *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

She particularly drew attention to White people's failed governance in Europe, prior to America's conception, as a means by which to convince Black people that their moral presence was necessary for the nation to progress.

Woodson's definition of the age of enlightenment functions on a number of historical and ideological levels. Hers is a figurative approach to national enlightenment, or a point at which a swelling number of Americans, as she suggests, had come to regard American slavery as an immoral and counterproductive institution.

An age adorned with the glory and beauty which have been shed upon us by the efforts of an advancing intellect through a long succession of generations. An age of profound philosophy and experiments, of books and much reading. An age in which intellectual acquirements are more widely diffused than any other preceding it. An age in which the light of experience, and of the revelation of divining truth has shone with inextinguishable luster; and the powers of the mind are triumphing over the accumulated errors of the past.⁶⁹

Woodson believed that the monumental changes enacted in the 1860s were embedded in a longer history of "stages of human existence" that were defiled by empowered classes' inability to evenly perceive of human worth and to evenly distribute access to the natural world and the fruits of human economies.⁷⁰ These "errors of the past" evoke centuries of political and classist human subjugation. As Cedric Robinson claims in *Black Marxism*, racism "was not simply a convention for ordering the

⁶⁹ Woodson, Sarah. J. "Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers' Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio." *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

⁷⁰ Woodson, Sarah. J. "Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers' Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio." *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

relations of European to non-European peoples but has its genesis in the ‘internal’ relations of European peoples.”⁷¹ Woodson would affirm this point. Black peoples’ struggles for emancipation and citizenship rights in America were at once unique and embedded in a longer history of White European’s facilitation of mass disenfranchisement against humanity, even against White Europeans. Arguing that “the mighty empire of despotism and oppression is trembling to its foundation, (and) it must soon crumble,” Woodson encourages Black youth to consider the past as an age of intellectual darkness perpetrated by White people’s historical injustice against humanity.

The “Dark Age” that Woodson’s “Light Age” reverses plays upon the historical Dark Ages when European feudalism flourished. The rise of a middle-class or bourgeoisie anchored between ruling classes and peasants in medieval Europe, scholars often argue, was the most important impetus to what would become, by the nineteenth century, modern notions of the human right to self-determination and the right to monetary profit from physical and intellectual labor. As Cedric Robinson argues, the feudal system was designed by “[an] intellectually backward and commercially unimaginative ruling class, where famine and epidemics were the natural order of things, and where the sciences of the Ancient World had long been displaced as the basis of intellectual development by theological fables and demonology.”⁷² In seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America, pro-

⁷¹ Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. 2.

⁷² Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. 13.

slavery advocates believed that denying Black people access to free market labor improved the national outlook. Such political opinions particularly attended to the wellbeing of White elite men, their families and private commerce. In presenting this view of political time in the era of Emancipation, Woodson demonstrated that White empowered leaders in America had been continuing a longer era of human disenfranchisement and impractical national governance that hindered national progress and democratic ideals while a White oligarchy and the general White population benefited.

Perhaps most importantly, Woodson's suppositions about an age of enlightenment in the era of emancipation suggest that the deconstruction of inhumane practices against disempowered people in world history had largely been prompted by the rise of commerce and the matriculation of disempowered peoples into bourgeoisie classes. It was a history of the rise of under-classes through their attainment of socially-valued positions within society. As John Larson argues in *The Market Revolution in America*, by the 1860s, most Americans believed that economic freedom was a sign and impetus of political freedom. Woodson viewed the emancipation moment through this lens, even as Lincoln's proclamation failed to immediately enact fundamental changes or level the economic playing field for Black people. Scholars have long argued that Lincoln did not initially intend to do as much. Still, Black thinkers at that time often granted great symbolic significance to the proclamation and to the political atmosphere that it created.

Woodson anticipated a class of freedmen floating in political liminality. This was a dilemma that many education conventioners had welcomed, even as they lacked the resources to contend with a significantly larger population of learners. Part

of the crisis was the dearth of teachers and facilities, one unmatched by any other in America. A comparable population flare that American intellectuals had publically dealt with came by way of rapidly increasing White European immigrants flooding the Northeast between the 1830s and the 1850s. Shaping the Black experience as a measure of market and intellectual revolution in an acclaimed age of enlightenment, Woodson sought to balance the harsh realities of Blacks' nominal freedom with a tried-and-true rationale for underclass ascension through educational and occupational attainment, moral decorum and relentless social action for Black people.

Woodson's view of time engaged popular dichotomies in the public sphere, which added an instructive element to her sense of time as a means to understand the dichotomies that regularly pervaded the public sphere and heightened racial tensions. Northern Black thinkers, especially supporters of millennial destiny, often argued for such a bifurcated view of political time. In the emancipation moment, Black leaders' notions of a dark age were often used in response to a plume of racial and political separatism that had consumed the nation before the Civil War. For some, the colonization movement represented a metaphorical dark age. For example, Henry Clay's American Colonization Society and Henry Highland Garnet's African Civilization Society prompted heated debates. Still, they drew White and Black leaders' support for Black people's emigration to Africa, the Caribbean and Canada, even as that emigration represented a form of brain drain from free Black communities. Part of the critique of these organizations was that crucial populations of free Black artisans, intellectuals and young people with potential were being lured away from their communities. In another response to political bifurcation, some actively denounced the ideological distance between national-scale violence and

federal peace initiatives. For example, some believed President Buchanan's publically contested Fast Day, a national day of prayer inaugurated on January 1, 1861, mostly succeeded in showcasing a democrat's inability to choose between Union sensibilities of national unity and the racist and separatist values of the Confederacy. Keenly aware of such political chaos, Woodson pushed young Black people to learn world history so that they could understand their place in the world in relation to the past, the present and the future.

Woodson appropriated popular economic thought to situate moral economies as a tool for Black youth. Most Black intellectuals believed this age group had a better chance of taking advantage of revolutionary changes in American governance and continuing the battle for long-term equality. By the mid-century, popular American economic thought celebrated the roles individuals and communal republics played in building and sustaining local labor markets. The Labor Party, for example, had become well known for this approach. But Woodson believed that Black people's economic successes were connected to their attention to virtuous living. In other words, one should abstain from immoral habits that might include gambling, card playing, alcohol consumption and prostitution. Woodson linked virtuous living and economic wellbeing in a series of passages. She proclaimed:

It is natural that human beings should acquire possessions; and that they should desire those especially, which are the most eminent among mortals; ...

Wealth and honor are not the offspring of ease and luxury, but they are the legitimate reward of constant toil and perseverance. ...

...But he who would taste the delicious stream must dig deep, and toil hard, ere he can enjoy a draught of the pellucid waters. ...

Our personal wants, our domestic ties, and even our social relations,
address not to us those questions which touch our interest most vitally.
...

Man, the only creature of all God's material universe who is anointed
with the holy oil of reason and reflection, of conscious and
imagination; [...] a connecting link between the eternal Spirit and his
material creation; endowed with the most exalted hopes and loftiest
aspirations, and possessed with all the fine sensibilities of an exulted
nature, should be studiously fitted for an existence beyond his physical
being.⁷³

Using an ethos focused on the Black condition, Woodson's moral economies
intervenes in the day's common understanding of free market participation. Her
philosophy seeks the essence of economic proof, that is, human ability, as opposed to
statistical evidence of economic success, including actual income, business holdings
and other information about Black economic successes. That is, Woodson's
formulation of moral economies as an imperative of Black intellectualism is concerned
with a futuristic and unknown encounter between Black determination and wage-
based labor that would be based upon Black people's ability to wield their inherent
abilities for capital gain. We can speculate that Woodson's approach sought to
inundate young students with a theoretical grounding for Black uplift activism and
sought to offer a conceptual foundation that would help young people confront the
hardship associated with their socio-economic climb later in life.

Woodson's moral economies speech anticipated national conversations about
labor and the exploitation of laboring classes that continued to gain traction among

⁷³ Woodson, Sarah. J. "Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson,
Before the Colored Teachers' Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio." *The Christian
Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

wage laborers, industrialists and politicians during the early 1860s. Pro-slavery southerners vividly espoused justifications for their willingness to wage civil war to preserve slavery. The severity of labor conditions in America also included “the worst class of laborers in the slums of New York and Philadelphia, and the factory towns of New England,” a point Du Bois raises in *Black Reconstruction* while comparing the labor conditions of enslaved Black workers in the South to poor European immigrant laboring classes in the North.⁷⁴ Part of what set slavery apart from other cruel forms of American labor in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was psychological enslavement, or “the enforced personal feeling of inferiority, the calling of another Master; the standing with hat in hand. It was the helplessness. It was the defenselessness of family life. It was the submergence below the arbitrary will of any sort of individual.”⁷⁵ Woodson also attended to young people and free(d) people’s struggles with psychological impairments perpetrated by racial injustice.

Woodson addressed social-emotional issues Black students would inevitably encounter in the era of emancipation. It is very likely that, for Woodson, Oberlin communities set a strong precedent for how to create welcoming and productive environments for Black students studying at a predominately White institution. This support took shape as “townspeople provided employment as well as emotional support to black students who suffered incidents of maltreatment and stress or

⁷⁴ Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. New York: The Free Press, 1935. 13.

⁷⁵ Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. New York: The Free Press, 1935. 13.

loneliness as a result of protracted stays away from home and to others who were unable to adjust to the new conditions of an interracial endeavor.”⁷⁶ But many emotional barriers that Woodson’s audience would encounter included the very idea of Black history in addition to the environments in which their learning experiences would take place. Woodson addressed a deep distrust among Black people in the idea that theirs was not a story of communal and ethnic success on a large scale within world history. Woodson confronted issues of absent, lost and hidden histories of Black success throughout world history by creating a counter-image to the rising Black intellectual: the White American who stole histories, intellectual advancements and economic progress of people of African descent and whose political power teetered on the precipice of collapse. Under Woodson’s philosophical reasoning, the White American’s crumbling barriers to Black success would give way to a revolutionary wave of Black activism and extend to young Black students opportunities to “occupy a position among the higher orders of creation,” as members of the American professional class, specifically as “a physician, lawyer or mechanic.”⁷⁷

Woodson provided a critical response to parents and guardians of Black youth whose anxieties and frustrations with such ideals were expressed at the previous year’s OCTA convention in 1861. Parents and guardians were concerned about the likelihood that Black children would have fair opportunity to rise in social stature. They were

⁷⁶ Baumann, Roland. *Constructing Black Education at Oberlin College*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010. 30.

⁷⁷ Woodson, Sarah. J. “Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers’ Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio.” *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

frustrated with the possibility that Black children would not gain access to educational opportunity, fair employment or even fair social standing due to their skin color. The 1861 OCTA's Committee on Address, which included John G. Mitchell, Theodore J. Ferguson and Benjamin K. Sampson, articulated parents' common rebuttals to Black leaders' ideals. It also took parents to task for neglecting to visit their children's schools, condoning their children's poor attendance and, more broadly, condoning the "sleeping faculties of our race."⁷⁸ The committee contended that when intelligent people engaged in different forms of labor, they exponentially increased the value and productivity of their work:

It is a question with many to understand *why* we should spend so much time and money in educating our children, when it is known they are not allowed to fill the places of lawyers, senators, judges or presidents. We verily admit all this; but does this truth afford the slightest reason that we should refuse to cultivate our faculties, refuse to assimilate ourselves to the Divine Archetype, and become the representatives of [God's] infinite and perfect wisdom?—Is it not, rather, necessary that the laboring man, the farmer, mechanic, hostler, kitchen-girl, should all have a good education?⁷⁹

The committee's response to parents' complaints emphasizes the paradoxical mission of the Black intellectual. In addition to feelings of worthlessness, Black people struggled with the notion that lowly forms of labor prevented a worker from deriving

⁷⁸ *Transactions of the First Annual Meeting of the Colored Teachers' Association Held at Springfield, Ohio, Dec. 25, 26 & 27, '61*. No publication information available. 8. *Hathitrust.org*.

⁷⁹ *Transactions of the First Annual Meeting of the Colored Teachers' Association Held at Springfield, Ohio, Dec. 25, 26 & 27, '61*. No publication information available. 9-10. *Hathitrust.org*.

happiness or pride from working-class labor. Although it was common for Black leaders such as Woodson to push Black youth toward subjects of study that would propel them into professional, bourgeoisie classes, OCTA leadership also largely believed that a liberal education was “the best legacy” a parent could leave his or her child, despite that child’s ultimate line of work.⁸⁰ Indeed, the professionals leading the OCTA association spread the belief that all occupations among Blacks should be celebrated, “claiming dignity for all labor and pride in their own work” as the historian Leslie M. Harris argues was a popular a strategy among New York Black educational leaders.⁸¹ This strategy sought to reduce classist conflicts between widely divergent classes of Black publics attending and engaged with the OCTA’s values, events and activist agendas. It particularly sought to offset socio-economic differentiation between teachers, ministers, principals, college professors and bureaucrats that led the organizations and the poor and working-class students they instructed.

Woodson’s 1862 speech and the 1861 OCTA convention address make clear that Black teaching was thought to require a holistic, often religiously inspired approach to Black education, though this was not an approach that was popular among all Black leaders. Because the OCTA convention served to train teachers as well as to debate, discuss and circulate representative ideologies about Black education, teachers were expected to anticipate and properly respond to Black students’ and community

⁸⁰ *Transactions of the First Annual Meeting of the Colored Teachers’ Association Held at Springfield, Ohio, Dec. 25, 26 & 27, ’61*. No publication information available. 10. *Hathitrust.org*.

⁸¹ Harris, Leslie M. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 219.

members' anxieties and emotional turmoil. Black teachers often acted at once as instructors, mentors, career counselors, community mediators and even spiritual advisors. But Black educational activists connected to the forum had expressed competing ideas about religion in school teaching. In one example, the 1861 OCTA Committee on Address condemned religious denominational affiliations. The printed minutes capture the committee's firm rebuke:

Every denominational prejudice helps to retard the progress and destroy the efficiency of schools. Many persons, too, ignorant of the offices of a Holy religion, have turned them into political contests. Ay, teachers have gone into the schoolroom, . . . teaching not so much those principles which would tend to the full development of man's intellectual and moral faculties, but rather propagating certain doctrines which can be regarded nothing more than fixed notions of their own prejudices.⁸²

Spiritual leadership in the classroom attracted uneven support. The abstract quality of Woodson's appeal to Black youth to establish a spiritual connection with God and to undergo a vaguely-articulated process of spiritual refinement was likely an attempt to mediate differing perspectives, while nevertheless marrying her teaching with her religio-political sensibilities and her notion of moral economies. The committee's rebuke most readily reveals that even though Black churches often provided pecuniary and ideological foundations for Black educational uplift initiatives and school teaching, Black teachers had yet to agree upon a standardized approach that differentiated between moral and religious instruction.

⁸² *Transactions of the First Annual Meeting of the Colored Teachers' Association Held at Springfield, Ohio, Dec. 25, 26 & 27, '61*. No publication information available. Print. 9-10. *Hathitrust.org*.

By this time, topics about racial and religious inclusion were at the core of widespread debates and reforms in America. This fact was later enunciated by the 1870 *Minor v. the Board of Education* case, wherein the Cincinnati Supreme Court upheld educators' right to use the Bible as a schoolbook.⁸³ About a month after the OCTA's December 1862 convention, the *Recorder's* editorial staff, working under Elisha Weaver, compiled church and political news, poetry, opinion pieces, the OTCA convention proceedings and Woodson's speech, among other content. This content reported on several issues: Black youth and education, Lincoln's January 1st Emancipation Proclamation and ongoing debates about the role of religion in public society. The paper's January 31, 1863 issue suggests that the *Recorder's* editorial staff likely wanted to feature a number of perspectives regarding roles of spiritual teachers.

Woodson's OTCA speech is part of a heated debate about spiritual instruction and spiritual duties in the *Recorder* issue. In one example, the *Recorder* staff draws "special attention" to the then Baltimore-based A.M.E. pastor and schoolteacher, George T. Watkins' scathing editorial. In "The Educated Ministry," Watkins denounces the matriculation of uneducated, untrained preachers into ministerial roles, particularly any who had "never rubbed his head against a college wall, and [didn't] know a letter in the book."⁸⁴ In another example, the *Recorder* reprinted an article

⁸³ The Bible had long been one of the best-selling books in the country along with Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and McGuffey's *Readers*, the widely-distributed schoolbook.

⁸⁴ "An Educated Ministry." *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*. The Black reverend George T. Watkins later led St. John's A.M.E. Church in Norfolk County, Virginia and had been known to mentor and groom Black ministers such as Israel LaFayette Butt, D.D. In that role and in his leadership positions at state annual A.M.E. conferences in Virginia, Watkins became known for

from Henry M. Fields' *The Evangelist* that argues that Union Army chaplains suffer public abuses due to the common idea that they are "mere hirelings" as opposed to respectable ministers.⁸⁵ The article contends that ministers employed in secular institutions should receive no less respect than those working in churches. In an address to Western Theological Seminary, the A.M.E. minister Jeremiah H. Turpin encouraged young men entering ministerial roles to pursue "piety, modesty, truth, benevolence, temperance, and industry"—tenets of moral economies—and to refrain from stoking an ego that excused wrong-doing upon matriculating into ministerial positions.⁸⁶ Undoubtedly, the issue suggested that ideas about spiritual leadership transcended schools of thought and certainly transcended religious institutional validation. Still, the issue no less concretizes the importance of professionalizing institutions—Colored Conventions, seminaries, newspapers and religious denominations—and the voices that brought local issues to national readers.

The *Recorder* issue also hones the idea that Black intellectuals' modus operandi prioritized spiritual leadership, a view that included and affirmed both professional training and spiritual calling. Major U.S. religious denominations required ministers to undergo a process of ordination. In "The Educated Ministry," Watkins argues, as he mentions his predecessor and A.M.E. co-founder Morris Brown

his hardline stance against the ordination of ministers who did not meet the Church's criteria for moral decorum and proper education.

⁸⁵ "Army Chaplains Defended." *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

⁸⁶ "Western Theological Seminary." *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

had, that a standardized or authorized system of professional training should have been a necessary part of A.M.E. ministers' matriculation into leadership roles. Moreover, standardized training gave individual churches and collective organizations credence that positively reflected upon the host church and the larger denomination.

Standardized training would concretize a ritual of engagement and a professional respectability that could be passed down to future generations. However, Black women were systematically excluded from ordination until 1894, when Julia Foote became the first woman licensed A.M.E. minister.

Woodson suggested that, while professionalization within religious orders was an important and practical measure, God extended spiritual calling to all people. This perspective differed from traditional views about spiritual teaching. Woodson argued that Blacks should see themselves as “messengers, by which we keep up our communication with the external world.”⁸⁷ On one level, Woodson's style of abstract, philosophical rhetoric strengthened the duration of her message. It could appeal to those who valued an educational platform that emphasized the empowerment and psychological support religious practices and a personal sense of spirituality offered Black young people aging in an often violent and unfair world. Woodson's message also created a continuum that included all mankind—placing the impetus, and thus power, upon individuals to seek out a relationship with God that would strengthen their entire outlook on life. More readily, as a moral economist, Woodson believed

⁸⁷ Woodson, Sarah. J. “Address to the Youth. Delivered by Miss S. J. Woodson, Before the Colored Teachers' Association, in Cincinnati, Ohio.” *The Christian Recorder*. 31 January 1863. *Accessible Archives*.

professionalization and spiritual calling were not exclusive to men or validated by men. Such a perspective created a feminist stance in a debate dominated by Black men in the *Recorder* issue. It acknowledged decades-long, trans-denominational debates about women's roles in spiritual leadership as ministers, preachers, evangelists and exhorters. Woodson also presented a nuanced way to understand relationships between professionalization and spiritual calling—suggesting that the two were not mutually exclusive and that women, boys, girls or men of any color had a direct line to, and were called by, God to spread their message.

Woodson's own teaching and speaking careers strengthened the notion that moral economies was an effective strategy. Certainly other Black intellectuals gleaned as much. Educator and Colored Women's League founder Hallie Quinn Brown likened Woodson's presence to a "granite wall in defense of right and truth," remarking that "for a student to appear before Miss Woodson without a lesson, was comparable to a culprit facing a judge and jury."⁸⁸ The A.M.E bishop and Colored Convention organizer Henry McNeal Turner knew Woodson to be "metaphysical and theoretical" with "the geography of the world" appearing "to be at the tongue's end."⁸⁹ Brown frequently came in contact with Woodson during her Wilberforce years. Turner often encountered her at A.M.E. events after 1870. The general reputation that Woodson held as a Black philosophical thinker suggests that her OTCA speech

⁸⁸ Quinne, Hallie Brown. *Pen Pictures of Pioneers of Wilberforce*. Xenia: The Aldine Publishing Company, 1937. 24.

⁸⁹ Stephen Ward Angell and Pinns, Anthony. *Social Protest Thought in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1862-1939*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000. 272-3.

represents a brand of intellectual performance that cemented her thought among other Black thinkers, while effectively spreading her perspective on world history and spiritual leadership among a spectrum of Black people—leaders and everyday people, readers and audience members.

The Masculinist Ideal: John Mercer Langston at the 1869 Kentucky Colored Educational Convention

John Mercer Langston spent a great deal of time working as a teacher, political theorist and activist in the middle decades of the nineteenth century before going on to become the Dean and then President of Howard Law School; in 1888, he broke ground as the first Black elected congressman for Virginia. Through out the middle decades of the century, he relentlessly supported a multifaceted value system of self-determinacy, political advocacy, strong family values, moral living and the cultural assimilation of Black freemen into upper-class White communities. Even though his mixed-raced heritage and wealthy White planter father, who died in his youth, were often topics of public speculation, his teaching and educational advocacy as a Black man of great achievement remained central to his public identity. 1855 proved a breakout year. At the age of 26, the young activist was elected as township clerk in Brownhelm, Ohio by an all-White vote and was admitted to the Ohio bar as an attorney. He taught at a local school and served on the town's board of education. He later rose to become the first dean of Howard University's law school. Langston's political convictions, educational achievements and professional success drew public interest. Speaking notices and convention reviews published in Black and White-run newspapers plot Langston across a multi-regional, interracial terrain of organizational meetings, Black pride

celebrations and Black activist networks. By the time he spoke before the 1869 Colored Education Convention, he had become integral to an active American intelligentsia focused on questions of abolition, equal rights and the government's domestic policies.

During the 1860s, Langston's public life seemed to reflect American progress and possibility, though his own successes were not without the limitations of deeply entrenched perceptions of leadership as a particularly male endeavor. In *John Mercer Langston*, historians William and Aimee Lee Cheek especially mark the 1860s as the period when Langston ascended to national recognition as a sharp and able politician whose politics had been able to transcend boundaries of racial disunion. As a recognized dean and a D.C.-based government agent, his relations with mainstay Black leaders were strong. The Republican Executive Committee and other Black leaders called on Langston to travel to speak at political campaigns and meetings along the mid-Atlantic corridor and in parts of the South.⁹⁰ He traveled as a General Inspector of Education for the Freedmen's Bureau. Reports and memos coming out of his office at Howard Law School circulated in papers across the states. From his physical presence and vocal eloquence to his political values and affiliations, aspects of Langston's political activism and professional life most noted in the American press often operated as a mode of defining the state of Black activism as it related to Black individual and collective achievement. Even at his level, Woodson was one of Langston's most important intellectual and activist woman counterparts. By the time

⁹⁰ "Professor John M. Langston; Mississippi," *Weekly Louisianian*. 12 October 1871. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

of the 1862 OCTA and the 1869 Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, they had both achieved a nationally celebrated status of Black intellectual. They were both passionate about grooming Black youth in the ways to rise in socio-economic status. And they placed significant emphasis on moral economies as a set of strategies for that goal.

Scholars and public commentators often seat Langston's political career at a nexus between antebellum activism and postwar American bureaucracy. After the war, he continued the literary and oratorical styles of Black antebellum political discourse by publishing an autobiography that, in part, argued for Black people's civil rights. Langston's premier biographers William and Aimee Cheek have called him the Barack Obama before Barack Obama, with Kevin Merida seconding the comparison.⁹¹ The Cheeks argue that, during the 1860s, he largely maintained his politics of the 1850s: "Oberlin perfectionism, democratic-republican ideals, antislavery politics, and the northern black civil rights movement."⁹² Maxwell Bloomfield argues that Langston's law career was supported by the associations he built while at Oberlin and while part of the Colored Conventions movement of the 1840s and 1850s. As Wilson Jeremiah Moses points out, even though "Langston found [Frederick Douglass] difficult to work with," they were both interested in bringing together Black professional classes of teachers, ministers, lecturer tour speakers, bureaucrats, editors

⁹¹ Merida, Kevin. "The 'Obama before Obama.'" *The Washington Post*. 7 June 2008.

⁹² Cheek, William and Cheek, Aimee Lee. *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989. 418. By "civil rights movement" the Cheeks largely refer to the movement of colored men's and citizens' conventions of the antebellum era.

and entrepreneurs with their recently freed “darker brethren.”⁹³ Langston’s 1869 speech is a compelling example of this interest. But few link his ambitious promotion of professionalization among Black people to the postwar Colored Education Convention circuit; it is often overshadowed by the larger significance of his lecture tour as a Bureau agent. His 1869 speech is an example of Langston’s increasingly overlapping legal, educational and organizational pursuits. The pursuits, more broadly, represent the sort of Black activist who had, by the postbellum era, understood activism and work as inseparable forms of profitable labor and moral duty.

As an audacious law school faculty member and up-and-coming politician in the national spotlight, Langston’s attendance at a Kentucky Black convention appealed to delegates’ interest in legal reasoning, savvy argumentation and male model leadership for Black youth. He attended the Kentucky convention as a headlining speaker as he wrapped up a southern state-to-state campaign as an educational inspector for the Freedmen’s Bureau. Langston’s contemporaries would join sessions, too: Berea College trustee John G. Fee; Berea College president E. H. Fairchild and Peter Clark, the Kentucky school superintendent.⁹⁴

On July 14, 1869, a crowd reportedly numbering in the thousands met with two-hundred and seventeen Black delegates at Benson’s Theater in Louisville for the inaugural Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention during the week of the first

⁹³ Wilson, Jeremiah Moses. *Creative Conflict in African American Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 33.

⁹⁴ Fredrick Douglass would cancel his appearance at the last minute.

anniversary of the 14th Amendment's ratification.⁹⁵ The delegation worked hard to reverse the dissolution of the fund the Freedmen's Bureau had allotted to Kentucky.⁹⁶ They called upon the state to meet the difference in a petition they planned to lobby before the legislature. The petition demanded that tax dollars derived from Black people, including pauper taxes, be appropriated to a colored school fund.⁹⁷ For delegates, having the likes of Langston and such a large crowd in session signified a general seriousness about business proceedings. It signified the convention's political strengths and its access to resources needed to undergird what would inevitably be an uphill fight.

⁹⁵ The 1869 Colored Educational Convention was the first *educational* convention held in Kentucky and the third state colored men's convention. By the time the 1877 Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention was held, the delegation was made up of both men and women and required all delegates be a teacher or have an occupation within the field of education. *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson's Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

⁹⁶ The government allotted funds to two hundred and ninety schools with approximately fourteen thousand children on their rosters. *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson's Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

⁹⁷ In the petition published in the pages of the proceedings, delegates announce the wide-spread fraud practiced by tax collectors as well the illegitimacy of Kentucky taxation practices, which had levied standard and pauper taxes on Black people without granting equal educational opportunity for Black youth throughout the state.

The delegation believed race, education and labor were bound up together. Similar to Woodson, the attending speaker and Black army major Martin Delany viewed American slavery as a similar form of enslavement and political oppression that had been apparent during Russian serfdom and Biblical stories surrounding Israelite bondage in Egypt. He argued that compared to histories of White European peonage, the end of American slavery promised a sharp turn in Black people's socio-economic opportunities—an opinion “loudly applauded throughout.”⁹⁸ Other speakers rebuked Democratic politicians' strategies that often pitted Black people against White German and Irish immigrants in the labor market. The former Union colonel Don Piatt declared, “[Democratic] politicians will crawl upon their bellies and lick the feet of any class possessed of the political power the ballot gives, as they will, on the other hand, cruelly oppress and abuse any class not armed with this potent privilege.”⁹⁹ In his letter, read aloud at the convention, James M. Fidler represented what many local Black activists believed true: the government was increasingly run by White men whose own impassioned prejudice against Black people had been transmuted into law. He nevertheless believed that Black people's morality and intelligence would

⁹⁸ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson's Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections. 3.

⁹⁹ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson's Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*, 7. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

undermine racist leadership. “Speak boldly for your rights,” wrote Fidler.¹⁰⁰ Blacks should, he would say, “supplicate no longer, but demand of Kentucky the removal of every disability imposed upon you. [...] In the meantime build up school-houses and send teachers abroad.”¹⁰¹ Delegates seemed to largely agree that sectarian battles between ethnic lower classes thwarted the potential for greater collective action that could improve their labor opportunities and widen access to public education for all tax-paying Americans. In this heated and lively climate, Langston proposed a masculinist moral economies to young Black men who he believed could rise and challenge White men in the highest echelons of power.

Langston’s moral economies suggests that individual power matters more to social elevation than previous condition. Individual power reflects a person’s ability to profit from his or her lived experience, beliefs, persona, social connections and reputation. Tenets of male responsibility, narratives about Black achievement, and proper moral decorum form the basis of Langston’s notion of the Black male intellectual. In his speech, Langston “encourages...young colored men in the performance and discharge of their duties” as professional men.¹⁰² Patriarchal social

¹⁰⁰ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*, 6. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

¹⁰¹ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*, 6. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

¹⁰² *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*, 23. Original publisher and date of publication

environments, or spaces wherein White “men of status” operated with a level of near-undisputed authority, were key to his philosophy.¹⁰³ Professional men were also to acknowledge the ascension narratives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln as models. Whereas Douglass was locked out of doors of higher learning, Langston contends, “[T]he law school, the medical university, and the theological institutions of learning are all open to (Black male youth). I need not exhort you to become great.”¹⁰⁴ Langston scoffs at defeatist attitudes among Black young men as a conduit for continued racial subjugation. He champions a vision for the future with Black men holding a number of positions of power.

Langston’s process for the maturation of an ideal Black intellectual revolves around a masculine figure proficient in both domestic and public cultures. As such, his figure of the Black intellectual would understand and appropriate nuances of religious, political and social interactions for the good of Black communities. In another way, this figure worked in tandem with, and sought to represent, patriarchal leadership and authority. Langston offered a methodology of decorum. First, one must place one’s

unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

¹⁰³ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*, 23. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

¹⁰⁴ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*, 24. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

self in alignment “with whom we would associate” and have enough income to support the life in the pursuit of that profession, including providing a lifestyle that places one’s “wife and family inside of the circle in which you move.”¹⁰⁵ To rise in social status, a professional man must be equipped with a “tight” moral character and a “good name” such that he meets the dictates of his agreements and relationships with others.¹⁰⁶ He wrote: “He who makes his promise to you and breaks it lies, and will lie to the church, and he who will lie to the church will swear falsely in the court.”¹⁰⁷ Moral character, then, mattered a great deal when it came to how a Black man would be perceived in social institutions, though denominational affiliations were largely ancillary to Langston’s secular notion of moral economies.

For Langston, professional decorum and material comforts aid the Black intellectual’s mission to become influential in society. He argues that the road to professionalism is “long, arduous, and unremitting labor” such that an acquaintance with higher classes without interest or motivation to endure the journey would render the pursuit defunct.¹⁰⁸ Above genius, a sound work ethic was a fundamental aspect of Langston’s philosophy. The latter would guarantee financial security; the former was

¹⁰⁵ Langston, John Mercer. *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*, 26-27. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.

¹⁰⁶ Langton, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 26.

¹⁰⁷ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 27.

¹⁰⁸ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 26.

still largely abstract, even in nineteenth-century scientific thought. While work ethic solidified credentials, material possessions such as liquid currency, land and other property and domestic comforts would facilitate the Black man's rise in social status. Money granted the opportunity to reshape one's disposition in life by "revolutionizing" the man and "the sentiments of [his] wife and children."¹⁰⁹ A savvy emerging leader would arrange a lifestyle equipped with domestic luxuries and practice habits of thrift to maintain such a status. Langston's approach required material and behavioral aesthetics and performance. Accentuating the aesthetics of moral economies allowed Langston to avoid restricting the role of the Black intellectual to those commonly understood as professional men. At the time, professionals would have trained and worked in fields such as education, engineering, trade and commerce, manufacturing, religious institutions, medicine, the press, banking, insurance and most government offices. In Langston's case, one of the most rhetorically operative but also paradoxical facets of moral economies was its nominal acceptance of a variety of forms of labor, while constructing the figure of the Black intellectual upon an exclusive set of men.

The aesthetics of intelligence and social status were important to Langston's legal philosophy, which he tailored to a predominately Black and poor audiences. Langston outlined four types of equality measures: natural equality, legal equality, political equality and social equality. Natural equality was "announced beautifully by the Fathers in the Declaration of Independence: 'we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created free and equal. So we are created by God the equal of

¹⁰⁹ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 28.

the White man.”¹¹⁰ Legal equality was deeply connected to the ways citizens were recognized as part of the American “body politic.”¹¹¹ Black men needed “the right to stand equal in the eyes of the law, in the court, in the legislative halls, in state, in church, to be the equal of every other man before law.”¹¹² Langston’s notion of political equality claims that despite previous condition, the Black man holds full citizenship as outlined in the Constitution. After the 15th Amendment’s passage, Langston thought that Black people’s natural equality was innate, their political equality was codified and their legal equality would not be fully gained before the Black man had earned the respect of his peers in social settings. However, his philosophy towards Black rights did not deal directly with the ways Kentucky Black laws, many added during and after 1866, had suppressed freedoms the 14th Amendment granted. His position, thus, came into conflict with other attendees’ ideas.

With urgency, Langston modeled a way to advance beyond evangelical Christian doctrine and millennial destiny rhetoric as a primary lens through which to view America’s future. Langston heralded a vision for the Black voice of America—a “voice of thunder”—that would unrepentantly announce Black people’s democratic rights. He passionately argued that social affairs were Black people’s best chance at constantly raising Black issues in formal and leisure spaces wherein White powerful men moved. A pre-Talented-Tenth proponent, and likely implying his presence at a

¹¹⁰ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 20.

¹¹¹ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 21.

¹¹² Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 21.

convention of colored people as an example, Langston unshakably believed that when Black leaders expressed political concerns in such settings, they moved the issues of the Black masses to the minds of powerful White men, which would eventually reach the minds of the White populace. Then Black leaders were to

...write it out forever in burning characters of eternal fire, and send it out, not in the word of God, but in the voice of thunder, to roll over your country,...that whatever may have been a man's previous condition, whether born on the soil, native to the country or not, and not now a slave [was a free man].¹¹³

He had found a way to merge his antebellum convention training into a fiery secular discourse suitable both for the postwar moment and his commission as a Freedmen's Bureau agent.

Like Woodson, Langston viewed strong communication and argumentation skills as core characteristics of the postwar Black intellectual in the public sphere. On the one hand, educated Black men would need to operate behind the scenes; the talented and articulate would enter White men's homes to campaign for Black rights. It was particularly important that the "best" among them network with White men who harbored resentment toward the Black American and who conspired for the obstruction of Black people's citizenship rights.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, they also needed strong writing skills and wider access to popular culture mediums such as the press, educational institutions, organizational meetings and lecture circuits. Langston declared, "the intelligent man, white or black, will rise from the lower condition and

¹¹³ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 22.

¹¹⁴ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 22.

swim like the cork upon the surface of the water.”¹¹⁵ His sink-or-swim creed sought to appeal to young men across educational status to communicate the real danger in failing to “swim like the cork” to one’s rightful place among the nation’s “best men.”¹¹⁶ In other words, remaining impoverished and without a profitable skill would be akin to social death. A significant part of his dictum was the honing of skillful oratory, back-door politicking and persuasive writing among young Black men.

Despite praise for his oratory and his glowing reputation, Langston’s arguments were not all well received because they attached an extraordinary amount of significance to elitist success. Langston argued that Black leaders should enter into semi-private negotiation with White men over issues related to Black civil rights; his plan was “to say to white men that achievement is the test of equality” as opposed to inherited power, skin color and previous condition.¹¹⁷ One problem connected to Langston’s elitist notions of upward mobility was that the most prominent goal of the convention was to secure rights to education by way of *legal* action. His view was pointedly contested by a White Republican speaker, Donn Piatt, who had argued in the previous day’s session that education proved the best means of elevation *only* in the absence of “that magic power”: the vote.¹¹⁸ Piatt also argued that financial independence was more powerful than intelligence, thereby challenging Langston’s

¹¹⁵ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 22.

¹¹⁶ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 22.

¹¹⁷ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 22.

¹¹⁸ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 8.

idea that traditional educational pursuits were the best way to achieve financial independence.¹¹⁹ Langston's philosophy suggested that the job of the Black intellectual was to *prove* his own worth. This proof Langston referred to was the test of achievement—a test in which Black intellectuals who represented the Black race could level the playing field by embodying fairness, moral reasoning, educational attainment and professional standing.

In some ways, Langston's approach argued for a continuation of the empowerment of White bureaucrats and politicians to distribute power. This approach shifted the focus of the fight for racial justice from legislative halls and from legislative decorum to the homes, restaurants and other leisure spaces that White privileged classes frequented. In politicized leisure spaces, individuals were admitted upon invitation. As a strategy, such admission politics ensured that the power of decision-making remained exclusive to well-connected individuals. This strategy excluded those ignorant of well-defined social codes, networks and spaces. The press'

¹¹⁹ Piatt and Langston would have been familiar with one another, on a name basis at the very least, as Piatt had been active in practicing law in the 1840s and 1850s in Cincinnati before relocating to D.C., where he became an insatiable gadfly and editor of *The Capitol*. Piatt had made a name for himself as an ally in Black people's struggles for freedom when he, after enlisting Black laborers in Baltimore to build hurried riverside fortifications against northbound Confederacy troops, had encouraged his superior, General Schenck to propose to Lincoln that Black Marylanders be freed and be enlisted into regiments "from among the four thousand blacks, both slaves and freeman, who had already been working hard for the Union." After meeting with the President's hesitancy, with blatant disregard for Lincoln's orders, Piatt successfully recruited and declared free Maryland slaves. While Piatt's rhetoric was bloated with pity for the humbled state of Black people and political conjectures about the hardships Black people would continue to face, it provided an important counterweight to Langston's call to action that pragmatically addressed Black elites and white politicians more so than Black youth.

reception of the convention alludes to this exclusion. Reportedly, Benson Theater was “literally packed from pit to dome.”¹²⁰ Most of the audience was “negroes, most of whom had formerly been slaves, and who, though still groping in darkness, were beginning to seek the light.”¹²¹ And “a goodly number of white men were seen standing near the doors, eager to catch the eloquent, truthful and convincing words as they fell from the lips of the orator.”¹²² The *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* depicts an image of White men in the act of standing spellbound while Langston seems to affirm their leadership within social and political structures. With consideration of his audiences and his definition of social equality, this aspect of his speech makes clear that Langston’s theory of social equality was more useful in understanding the public roles of the upper echelons of powerful Black attendees and powerful White men. Thus, Langston’s speech, though initially addressed to young Black men, was only nominally geared to school-age Black youth.

In his speech, Langston shares a story that embodies his notion of social relations between White and Black men. Upon invitation, Langston and a Black journalist had visited the home of a staunchly racist southern colonel. The men spent a great deal of time debating about race in America. Langston and his friend felt welcome as denoted by the fact that Langston openly “talked to the ladies of the

¹²⁰ “Letter from Louisville. Conclusion of the Colored Convention.” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 18 July 1869. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹²¹ “Letter from Louisville. Conclusion of the Colored Convention.” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 18 July 1869. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹²² “Letter from Louisville. Conclusion of the Colored Convention.” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 18 July 1869. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

house.”¹²³ All the while, the Black journalist was collecting information about the colonel’s family that fed into an article that he subsequently published; it relayed “how nice a man [the colonel] was.”¹²⁴ Upon meeting the colonel again, Langston contended that the colonel did not remark upon the color of his face, nor “anything about the negroes rising in rebellion, fire, devastation, murder, or such like” in conversation.¹²⁵ Instead, the colonel waxed on and on about the positive representation of a “full column and a half all about his family” featured in a “Garrison Liberator.”¹²⁶ Langston replied: “Don’t you remember who wrote it; it came from the head, heart, and hand of a negro.”¹²⁷ The colonel subsequently deems the writer to be “equal, and superior, too.”¹²⁸ The message: “the character ...the moral life, the ability of that black man, refuted forever the arguments” of Black inferiority. The economy of morality in this sense is related through Langston and his journalist companion’s ability to advocate for Black rights by contradicting the notions of Black inferiority that the colonel held.

Langston’s masculinist or male-centered philosophy strongly endorses democratic discourse, or the practice of tolerance between disagreeing factions. The

¹²³ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 24.

¹²⁴ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 24.

¹²⁵ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 24.

¹²⁶ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 24.

¹²⁷ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 24.

¹²⁸ Langston, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, 1869*. 24.

narrative mocks the absurdity of racism. The colonel and the women in his family are embodiments of White supremacist logic, a counter-figure to the Black intellectual that corresponds with Woodson's emphasis on the challenge White obstinacy poses to Black success. These figures provide a necessary angle through which Langston can herald the moral economy that Black men, the base segment of his masculinist approach, can wield in public and private spaces. The Black journalist's appeasing column centralizes the resourcefulness of a Black professional man in either dispelling negative images of Black people or promoting civilized, integrationist perspectives rooted in actual events and connections. The Black writer's connection to a "Garrison Liberator" brings to bear the ubiquity of abolitionist ideas and pro-Black civil rights views in both northern and southern intellectual life—even though the colonel initially views the popular newspaper as a receptacle for oppositional ideologies. As the Cheeks argue, "[C]andor, courage, and civility characterized Langston's discourse."¹²⁹ Langston was not alone nor were his methods particularly new. Especially fitting is David Blight's description of an antebellum radical abolitionist and colored conventions activist, James McCune Smith, who worked according to "a strong sense of moral responsibility, and faith in the power of human reason to blunt, if not conquer the irrationality of racism."¹³⁰ Langston models the respectability politics of many

¹²⁹ Cheek, Aimee and William. "John Mercer and Langston." *Black Leaders in the Nineteenth Century*. Eds. Leon Witlack and August Meier. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991. 117

¹³⁰ Blight, David. "In Search of Learning, Liberty, and Self Determination: James McCune Smith and the Ordeal of the Antebellum Black Intellectual." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 2.9 1985: 7-25.

Black intellectuals by proving himself capable of engaging in civil interactions with ideological opponents.

A little over a year before, *The Elevator* had published an article that suggested Langston's anecdote was based on real events. In "Chivs, Captivated by a 'Nigger,'" a writer reports on Langston's sensational speech before a White audience of secessionists gathered at the Louisa Court House in Virginia. While the author describes Langston as a celebrated "colored scholar orator," the secessionist crowd before him had apparently balked, becoming "highly indignant at the impudence of a negro coming to talk in their midst, even to his own people."¹³¹ The author argues that their anger was placated only by the knowledge of Langston's White father, a plantation owner, such that he was accepted once he "proved to be the son of one of the most influential and beloved of the old aristocracy."¹³² The author crafts a narrative of Langston's integration into the home of a White colonel on the basis of this connection:

The Confederate General Gordon was so pleased with Langston that he called upon and invited him to his house after he heard his argument in favor of Radical Republicanism, and the white ladies of the place would not be satisfied till he had given them a speech in the village church.¹³³

¹³¹ "Chivs, Captivated by a 'Nigger,'" *The Elevator*. 24 January 1868. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹³² "Chivs, Captivated by a 'Nigger,'" *The Elevator*. 24 January 1868. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹³³ "Chivs, Captivated by a 'Nigger.'" *The Elevator*. 24 January 1868. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

In Langston's version of this very similar incident, he and his companion control knowledge-production and prove that social equality succeeds when men meet in politicized leisure or domestic spaces. They control the article that is written and dominate the intellectual exchange at the colonel's home. In the *Elevator's* version, however, a White family's fascination is the controlling force that renders Langston a speechmaker for the entertainment of the White colonel and his family. Whether the editorial is written with sarcasm or genuine delight is largely ambiguous. What's important to note is that such parallel descriptions of events help to put into perspective warring images of a Black intellectual. It is also important to note that a veneer of political aesthetics covers both encounters. That is, Langston does not define nor is he represented to define the ways by which the Black men's encounter with southern racists moves Blacks closer to legal and political equality, though his supposition about social equality declares as much.

Langston's elitist approach to social equality is also implicitly challenged by Donn Piatt's fugitive soldier narrative, part of his address to the 1869 Kentucky Educational Convention. In Piatt's story, relayed to him by a soldier named Campbell, Confederate forces hold Campbell prisoner in a "horrible death-pen" full of "miserable, starving wretches, crowded together in their misery, covered with rags and vermin."¹³⁴ After several failed attempts, Campbell eventually escapes the holding cell on foot in "an enemy's country," choosing to travel during the night and hide

¹³⁴ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson's Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections.12.

during the day.¹³⁵ Campbell meets bondmen, who provide shelter in “miserable huts” and nourish with him with the little food they possess.¹³⁶ They move him along a route operated by their fellow bondmen, “guiding him northward, whence they had so often fled” even as it was overrun with warring Union and Confederate factions. Bloodhounds pursue Campbell, and one slave directs him, “Cross de creek, massa, dey won’t follow you; day’ll follow me; day’s taught for dat.”¹³⁷ The guide’s quick decision leads to his death, while Campbell safely finds Union camps. For Piatt, the bondmen’s act represents the highest form of heroism. It also represents the higher classes of “citizenship” that Black bondmen practice in comparison to the White Democratic “men who seek to oppress them.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869.* Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections. 13.

¹³⁶ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869.* Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections. 13.

¹³⁷ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869.* Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections. 13.

¹³⁸ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869.* Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections. 12.

Reading the rescuer's death as an act of Black soldiery situates the slaves as counterintelligence operatives. This reading demonstrates the effectiveness of and the intelligence needed to operate the Underground Railroad. The railroad had gained popularity in public discourse in the postbellum era as a secretive, yet highly successful web of complex networks, missions and routes running from the southern states to as far as Canada. It had powerfully demonstrated the deft, crafty and collaborative work between Black people, organizations and institutions. Bondmen in Piatt's story anticipate encounters with fleeing White Union soldiers who had been captured by the Confederacy. They wield their knowledge of geographical terrain and the positional relation between Union and Confederate infantry to protect the Union's interests. But, ultimately, they sought to free slaves from lifelong captivity. In the narrative, Piatt defines the rescuer's heroism in terms of unconditional love. Piatt calls this love a form of affection mirroring that which is between "friends [who] have died for each other, children for parents and parents for children."¹³⁹ This notion romanticizes a Black man's death rather than explicitly appreciating the bondman's larger goals: emancipation. Indeed, Campbell's rescuer dies as an active member of a concerted underground battle for his and the larger enslaved population's freedom.

In contrast to Langston's views about biracial social affairs in elite spaces, Piatt presents the idea that Black and White men of *any social status*—a bondman and

¹³⁹ *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson's Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections. 12.

a “common soldier” even—can achieve mutual respect.¹⁴⁰ Piatt believed that the rescuer’s good deed was a compelling example of the ways a single event could stand as evidence for future relations between Black men and White men. In contrast with Langston’s views about power and racial equality, Piatt’s narrative presents a productive biracial relationship between men of lower classes that leads to the elevation of a Black man’s character. However, the soldier and his rescuer’s relationship develop along a fundamentally uneven stratum of freedom that indelibly separates them. The plot suggests successful Black-White race relations require Black people to occupy lower positions than White people in as much as the enslaved man has a lower status than a White soldier. In addition, because the slave dies, Piatt’s story seems to echo antebellum anti-slavery philosophies that largely supported the end of slavery, but ardently advocated against Black people’s assimilation into society as equally free people.¹⁴¹ Polarized as they were in this sense, Langston’s and Piatt’s depictions of relations between Black and White men are examples of male public intellectuals situating men as primary actors in debates about the general Black population’s moral and political elevation.

¹⁴⁰ Piatte, *Kentucky State Colored Educational Convention, held at Benson’s Theater, Louisville, Kentucky, July 14th, 1869*. Original publisher and date of publication unknown. Minutes are held at the Western Kentucky University, Department of Library Special Collections, Kentucky Library Research Collections. 12.

¹⁴¹ See Piatt’s book, *Memories of the Men Who Saved the Union*, (New York: Belford, Clarke & Company, 1887), 99-102.

Ideas Matter: Black Intellectuals as Radical Occupational Idealists

What sort of Black intellectuals were Sarah Woodson and John Langston in relation to the Freedmen's Education and Colored Education Convention movements? At the onset of the Reconstruction era, Woodson and Langston encouraged Black people to work and think strategically, even as White-orchestrated obstructionist policies continuously thwarted Black upward mobility. Certainly, Woodson and Langston knew that the circulation of material goods, monetary currency and racism fueled the subjugation of Black people. These interconnected facets of society provided an economic base for American capitalism and patriarchal rule in the antebellum era to thrive. Woodson and Langston passionately persuaded Black communities to join such a system, so that they could subvert the power of White supremacy and ensure the future rights of people like them. In their roles as public intellectuals, they waxed passionate about elevating Black people to the political status quo of most White people and to the professional status quo of well-educated White Americans. But in terms of their key audience, disenfranchised Black youth, they were engaging in an important market of ideals.

Sarah Woodson's and John Langston's accomplishments, access to advantageous opportunities and economic outlook undergirded their presence in popular American culture as public intellectuals. Woodson and Langston were college-educated and nationally known activist-lecturers in 1864 when the vast majority of the Black population—more than 3.9 million slaves—were entering into nominal freedom. Eloquent, strong-willed and intelligent, they impressed those in the circles in which they moved. These advocates had joined one of the most important nation-building professions, education, in an era of democratized public education and during a rise in government-funded institutions of higher education. They imagined

the majority of Black people in similar positions. They shared an idealistic political philosophy—moral economies—that suggested a way to think about political action that worked to expand Black people’s individual and collective upward mobility. These principles asserted that, in general, Black people needed sound educational training. They also needed to work hard, live morally and speak boldly for Black people’s rights.

An ideologically connected pair of Black education advocates, Woodson and Langston were occupational idealists¹⁴² during the 1860s. In their addresses to predominately Black audiences at Colored Education Conventions, they avoided a demanding, militant vision for immediate and complete racial equality. Instead, they touted a vision for Black people’s gradual integration into the social, economic and political fabrics of the American populace. They argued that such an integration was contingent, in part, on how well Black people could publically establish their moral and intellectual worth; the Woodson’s and Langston’s political messages were so ingrained in their professional pursuits that they validated, and operated within, sectarian bodies of Black intellectuals sharing similar big ideas about racial justice. These intellectuals often used their own professional careers as platforms through which Black upward mobility could be accomplished and racial oppression challenged. Trans-regional in scope, postbellum colored professional meetings tended to attract such a cohort of Black occupational-idealists: teachers, ministers, editors,

¹⁴² The term occupational idealist refers to Black activists who argued for workers’ participation in racial uplift through certain professional and labor fields such as teaching and church leadership.

politicians, entrepreneurs, businessmen, bankers, vel sim. Black professional associations balanced short-term, hands-on and pragmatic political agendas with space for Black intellectuals like Woodson and Langston to disseminate notions about Black identities and social values. The forums encouraged these leaders to share ideas about how communities could craft long-term initiatives for racial equality that could offer hope in the face of hardship, violence and professional exclusion. More than the simple act of speech-making, the value system they expressed constituted a valuable aspect of Colored Conventions and helped sustain the longevity of Black struggles for freedom. Connected to corresponding intellectual notions such as Robert Gordon's vision for a moral society, moral economies is a labor-assimilation conceptual framework that is instrumental to our understanding of the central strategies and arguments that link otherwise regionally diverse groups of postbellum Black intellectuals.

Public life mattered a great deal to most occupational idealists and to their level of influence. Inestimable numbers of press notices and reviews reflect public interest in the ethos and logistics of Black political conventions in relation to local, state and federal politics. For example, public displays of high political cultures in the form of elected delegations, formal voting, petitioning, speeches and entertainment helped to validate the principles of moral economies. Black women increasingly joined and were statistically acknowledged as teachers and professors in the federal census and as Colored Convention delegates in the postbellum era. No doubt Woodson's work with the OCTA contributed significantly to the ways in which activist communities connected to the African Methodist Episcopal Church and how predominately White women's temperance organizations would receive her leadership

style and educational philosophy, both before and after her historic Wilberforce University career. In her speech before the 1862 OTCA convention, she expounded upon a commonly espoused corporeal-spiritual concept of moral sensibility, intellectual ability and gainful employment. But by focusing on the collective abilities of humankind, she claimed her own place in Black educational leadership. She also fashioned a feminist argument that made rhetorical claims for why Black women were also part of humankind's potential for greatness, for why they, too, should pursue a greater variety of occupations. Her educational philosophy combined Black egalitarianism, progressive feminist-labor thought and progressive religious thought.

Langston's professional career, too, largely shaped his political outlook as it materializes in his 1869 Kentucky convention address. Langston's speech merges labor and assimilation with what I term a masculinist ideal. The latter phrase reflects Langston's interest in positioning Black young men at the center of progressive approaches to Black racial uplift. He believed Black educated men working in a number of professional fields could compete with and challenge the most successful White men in America and abroad. His version of moral economies argued for more Black men groomed in values pertaining to family, work and politically beneficial associations with White men. As his subsequent political career as a congressional representative in Virginia evidences, Langston would continue to be a distinctly *American* philosopher of democratic ideals, with an interest in theorizing about the upper echelons of Black leadership, its values and future goals. Still, communities and opposing factions directly and indirectly challenge occupational idealists as this group often sculpted racial uplift scenarios by looking from the inside outwards. As idealized

as their philosophies often were, they demonstrated the ways in which the 1860s was alive with ideas and an interest in potential.

Chapter 3

ACTIVIST DAUGHTERS: BLACK LEADERSHIP, PUBLIC MEN AND ACTIVIST LIFE-WRITING IN BLACK WOMEN'S BIOGRAPHY

“Everywhere his plume was seen in the thickest of the fight for unconditional civil rights and universal suffrage, with Douglass, Sumner, Phillips, Garnet, Garrison and Ward, he led the race out of physical bondage into the bright light of freedom. It is now for the younger men to gather inspiration from the lives and labor of their heroic seniors and carry on the work.”¹⁴³

-Serena A. M. Washington

On August 8, 1855, sixteen-year-old Josephine Brown, daughter of the famous fugitive William Wells Brown, arrived in New York City from London onboard a vessel called the *Baltic*.¹⁴⁴ The attendant who filled out the manifest list drew a vertical chain link of seven interlocking circles, in which Brown was the fourth. The linked parties included four Americans and three Britons: a farmer, a bookkeeper, a painter, and two merchants. No occupations were cited for the party's two women, though Brown was an accomplished and formally licensed teacher at the time. She

¹⁴³ Washington, Serena Ann Miller, *George T. Downing: Sketch of His Life and Times*. Newport: Milne Printing, 1910. 17.

¹⁴⁴ Born in 1839, Brown would have been 16 in 1855, though she is listed as being eighteen on the passenger list. Ancestry.com. *New York, Passenger Lists, 1820-1957*. National Archives, Microfilm Serial: M237; Microfilm Roll: 155; Line: 10; List Number: 758.

was returning from England, where, after being educated in France and in London since she was fourteen, she led a school “with more than one hundred pupils and an assistant two years older than myself,” as she wrote to Samuel May in a letter published in the *Liberator*.¹⁴⁵ Brown travelled back to America to add the title of author to her list of early accomplishments; she carried with her a copy of the manuscript for *Biography of An American, By His Daughter* (1855). When it was published, Josephine Brown would become the first Black woman biographer in the extant record.

As daughter of a well-known abolitionist, Josephine Brown’s path from teacher to author was accelerated by figures in abolitionist communities and by an arsenal of progressive thought in print. She was met at port by none other than Horace Greenly, the editor of the *New York Tribune*, who escorted her to Boston to join her father. Still, like the other writer-daughters of then famous nineteenth-century Black activists, editors and entrepreneurs, her biography would soon fall into obscurity. Indeed, her life and work has been largely absent from scholarly inquiry. Though Brown remained in America until at least 1857, thereafter, her travels and activism have failed to be cogently linked to Black activist thought during the height of anti-slavery and Black reform movements in America and abroad in the nineteenth century. Indeed, the New York passenger list is one of the few surviving documents that indicate the travels associated with the publication of her first and only known book-length work.

¹⁴⁵ *The Liberator*. 25 January 1856. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

Josephine Brown's short authorial stint in the public eye during the 1850s is an instance of the political thought emerging from an African American woman intellectual whose insight into the conditions of Black life matured into a book project. She would pen a biographical narrative of her father's life as much as chart the means by which a Black leader could ascend into international public popularity through the lens of her father's activist career. As this chapter seeks to illuminate, Black women biographers' experiences as teachers, community organizers, committee members and consumers of the anti-slavery and Black press enabled them to synthesize contemporaneous racial uplift philosophies into models for Black resistance and leadership. Viewing their work as examples of nineteenth-century Black feminist epistemologies, this chapter critically recovers Black women writers' intellectual productivity by unpacking the intellectual social networks that engaged in reform before and after the American Civil War. For many Black writers, the practice of merging public history, biography and political philosophies amounted to a mechanism for the survival of Black thought—a matter of necessity. The Black men whose lives were at the center of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black women's biographies were considered to be indicative of, if not fully representative of, Black life in a particular region or line of work. From the models of Black leadership drawn from the lives of prominently known and highly mobile Black ministers and businessmen, we better understand the common traits that were associated with representations of Black men as public figures and, in some cases, as quasi-saviors. The biography was a particularly popular genre towards this end.

Comparative readings of Josephine Brown's *Biography of An American Bondman, By His Daughter* (1856), sisters H. Cordelia and Florence Ray's *Sketch of*

the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray (1887) and Serena Ann Miller Washington's *George Thomas Downing: Sketch of His Life and Times* (1910) reveal that these Black women writers' rhetorical and editorial decisions remark upon a history of Black grassroots organizing to extend leadership styles that made their fathers regional heroes, elected representatives and frequently central figures of press coverage. Brown, the Rays, and Washington appropriate the biographical form—a widely read literary form—to express their own political critiques on politics, gender and race as these topics intersect with the public participation and print messaging that endorsed Black-led leadership training, representational activism and racial uplift philosophies. But the glaring absence of many of these women's work in contemporary scholarship has situated nineteenth-century Black women biographers as examples of “the unseen” shaping “the seen without having its presence acknowledged.”¹⁴⁶ Sandra Y. Govan's “A Blend of Voices” offers a meta-critical commentary on contemporary literary studies, arguing, “Black women's writings as figurative undergarments become the sign for the legitimization of marginalization, not fit for discussion in public discourse.”¹⁴⁷ Black women biographers' works are indeed susceptible to coded language and self-effacing narrative strategies, which results in “the work of black

¹⁴⁶ Hubbard, Dolan, Ed. “Introduction: Can I Get a Witness?” *Recovered Writers/Recovered Texts: Race, Class, and Gender in Black Women's Literature*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997. Print. Xiv.

¹⁴⁷ Hubbard, Dolan, Ed. “Introduction: Can I Get a Witness?” *Recovered Writers/Recovered Texts: Race, Class, and Gender in Black Women's Literature*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997. Print. Xiv.

women (slipping) through the cracks of literary scholarship and into oblivion.”¹⁴⁸ As Gabrielle Foreman’s notion of simultextuality suggests, “[A]n examination of the formal and historicized strategies by which earlier writers address multiple audiences simultaneously” can lead to a way by which “to hear and harmonize the seeming dissonance between early texts’ ‘univocal’ sentimental affiliations and the dialogic complexity they engage to articulate messages in various social registers.”¹⁴⁹ This study will demonstrate the ways that Black women’s dialogic nuance, including their motivations for pursuing biographical authorship, can be understood through the ways their commentary on Black masculine ideals and public intellectual decorum privileges a continuation of political outcomes and underlying philosophical longevity, instead of privileging women’s absence in public literary culture.

The biographers’ editorial and discursive decisions, as well as their professional careers allowed them to assert a model of professional respectability surrounding authorial empowerment for readers such as other Black women interested in writing about Black activist histories, Black educational thought and political culture. The very act of publishing their literature represented a form of professionalization that was crucial to the image of Black women as public authors and public intellectuals. Furthermore, the biographers’ investment in promoting their roles as educators and their experiences learning from activist communities likewise

¹⁴⁸ Hubbard, Dolan, Ed. “Introduction: Can I Get a Witness?” *Recovered Writers/Recovered Texts: Race, Class, and Gender in Black Women’s Literature*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997. Print. Xiv.

¹⁴⁹ Foreman, Gabrielle. *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth-Century*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. Print. 7.

modeled for readers the importance of viewing the public sphere as hub of sites for educational attainment in relation to but also outside of traditional educational boundaries. Certainly, their work reflects investment in Black leadership classes that Black spokesmen had historically represented at public venues with notable exceptions, such as author-educators, Maria Steward, Mary Ann Shadd Carey and Frances E. W. Harper. As Patricia Hill-Collins argues, the common patriarchal practice of “denying African American women the credentials to become literate certainly excluded most African American women from positions as scholars, teachers, authors, poets and critics.”¹⁵⁰ Notably, the activist sketches produced by Josephine Brown, the Ray sisters and Serena Washington reject traditional single-author practices of authorial attribution. The books seem intent upon encouraging hagiographic depictions of Black intellectual cultures surrounding mid-century celebrities, while downsizing their own political presence along the way.

As part of the largely unadorned 105-page tract, for example, the title on the title page to *Biography of An American Bondman, By His Daughter* possesses singular authorial messaging for readers. Brown brandishes a form of recessive authorship through generic genealogical nomenclature (daughter) and legislative nomenclature (bondman). Doing so allows Brown to present the work as a cultural review of American bondage, while declaring intellectual singularity and superiority. She is as much the progeny of American despotism as she is a daughter of an organizational history of northern, Black activism. William Andrews suggests that, as a young writer,

¹⁵⁰ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990. 5.

“she wanted first and foremost to preserve the image of William Wells that he had so carefully fashioned” in the five versions of his autobiography.¹⁵¹ But, Josephine Brown’s editorial choices further illustrate what I call Black women’s professional respectability. She embraces and criticizes the social life instigated by American slavery, as told through the lens of a public figure who is both a victim and a titan of American ideals: freedom, citizenship and equal opportunity. Brown’s self-distancing in the book’s title and the power of proximity that she later declares in the preface further emphasizes the book’s political message: the continuation of Black community-based, or grassroots organizing through simultaneously localized and universalized depictions of Black leadership. Brown’s textual decision is a form of strategic, often rhetorical, mediation of cultural relations surrounding gender and public influence.

The Ray sisters’ editorial choice to use initials as authorial signature and to produce *Sketch of the Life of Charles B. Ray* as a collaborative, family work is another example of the ways Black women’s collaboratively written literary production lent credence to Black leaders’ antebellum and postbellum activism through simultaneously singular and universal depictions of Black political leadership. The Ray sisters situate their 79-page volume as a pseudo-autobiography in the preface to *Charles B. Ray*. The title page includes the name of the sketch in decorative typography and the publisher’s information but not the women’s full names. A preceding page contains a portrait of Charles Ray signed, “Yours truly, Charles B.

¹⁵¹ Williams, Andrew. “Introduction.” *Two Biographies by African-American Women*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. xxxvii.

Ray.”¹⁵² The acknowledgement page reads, “To the memory of a beloved husband and father, the flower of whose life was devoted to the cause of the oppressed, this volume is affectionately dedicated by his family.”¹⁵³ What remains of the sketch’s front matter includes the prefatory note signed by the sisters, “F.T.C.” and “H.C.R.” and a single poem by “H.C.R.”¹⁵⁴ The preface reads:

This memorial work is designed to embody a sketch of the life of the Rev. Charles B. Ray, especially in relation to his labors in the anti-slavery conflict. [...] The autobiographical form is given as far as possible, for none can more fittingly record the events and vivid impressions of a long experience than he who has realized them.¹⁵⁵

The sisters’ attention to designing a family-authored sketch that contextualizes Charles Ray’s political impact on Black activism symbolizes the social currency that the Ray sisters imagined the first-person narrative voice might garner among readers.

However, it is also through the autobiographical format that the Ray sisters skew a reader’s sense of a single authorial presence. The rhetorical implications of their use of the autobiographical format are meaningful. On the one hand, Charles Ray is positioned as a public figure whose political authenticity is measured through the validation of his daughters’ perspectives on racial uplift strategies. On the other hand, the autobiographical genre is rendered as a shared intellectual space, wherein both the

¹⁵² Ray, Florence and H. Cordelia Ray. *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray*. New York: Press of J. J. Little & Co, 1887. 1.

¹⁵³ *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray*, 4.

¹⁵⁴ *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray*, 5-6.

¹⁵⁵ *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray*, 5.

contributions of an actor and his protégés can embody notions of validity on registers of experience usually reserved for words, actions and events as understood by the actor alone. The Rays' interest in artificially manufacturing their father's political persona reflects the women's demonstration of a concept of feminist epistemology crafted out of respect for Black activism as a form of cultural labor and their own experience as a validating, parallel corpus on which audiences could depend. In doing so, the writers create the veneer of an autobiographical account that necessarily merges their own political leanings and reflections with cited and quoted material presented by the named subject.

In *George Thomas Downing: Sketch of His Life and Times*, Serena Washington also embraces authorial androgyny as a means to localize and universalize Black activist philosophies at the turn of the century. The 23-page sketch's front matter consists of a stately daguerreotype of George Downing and a title page, which is signed, "By S. A. M. Washington."¹⁵⁶ Washington's editorial decisions for the title page disguise her gender through an acronym amounting to a decidedly masculine name: Sam. Washington's chosen identity marker mimics the naming conventions of signature in Black activist print culture, particularly in title pages of convention minutes of Colored Men's and Colored Teachers' community events George Downing was known to attend, as well as abolitionist-themed annals. In such texts, first and middle names were often listed using initials, with the surname appearing in full. For women, Mrs. and Miss frequently accompanied their surname or the initials of a husband. Thus, women's signature practices reflected what writers and audiences

¹⁵⁶ *George Thomas Downing*, 1.

considered respectable. In this case, a woman activist's marriage status could lend credence to her public presence, her narrative voice as well as the venue, event or text to which her name was attached. In *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America, 1850-1900*, Susan Williams argues that scholarship on "the position of the female author" often seeks out "examples of unhappiness rather than satisfaction, violence rather than sociability, subversion rather than convention."¹⁵⁷ Certainly, men and women writers expressed "anxiety in the second half of the nineteenth century with the conversion of high art into a more rigidly masculine field that would escape the 'contaminating' effects of women."¹⁵⁸ Williams argues that women writers were capable of theorizing about authorship apart from sentimentalized duress regarding the act of writing, thus dedicating their "energies toward the production of literature and the goals they set for it—goals set in part by the principles outlined in writing devoted to authorship, particularly in periodicals."¹⁵⁹

I argue that Brown, the Ray sisters and Washington's centralized depictions of Black public activism derived from nineteenth-century reform movements, while also attempting to build credibility among the women who received less public credit for activism among the mostly-male political cohorts to which the subjects of their literature were attached. Their work reflected the right and ability to produce original

¹⁵⁷ Williams, Susan. *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America, 1850-1900*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. 20.

¹⁵⁸ Williams, Susan. *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America, 1850-1900*, 19.

¹⁵⁹ Williams, Susan. *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America, 1850-1900*, 20.

and abridged content that interrogated a topic on which they had become experts: the performance of Black masculinity. Their authorial decisions to focus on Black public figures affirm their own knowledge of Black community-organizing strategies, while modeling authorship as a form of activist engagement—part of women’s contributions to fights for equality. This chapter argues that to read Black women biographers’ work as simple reproductions of previous works is to dismiss the goals of their biographical productions: to communicate tested Black political philosophies, to broaden what educational literature could entail and to model the ways in which Black women with experience and credentials could breach intellectual gaps between generations and nationalities.

To understand the emergence of historically situated figures of Black public manhood and such performances in the public sphere, this chapter contextualizes the daughter-authored biographies as part of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cultures of activist biographical writing. Activist biographies—often known as sketches and sketchbooks—were deeply steeped in Black communities’ fight for social, political, legal and gender equality. Therein, otherwise private spaces such as home life and personal letters are collapsed and reframed as public documentation. Social justice figures appear as catalysts for respectable Black intellectual decorum. The prefatory notes to the biographies establish the writers’ intention to enter a sphere of writing that was well known to activist circles in America and England. Readings of the texts’ multi-faceted content likewise further the notion that the activist biography simultaneously operated in the historical and imaginative spheres. Black women biographers asserted a professional respectability as cultural critics by appropriating narrative patterns practiced in contemporaneous digest literature dominated by male

authors. Secondly, I argue that the Ray sisters and Washington appropriated contemporaneous activist classification systems, or leadership models, that situated Charles B. Ray and George T. Downing as individual and universal depictions of a leadership archetype: dedicated, selfless, and morally astute heroes. Representations of spaces—the city and the home—are at the crux of the texts’ construction of political spaces wherein Black masculine ideals emerge.

A Matter of Upbringing

The Brown, Downing and Ray family names held a great deal of social currency among anti-slavery networks. The daughters’ upbringing, political affiliations and professional careers were central to their views on politics. Although Josephine Brown’s *Biography of An American Bondman, By His Daughter* is the author’s single extant book-length writing, the book’s public reception and reviews of Brown’s lectures in the periodical press help us to better understand the ex-patriot’s life and work leading up to her return to England in 1856. As the daughter of one of the most politically connected Black abolitionists of the mid-century, Brown’s story emerges as the most enigmatic of the four writers I examine. Born in 1839, Brown experienced a great deal of separation from her parents as well as a great deal of intimacy with anti-slavery social networks. Following marital conflict between Wells Brown and her mother, Elizabeth Schooner, Brown and her sister Clarissa spent the mid-to-late 1840s living in New Bedford, Massachusetts with the Black community leader Nathan Johnson and Martha Fletcher, two well-established movers and shakers associated with a circle of Garrisonian abolitionists. During this time, Wells Brown travelled as an abolitionist lecturer and Colored Convention delegate. By 1854, at the

age of fourteen, Brown had left New Bedford, had studied in esteemed educational institutions in France and in England, and had secured a teaching position at East Plumstead School where she presided over “more than one hundred pupils and an assistant two years” older than she. Brown announced in a letter printed in the *Liberator* her decision to “remain” abroad in Woolwich, England where she was “always treated with the greatest kindness and respect.”¹⁶⁰

Feeling both liberated and filled with a sense of duty to protest American slavery while abroad, Brown funneled her knowledge of slavery, Wells Brown’s experiences, and her life as a young, gifted and Black woman abroad into a biographical account of her father’s life. Brown corresponded with the famous White abolitionist Samuel J. May while teaching abroad. Detailing the anxiety she and her sister, Clarissa—also a certified teacher in England—felt upon graduating from Home and Colonial School, “a highly rated Preceptor’s College in London,” Josephine writes: “We were somewhat afraid that our color would be a barrier against our getting employment; but in this we [were] happily disappointed.”¹⁶¹ May sent letters to *The Liberator* that extolled Brown’s activities abroad. The piece exclaims: “Only think of the youthful daughter of an American fugitive slave at the head of a school, as teacher, of more than one hundred White young English ladies! Let the fact be published far

¹⁶⁰ Brown, Josephine. *Biography of An American Bondman, By His Daughter. Two Biographies by African-American Women*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. 4.

¹⁶¹ Sterling, Dorothy. *We Are You Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1997. 146. Sterling omits the first full paragraph of Brown’s letter to Samuel May, Jr., printed in the *Liberator*, May 26, 1854.

and wide.”¹⁶² As Vanessa Dickerson suggests, “[T]o understand the situation of African Americans in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries one must do so with an awareness not only of the roles of America and Africa but also with a sharper awareness of the role Europe, especially Britain, played.”¹⁶³ Europe provided Brown with a bifurcated experience from which to better understand American racism; she writes: “The entire absence of prejudice against color in Europe is one of the clearest proofs that the hatred [in America] to the colored person is solely owing to the overpowering influence of slavery.”¹⁶⁴ Living abroad in Europe with professional accomplishments empowered Brown to speak out against American slavery without fear of retribution.

The abolitionist press and free Blacks recognized the influence of Europe upon Brown’s writing and public presence. In 1855, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* printed a brief advertisement and review of “young authoress” Josephine Brown’s *Biography of An American Bondman, by His Daughter* (1856).¹⁶⁵ Calling the “interesting narrative” a “merited tribute” to Wells Brown, the reviewer speculated: “If circulated as it should be, [*Biography of An American Bondman*] will serve the cause of the slave.”¹⁶⁶ Upon its publication in 1856, *The Liberator* evaluated *Biography of An American Bondman*

¹⁶² *The Liberator*. 26 May 1854. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁶³ Dickerson, Vanessa. *Dark Victorians*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008. 6.

¹⁶⁴ *Biography*, 74.

¹⁶⁵ *Anti-Slavery Bugle*. Salem, Ohio. 29 December 1855.

¹⁶⁶ *Anti-Slavery Bugle*. Salem, Ohio. 29 December 1855.

as “very creditable, in every point of view.”¹⁶⁷ *The Liberator* framed Brown as a representative of the Black experience abroad, claiming that the young teacher “exhibit[ed] the world-wide difference between England and America...in the treatment of the colored race.”¹⁶⁸ A few years earlier in 1854, Charlotte Forten Grimké noted that Brown was a “sensible girl,” whom she should grow to like; Grimké also described Brown, who had attended her eighteenth birthday bash and chatted with Grimké about European life, as “pleasant and communicative,” adding: “Though coming lastly from England, [she] has...lived in France too much to acquire a great deal of that reserve which characterizes the manners of the English.”¹⁶⁹ European influence on Brown’s morals and manners also may have accounted for why Brown’s popularity acutely waned in the late 1850s. In a letter written in 1857, William C. Nell alerts Amy Post that William Wells Brown is “pained at what seems to be the degeneracy of...Josephine” and that Josephine had alas “lost her good name.”¹⁷⁰ And while Nell wrote that he hoped Josephine “may yet redeem herself,” Brown’s whereabouts and circumstance following 1857 are largely undocumented and

¹⁶⁷ *The Liberator*. 25 January 1856. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁶⁸ *The Liberator*. 25 January 1856. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁶⁹ Grimké, Charlotte Forten. *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. 138.

¹⁷⁰ *William Cooper Nell: Nineteenth-Century African American Abolitionist, Historian, Integrationist*. Eds. Dorothy Porter Wesley and Uzelac, Constance Porter, Eds. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2002. 488. Refers to entry related to Boston, August 23, 1857.

unknown beyond Brown's visit to Wells Brown in the U.S. at the time of his death in 1865.¹⁷¹

As young women, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray mounted careers in activist collaboration and public educational advocacy. Father Charles B. Ray rose as a seasoned activist in the Colored Conventions movement, often attending events in the Northeast as a New York delegate. The last editor of *The Colored American*, and the pastor of two Congregational churches based in New York and in Massachusetts, Ray's decades-long career in the public eye kept his daughters in the thick of things. Like him, the women received formal educations at the University of the City of New York and then the Sauvener School of Languages, where they received teaching licenses.¹⁷² Both taught for the New York City public school system.¹⁷³ Upon retirement, Cordelia taught English classes for a teacher education program.¹⁷⁴ Joint schooling and teaching careers offered the women nominal independence and respectability as women of middle-class opportunities often enjoyed by their White peers.

¹⁷¹ *William Cooper Nell: Selected Writings*, 488. Boston, August 23, 1857. See Ezra Greenspan's *William Wells Brown* for a description of Brown's return visit to Wells Brown in 1865.

¹⁷² Bolden, Tony. "Biographies." *Schomburg Library of African-American Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century*. New York Public Libraries. digital.nypl.org/schomburg/writers_aa19/biographies.html.

¹⁷³ Sherman, Joan. "Introduction." *Collection of Black Women's Poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988. xxix.

¹⁷⁴ Sherman, Joan. "Introduction." *Collection of Black Women's Poetry*, xxix.

Their joint enterprises extended into community and literary spaces. As executive members of the board for New York's Colored Orphans Asylum, they received fanfare for successfully raising over one thousand dollars during the asylum's 1860 fair—three years before the Manhattan-based orphanage was disastrously burned to the ground during an 1863 draft riot perpetrated by thousands of White men.¹⁷⁵ The *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune* praised the sisters for their intellectual and organizational contributions to the 1881 Ohio Colored Teachers' Convention and its successors.¹⁷⁶ In 1887, they would open and close a biography with sentimental poetry, penning at least one of the poems together. The Ray sisters maintained near identical affiliations such that their partnership as co-authors of *Rev. Charles B. Ray* aligns with their previous resumé of joint social, organizational and professional activities.

Still, Cordelia's personal accomplishments garnered far more public popularity than Florence's. Cordelia's entry into public memorial writing came nearly ten years before she co-authored *Sketch of Rev. Charles B. Ray* with Florence. On April 14, 1876, William E. Matthews read Cordelia's eight-line ode, "Lincoln," at the Freedman's Monument ceremony, where Frederick Douglass was the keynote speaker.¹⁷⁷ Some years after publishing *Rev. Charles B. Ray*, she published a short

¹⁷⁵ Sterling, Dorothy, ed. *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984. 118.

¹⁷⁶ "Colored Teachers of Ohio in Convention," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*. August 20, 1881. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁷⁷ Sherman, Joan. "Introduction." *Collection of Black Women's Poetry*, xxix.

memorial biography, *Charles Lamb* in the July 1891 issue of the *A.M.E. Church Review*. The sketch described the essayist's literature, his career as a literary critic and his relationships with famed poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Showing a likeness to the ways she emblemized her father in 1887, Cordelia claimed Lamb's life was of "truest heroism" and "saintly," though she never asserted that Lamb's strategies could be replicated to advance social and racial justice in the U.S., as she suggested her father had in the sketch *Rev. Charles B. Ray*.¹⁷⁸ Ray's poetry appeared in the *A.M.E. Church Review* in the late 1880s; she published two volumes of poetry, *Sonnets* in 1893 and *Poems* in 1910, and a single poem appearing in the collection *In Memoriam: Frederick Douglass* in 1897.

Unlike the Ray sisters and Josephine Brown, Serena A. M. Washington did not enjoy a palpable public presence, though the Downing family generally received substantial fanfare in the press. Inconspicuous as she was, Washington, George Downing's eldest daughter, lived in the thicket of political activity. A year before the Civil War, the seventeen year-old Washington resided at the "Sea Girt House," the Downing family's Newport, Rhode Island home of fourteen, which housed Washington's parents, her six siblings, an employed confectioner and several other adults and children.¹⁷⁹ In 1861 in Boston, she married George Washington, a restaurant keeper with a presidential name.¹⁸⁰ By 1880, she had returned with her

¹⁷⁸ Forten, Charlotte. "Charles Lamb," *A. M. E. Church Review*. African Methodist Episcopal Church. 8, 2 1891: 1-9.

¹⁷⁹ "Free Inhabitants in Newport." 1860 United States Federal Census.

¹⁸⁰ Massachusetts Marriage Records, 1861 and 1870 "Inhabitants in 4th Ward, City of Newport." *Ancestry Library Edition*.

children to the Newport Sea Girt House and worked as a clerk. She remained there no later than 1910, after which she ran a boarding house in Newport.¹⁸¹ During this span of time, Serena A. M. Washington attended family events and soirées with elite free Blacks. Although the 1910 *Sketch of George T. Downing* seems to be Washington's sole venture in the literary sphere, undoubtedly Washington followed in the footsteps of her father's publication of "A Sketch of the Life and Times of Thomas Downing" in the *A.M. E. Church Review*, April 1887, and the broader northeastern reform network's culture of activist biographical writing. Washington's characterization of the "public man" was modeled after the comings and goings of a variety of activist-minded people who visited and resided within the Downing family home during the second half of the nineteenth century. As such, politically charged spaces and social networks, along with her father, are narrative subjects in *George T. Downing*.

Josephine Brown's Limitations and a Culture of Antebellum Activist Biography in Great Britain

To develop a plan for Black leadership that would be recognizable and could be incorporated within Black activist networks, Josephine Brown, the Ray Sisters and Serena Washington framed their authorship as acts of interventionist historical writing seeking to situate their fathers' place in historiographical literature discussing Black activist cultures. In their biographies, each of the writers emphasizes their proximity to

¹⁸¹ "Inhabitants in Newport," 1880 Population of Newport, Rhode Island. 1910 United States Federal Census, Department of Commerce and Labor Bureau of the Census. *Ancestry Library Edition*.

their fathers' activism. And each biography demonstrates that they regularly took note of debates situated in news literature, as well as major legislative decisions at state and national levels. The books' prefatory material contextualizes the writers' motivations for producing the texts, while also providing context for the historical, political and literary environments within which they expected the biographies to operate.

Josephine Brown's biography, especially, announces her legacy in the record of William Wells Brown's dedication to the mid-century anti-slavery cause on both sides of the Atlantic.

Reading the limitations of *Biography's* reception provides insight into how professional Black teachers addressed real and imagined communities to demonstrate pathways for moral attainment and upward mobility. Brown imagined the public figure as a cultural tool through which to campaign for broader political ends. She also challenged traditional notions of respectability and temperance ideology by practicing professional respectability. In his introduction to Brown's *Biography*, William Andrews writes that Brown's purpose "was relatively modest," and that "if one attribute of the *Biography* were to be singled out as a contribution to the lore of William Wells Brown, it may well be this little book's stock of ironic and comic anecdotes."¹⁸² In the first book-length biography published since William Farrison's 1969 volume, Ezra Greenspan in *William Wells Brown: An African American Life* investigates Josephine Brown's authorial individuality and presents a case for why we

¹⁸² Brown, Josephine. *Biography of An American Bondman, By His Daughter. Two Biographies by African-American Women*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. xxxix

might doubt her authorship; he writes: “The account she composes...is a mostly paraphrased or loosely quoted retelling from published sources.” He adds that, according to Farrison, Wells Brown’s earlier biographer, “Josephine incorporated some of her father’s handwritten changes to chapter 1 into her text—unless, as may well be true, Brown did it himself.¹⁸³ Greenspan suggests that the amount of Josephine Brown’s original writing presented in *Biography* is so outweighed in relation to William Wells’ quoted and paraphrased material in *Biography* that one might believe that William Wells produced the primary body of chapters in *Biography* on his own. I argue that Josephine Brown’s prefatory text, editorial decisions and intermittent narrative commentary secure her authorial originality and individuality. Contemporaneous acknowledgement of her authorial productions among newspaper press corps that reviewed *Biography* and covered her public appearances further suggests that Brown presented the work as an intellectual collaboration between her father’s previous autobiographies and memoirs, her experiences with him as a close family relative, and her own desire to share her experiences as a teacher in Europe at a pinnacle of abolitionist agitation on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. While Brown’s role as a cultural critic and the book’s intertextual relationships with other biographies produced in Great Britain further position *Biography* as an autonomous production of literature, contemporary scholars’ reviews of *Biography* do build upon the limited public engagement that constitutes the book’s historical reception.

¹⁸³ Greenspan, Ezra. *William Wells Brown: An African American Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014. 341.

The aforementioned press notices that ran in *The Liberator* and the Ohio-based *Anti-Slavery Bugle* illustrate the press' willingness to extend reputational value to members of the Black elite, beyond book sales, which would suggest that Brown's original work had gained public popularity on its own accord. However, the celebratory language merely emphasizes the *fact* of Brown's authorship. The reviews neglect intellectual investment in, or critique of, the content she produced. For instance, *The Liberator* showed interest in her style of writing: "We print [this] without the alteration of a single word. It is uncommonly legible and graceful." The news outlets' limited engagement with Brown's sketch offers a sense of their role in limiting the book's intellectual reach and reinforcing the significance of Black women biographers' use of professional respectability. While Josephine Brown gained respectability as a professional teacher and as an author, her private persona and her writing style were still subjected to authenticity practices, wherein White men and women who acted as character witnesses were responsible for assuring the public of the veracity of Black people's artistic and political expression in literature. This was especially true for the slave narrative genre, and it formed the context out of which other women writers' work became public in the U.S. and in Great Britain, including Mary Prince, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Jacobs. Professional respectability both related to, and departed from, notions of Black women's proper behavioral roles in public society and the outcomes of formal education. That is, professional achievements allowed Black women such as Brown to build credibility on the basis of career and labor pursuits, even as they mediated that empowerment by acknowledging, deferring to, or rhetorically engaging popular notions of respectability that would have

made those achievements more palatable for potential reading audiences who valued or preferred traditional roles for women.

Even though Josephine Brown would distribute her book while speaking at society meetings in the Northeast, several factors influenced the limitation of its reception. When Brown published her book in 1856, Wells Brown's story was not particularly new to American abolitionists. The lecture circuit speaker had already published five autobiographies, including a travel memoir. His reputation was growing in popularity in Europe, especially in England and France where he had attended an international peace conference, anti-slavery meetings, and exclusive parties in the homes of wealthy statesmen. According to Brown, "It was the intention of Mr. Brown, when he went to England, not to remain there more than one year at the furthest. But he was, by the laws of the United States, the property of another, and the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill laid him liable to be arrested whenever he should return to his native land."¹⁸⁴ Lecturing and networking with influential people was Wells Brown's best chance at simultaneously supporting the abolitionist cause and securing his daughters' futures, while avoiding arrest or coerced kidnapping in the U.S.

Following her father's style of appeal to Europeans for support of American abolition, Brown initially penned a preliminary version of *Biography of An American Bondman* as an instructive pamphlet about slavery to educate her French boarding school peers. In the short prefatory note, Brown claims authority over the American slave narrative:

¹⁸⁴ *Biography*, 73.

I was often beset by my fellow students to know the history of my father, whom they heard was a fugitive from American despotism. To satisfy their curiosity, I wrote out the first ten chapters of the following pages, as I had heard incidents related. On returning to America last August, and finding that the narrative of my father's life, written by him, and published some years ago, was out of print, I determined to supply its place; and therefore have added a few more chapters to those while abroad.¹⁸⁵

Brown acknowledges a struggle to deliver a history of Wells Brown's escape from slavery without rendering the Black experience as an Other—prepared by a radical Other—the object that indulges curious schoolmates. While she does not struggle with colorism, or discrimination due to the color of her skin, she draws attention to French youths' continuous calls for a history about Wells Brown. Had their curiosity about slavery or about Wells Brown as a celebrity seemed more prominent than their outrage towards the system of slavery and its impact on Wells Brown and his family? Brown would have had some knowledge of French fascination with eloquent Black Americans. Describing the French's reception of Wells Brown as an elected delegate at the 1849 Peace Congress in Paris, she writes: "The Peace Congress, and especially the French who were in attendance at the great meeting, most of whom had never seen a colored person, were somewhat taken by surprise on the last day, when Mr. Brown made a speech."¹⁸⁶ Brown highlights a difference between Black Americans travelling abroad as leaders and the Europeans they met and convened with.

Josephine Brown portrays French youth as a learning community that provides one type of impetus to her political writing, but Brown sets her authorial voice apart

¹⁸⁵ *Biography*, 4.

¹⁸⁶ *Biography*, 62.

from her “fellow students.”¹⁸⁷ She demarcates her understanding of American slavery as an intellectual advantage, and thus an authorial advantage. Exposure to White Europeans in an educational setting brings into focus a sharper awareness of her own identity. It pushes her to vocalize an important transnational political position that disallows her White schoolmates’ fascination with a Black public figure to undermine more pressing issues related to enslavement. She firmly inscribes the power of her biography to authorize an authentic narrative about slavery in the context of European and American culture.

Having defined her voice as political and singular in the context of her French boarding school experience in her preface, Brown’s description of the two-part writing process that produced *Biography* suggests that Brown intellectually and rhetorically advances beyond White curiosity as the principle impetus of her entrance into political writing. As John Ernest in *Liberation Historiography* argues, “[W]hite fascination transformed the stories of African American lives, confined slavery to the sins of the white South, and transformed racism into a site for white benevolence.”¹⁸⁸ Brown suggests that in order to function as a political text, *Biography* needed to operate within a Black woman-centered authorial realm that confronted the French youths’ inadequate knowledge of global affairs and that rejected the exposé genre of—to borrow from Ernest—“gossipy” White-authored enslavement literature as Brown’s

¹⁸⁷ *Biography*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Ernest, John. *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 172.

definitive motive for publishing a biography about Wells Brown and about the insidious nature of American despotism.¹⁸⁹ In the overview of her writing process, Brown notes that Wells Brown's out-of-print 1847 autobiography equated to another intellectual-textual deficit. Once again, Brown makes room for a self-professed intellectual advantage. She denies the notion that her political writing developed out of a form of coercive White curiosity and elevates the notion that her political writing was a form of pedagogical activism that was necessary, both within the context of her boarding school experience and in the context of the American book market.

Still, Brown embraces the oral traditions that undergird the slave narrative in print. Brown wrote the first ten of twenty-four chapters of *Biography* as she "heard incidents related," no doubt while living with Wells Brown and Nathan Johnson, and while attending numerous anti-slavery and temperance events.¹⁹⁰ In chapter fourteen, Brown describes the activist and intellectual activities taking place in Wells Brown's home, a move that situates Brown as a keen surveyor of Black activist and anti-slavery cultures:

[...]Buffalo being a place through which many fugitives passed while on their way to Canada, Mr. Brown spent much time in assisting those who sought his aid. His house might literally have been called the 'fugitive's house.' As Niagara Falls were [*sic*] only twenty miles from Buffalo, slaveholders not unfrequently [*sic*] passed through the latter place attended by one or more slave servants. ...Mr. Brown's residence

¹⁸⁹ *Liberation Historiography*, 169.

¹⁹⁰ *Biography*, 4.

also became the home of the Anti-Slavery agents, and lecturers on all reformatory movements.¹⁹¹

Wells Brown “did good service” towards “those who sought his aid,” thus making his home an arena for the activists’ temperance philosophies to play out, as well as an arena acting as a geographical marker between a fugitive’s freedom and capture.¹⁹² More readily, we see Brown identifying a prototypical site, the home of a Black activist, from which she has gleaned a stated, unique view of slave culture in the South and a formative political culture in the North.

Like Douglass and Wells Brown, Brown moves from what she suggests was first the oral delivery of the slave narrative to *Biography*. In *Speaking Power*, Fulton and Pitts argue that through “oral ethnographies, African Americans protested injustice and created a record of the ‘peculiar institution’ that contradicted the master narrative of benign slavery with slaves who were both intellectually inferior and unable to adopt the behaviors and values of Western civilization.”¹⁹³ By the mid-nineteenth century, “[B]lack American autobiography evolved into a complex ‘oratorical’ mode best exemplified in the narratives of ex-slaves who had become master rhetoricians on the antislavery lecture circuit.”¹⁹⁴ Inserting the question of

¹⁹¹ *Biography*, 53. This passage does not appear in the 1847 and 1849 editions of *Narrative of William W. Brown*, and is an example of the ways *Biography of An American Bondman* is a unique text.

¹⁹² *Biography*, 53.

¹⁹³ Fulton-Minor, DeVanna and Reginald Pitts. “Introduction.” *Speaking Lives, Authoring Texts: Three African American Women’s Oral Slave Narratives*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2010. 5.

¹⁹⁴ Andrews, 1.

Black women into nineteenth-century Black *autobiographical* studies, Joann Braxton adds: “For Black women in American autobiography, the literacy act has been, more often than not, an attempt to regain [a] sense of place in the New World.”¹⁹⁵ On the one hand, as Fulton and Pitts suggest, Brown positions a fugitive slave as the proprietor of an active community consumed with ethical matters, thus undermining the notion that a former slave lacked intellectual and moral sensibilities. On the other hand, as Braxton argues, Black women writers harnessed eloquence and passion to deliver a compelling story that remained true to the brutal reality of slavery, while suggesting that there was hope for America’s future redemption—a particularly instrumental skill in relation to Black speakers’ interactions with predominately European audiences without knowledge of American despotism’s inner workings and ramifications.

Josephine Brown refocuses Wells Brown’s slave narrative from being male-centered to being woman-inclusive. Brown strategically raises issues related to rape and miscegenation, while retelling a story about a slave who appears in Wells Brown’s multiple iterations of *Narrative of William W. Brown*. Crucial to Brown’s reframing are several members of the Young Plantation, which rested in “a beautiful and fertile valley” in Missouri: Wells Brown as a young boy; Elizabeth, Wells Brown’s mother; Dr. John Young, who owns Wells Brown and is his biological uncle; Randall, a “stout” slave on the Young Plantation; and Grove Cook, Young’s menacing

¹⁹⁵ Braxton, Joann. *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989. 2.

overseer.¹⁹⁶ In the first chapter, Brown describes the conditions under which Elizabeth is forced to work, a representation crucial to the ways Randall's and Elizabeth's experiences merge and depart.

While admired, Elizabeth works as a field hand. Brown tells us, "Elizabeth was considered one of the most valuable slaves on the place," partly due to "her strength both of body and mind."¹⁹⁷ But as a field slave like Randall, Elizabeth succumbs to the "daily toil" of "twelve to fourteen hours" of labor beginning with the "call of the horn and bell" after which she retires to a one-room wooden cabin without a floor.¹⁹⁸ Exempt from the field hand's morning-to-night ritual is the young house servant, Wells Brown, who yearns for "a mother's care and softening influence," while enduring Mrs. John Young's excessive punishments.¹⁹⁹ We learn that Dr. John Young outsources the most brutal physical punishments through his overseer, while he serves as assemblyman to the Missouri state legislature. Cook, a tall, burly, redheaded drunkard with the "face of a spaniel dog" not only physically reflects tendencies toward lewd behavior, but is also a constant threat to any obedient slave on the Young plantation.²⁰⁰ In a scene involving Cook and the hardworking, trusted slave Randall, the latter is shot, whipped, chained and put back to work after failing to complete an

¹⁹⁶ *Biography*, 6-7.

¹⁹⁷ *Biography*, 6.

¹⁹⁸ *Biography*, 10.

¹⁹⁹ *Biography*, 7.

²⁰⁰ *Biography*, 6.

impossible task Cook assigns and after remarking to the overseer, ““No white man shall ever whip me; I will die first.””²⁰¹ After a climactic struggle mirroring the famous fight between Douglass and Covey in Douglass’s *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), Randall falls under Cook’s control with the aid of nearby White men. The circumstances that provide for Randall’s beating and its aftermath—a gruesome image of a bloody Randall—symbolize the decimation of the Black man’s spirit and body within slavery. Randall loses his dignity. Elizabeth resides on the periphery of this passage, though she is nevertheless central to Brown’s concluding statement.

Josephine Brown’s first chapter sets the tone for the political pamphlet. The chapter’s conclusion represents Brown’s interest in reversing the silencing of Black women’s experiences in male-centered narratives by addressing the terrors bondwomen endure. The first chapter ends with a litany:

If there is one evil connected with the abominable system of slavery which should be loathed more than another, it is taking from woman the right to self-defence [*sic*], and making her subject to the control of any licentious villain who may be able to purchase her person. But amalgamation is only one of the impure branches which flow from this poisonous stream.²⁰²

The chapter’s ending addresses the circumstance of both men and women under the duress of slavery. It also prompts readers to agree that rape outweighs other evils connected to slavery. To reposition Elizabeth’s narrative from a descriptive outlier to one that holds interior importance within the context of the Randall-Cook fight scene,

²⁰¹ *Biography*, 7-8.

²⁰² *Biography*, 7.

Brown gives voice to otherwise silenced enslaved women. The potential juxtaposition of Elizabeth's vulnerability and Randall's physical strength gives way to the violence of slavery such that even though Randall is physically capable, the slave is no more able to defend his person than Elizabeth.²⁰³ Wells Brown's presence on the farm hints at an act of rape, but any brutality related to his conception remains unseen and unheard to readers. Wells Brown's version of this story largely focuses on his experiences and the quotidian violence that he identifies as a method of systematic oppression.

William Wells Brown's early portrayal of Elizabeth on the plantation in the 1847 and 1849 editions of *Narrative of William Wells Brown* is fashioned in the context of a young boy whose enjoyment of small privileges afforded to a light-skinned house slave declines as he is made aware of the brutality of slavery. In the 1847 *Narrative of William Wells Brown*, we learn the following about Elizabeth:

My mother was a field hand, and one morning was ten or fifteen minutes behind the others in getting into the field. As soon as she reached the spot where they were at work, the overseer commenced whipping her. She cried, 'Oh! pray—Oh! pray—Oh! pray'—these are generally the words of slaves, when imploring mercy at the hands of their oppressors. I heard her voice, and knew it, and jumped out of my bunk, and went to the door. Though the field was some distance from the house, I could hear every crack of the whip, and every groan and cry of my poor mother.²⁰⁴

In the 1849 edition of *Narrative of William Wells Brown*, Wells Brown adds:

²⁰³ *Biography*, 8.

²⁰⁴ Brown, William Wells. *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*. New York: Kessinger Publishing, 2004. 15.

Experience has taught me that nothing can be more heart-rending than for one to see a dear and beloved mother or sister tortured, and to hear their cries, and not be able to render them assistance. But such is the position which an American slave occupies.²⁰⁵

Are Elizabeth's cries and groans in these passages responses to rape or another form of sexual violation *and* a whip? Wells Brown frames Elizabeth's weeping yelps—"Oh! pray"—as "words of slaves" pleading for an end to physical torture. He shifts to the collective woes of bondmen, rather than drawing attention to White men's sexual impropriety.²⁰⁶ When the 1847 and 1849 editions were available in print, Wells Brown touted temperance ideals and moral absolutism. A question we might ask, then, is would Wells Brown speak so openly about rape and miscegenation?

Small-scale changes matter a great deal to understanding a young Black woman in the 1850s as an author. Brown's emphasis on rape and miscegenation defines a way for freeborn Black women to challenge the degradation rampant within American slavery. She challenges the heteropatriarchal framing of Black bondwomen's condition as equal to other aspects of enslavement. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume Brown would have been aware of laws codifying slavery through enslaved women's offspring. She predicts that the destruction of slavery would be tied to the general public's understanding of the Black bondwomen's plight. Brown charges readers with the task of coming to understand both the humanity of

²⁰⁵ Brown, William Wells. *Narrative of William W. Brown, an American Slave*. London: Charles Gilpin, Bishopgate-St. Without, 1849. *Documenting the American South*. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/brownw/brown.html> 16.

²⁰⁶ Brown, William Wells. *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*, 15.

enslavement through Elizabeth and Randall, but more readily to understanding that the institution of slavery was actually perpetuated, in part, through rape.

Brown's intention to enter a specific book market also marks *Biography* an independent text. She expected *Biography* to operate within a book market of abolitionist biographies. Namely, she was invested in a community of biographers in Great Britain. In the first chapter, Brown boasts that *Biography* is an exemplary edition of her father's life story. She writes:

Five different biographies of the subject of the following pages have been published, during the last seven years,—two in the United States and three in Great Britain. Of these, one was translated into German, and appeared in Dresden, and another was published in the French language in Paris. The writer of this, however, fancies that the relation which she holds to the author of 'SKETCHES OF PLACES AND PEOPLE ABROAD,' gives her an advantage over those who have preceded her.²⁰⁷

The three British biographies she mentions are male-authored and, as reviews in the British press suggest, were quite acclaimed among some readers. These heavily circulating biographies include multi-subject, often short biographical sketches of men of African descent, statistics on slavery and denuncements of American despotism. Most notable are Wilson Armistead's *A Tribute for the Negro* (1848) and the editor Henry G. Adams' *God's Image in Ebony* (1854). Brown was privy to trends in citation apparent in Armistead's and Adams' biographies: referring to and quoting contemporaneous biographical literature and compiling source materials from a breadth of individual texts, particularly engravings and newspapers with significant

²⁰⁷ *Biography*, 5.

readership and distribution rates. In adopting Adams' intertextual relationship with other authors, Brown practices British citation trends, while also choosing to remain committed to Wells Brown's enslavement narrative as a primary entry into larger discussions and social histories about American slavery, activist networks, and anti-slavery-themed lectures in Great Britain.

Comparing the prefatory note of Adams' *God's Image in Ebony* with Brown's opening chapter to *Biography* reveals the texts' temporal and political connections. In his preface, Adams characterizes Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as "an impetus to the movement against Negro Slavery," but is sure to note his "little work" "was projected, and partly written, some time prior to the appearance of...Mrs. Stowe's."²⁰⁸ Adams also competes with Armistead's *A Tribute for the Negro*, even though Armistead had contributed the final chapter to *God's Image in Ebony*; referring to Adams as "my dear friend," Armistead writes: "Greatly shall I rejoice if I can add anything from my own observation, or from any other source, that shall assist in removing that unfounded prejudice which is manifested towards the most maligned and maltreated portion of the human family,...the Negro race, the result of which is continued hatred and oppression."²⁰⁹ Still finding Armistead's collection to be a "costly and elaborate volume," Adams argues that readers would find his own digest format more conducive to reading and circulating for the purpose of abolitionist

²⁰⁸ Adams, H. G., ed. *God's Image in Ebony: Being a Series of Biographical Sketches, Facts, Anecdotes, etc., Demonstrative of the Mental Powers and Intellectual Capacities of the Negro Race*. London: Partridge and Oakey, 1854. i.

²⁰⁹ Armistead, Wilson. *God's Image in Ebony*, 133.

philanthropy. Following Adams' rhetorical lead, Brown proclaims her biography to be more advantageous than *each* of the previous works due to her close proximity to William Wells.²¹⁰ In doing so, she boldly inserts a Black American woman's perspective into the male-dominated circle of self-proclaimed historians documenting the African and African American experience through biography.

Josephine Brown's opening chapter suggests that her knowledge of abolitionist literature and the reading habits of audiences sympathetic to the anti-slavery cause in the global sphere contributed to its organizational scheme. The success of the abolitionist biography heavily relied on global readers' interest in the compression of American enslaved experience and Black success within one text. On one hand, the format of the abolitionist biography intended to accommodate Britons' growing demand for anti-slavery material that was absent from a significant amount of historical and educational materials in circulation in England, post-British Emancipation. Authors of abolitionist-themed single-subject sketches and encyclopedic anthologies included prefatory clauses and opening chapters that varied from righteous indignation toward the peculiar institution to shameless self-promotion. Passages of the Armistead, Adams, and Brown biographies show a connection between the authors' anti-slavery political beliefs and the ways authors organized a variety of content to best reflect their beliefs. The intertextuality of these texts also

²¹⁰ In the context of Adams' stance toward the economic advantage of circulating inexpensive books, Brown's simple 104-page biography printed without illustrations, adornments, or leather-binding may have been printed thus so to increase sales at events, such as lectures and bazaars.

situates Brown within a culture of activist biographical writing in Great Britain among biographers of William Wells Brown.

The popularity of these activist biographies in Great Britain during the 1840s and 1850s is directly proportionate to the rise of an African-American presence within the British lecture circuit. Such is reflected in the more than one dozen discrete British periodical reviews of Wells Brown's lectures and book publications Brown reprints. She cites and heavily quotes numerous British periodicals: *Morning Advertiser*, *Literary Gazette*, *Morning Chronicle*, *London Critic*, *Athenaeum*, *Eclectic Review*, *British Banner*, *Glasgow Citizen*, *Glasgow Examiner*, *Caledonian Mercury*, *Biographical Magazine*, *Public Good*, *Daily News*, and Leigh Hunt's *Leader*.²¹¹ The articles extol Wells Brown as a self-taught, self-cultured and extraordinary man. The popularity of these biographies also ran parallel to the development of antislavery societies, ladies' sewing circles and fund-raising events, and "fairs and bazaars."²¹² Great Britain had abolished the slave trade in 1808 and abolished slavery in its colonies in 1833, though American slavery continued to be legal until 1865. By the 1850s, easy-to-circulate sketches and pamphlets like *Biography* described American enslavement while debunking arguments about White superiority. Sketches and book-length biographies operated as print manifestations of a Black presence in public anti-slavery discourse so that after men such as Frederick Douglass and Wells Brown had returned to America, the essence of their eloquence and their intriguing, yet dangerous endeavors could continue to be bought, sold, read aloud and taught.

²¹¹ See *Biography of An American Bondman*, chapters 21 and 22.

²¹² Dickerson, *Dark Victorians*, 65.

Brown's early literary career suggests that an ongoing, transnational career in anti-slavery activism was possible—but this was not the case. Scholars continue to speculate as to where Brown traveled after socially shaming rumors circulated within abolitionist social networks. Those who commented on Brown include William C. Nell, Amy Post and Rosetta Douglass. As Ezra Greenspan suggests, “[W]hat happened to Josephine Brown has long been a subject of confusion.”²¹³ Perhaps pregnancy, frequent drinking or consorting with less-than-admirable mates drove Brown's name into the ground. Some clues are worth exploring. A frustrated Rosetta Douglass in a letter to Frederick Douglass says she had been repeatedly mistaken for Josephine Brown. Apparently, news had spread through the Black intelligentsia regarding Brown's “growing intimacy with men,” while living with Martha Fletcher in New Bedford in the late 1840s.²¹⁴ But her absence from the print discourse and materials of Black activist circles after she published her book in America suggests that Brown had defied a code of respectability connected to temperance beliefs, while demonstrating another centered on professional self-representation. To leave her out of the American literary canon silences Black women writers like her and intensifies politics of marginality surrounding Black women writers.

²¹³ Greenspan, *William Wells Brown*, 342.

²¹⁴ Greenspan, *William Wells Brown*, 343-44

H. Cordelia and Florence Ray, Serena A. M. Washington and a Culture of Activist Biography after the American Civil War

Notions of Black masculinity in nineteenth-century literature often model Black manhood on paradigms of exceptionalism, representativeness, or as nods to genius. As Robert Reid-Pharr argues, “Black American culture emanates from Black American bodies. The Black American intellectual might gain access to the root of his blackness, then, by gaining access to his own body and the (black) truths embedded within.”²¹⁵ What of a Black woman biographer’s claim to a Black male’s body and his intellect? African American writers’ interest in (re)claiming the Black body is notably exhibited in postbellum biographies, especially Black women’s sketchbooks. Sketch writers found sanction in literary modes of expression, outlets that allowed them to design and possess a future based upon the past. As Maurice Wallace has pointed out, scholars have often considered modern manhood to be “an endless rivalry for the power and privileges of patriarchy animated by the psychic discomfiture of men’s mutual fears and desires for one another, often in sexually charged contexts.”²¹⁶ In his consideration of Black freemasonry and the early organizational activism and writings of Prince Hall and Martin Delany, Wallace finds that society’s preoccupation with race stands alongside sexuality as a “vexing iteration of the ‘homosocial’ itself.”²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Reid-Pharr, Robert. *Conjugal Union: The Body, the House and the Black American*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 4-5

²¹⁶ Wallace, Maurice. *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men’s Literature and Culture, 1775-1995*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. 1.

²¹⁷ Wallace, Maurice. *Constructing the Black Masculine*, 2.

While Black men's literature certainly reflects an ongoing masculine struggle for power between Whites and Blacks, the ways in which Black women were invested in the struggle to project self-determined images of the Black male body do not get enough attention. Black women biographers engage in depicting images of relationships between Black and White men in social settings (re: homosocial). They portray Black men and White men defining, struggling and contesting environments and ideologies mediated by race relations. Often idealized formulations of the public man and activist classification systems defining Black leadership in little-known activist sketches published between 1887 and 1910 insist that representative models for rising generations of Black reformers were made up of overlapping tenets.

Biographies and autobiographies about political leaders were read and widely discussed within American popular culture. The sketch gave authors immense flexibility, from length to the inclusion of features from several different literary forms. A hybrid form with characteristics drawn from commemoration literature, public history and newspaper culture, sketches often included poetry, excerpts from convention proceedings, personal letters and newspaper items. Because of activist sketchbooks' multi-text design, contributing authors' own ideas and themes strongly directed the narrative flow. Place of publication and paratextual testimonies establishing the departed's social, political or moral influence attempted to represent the degree of importance that these men held in local and national sectors. Many biographies attended to the relationship between political, entrepreneurial and religious leadership to suggest that positions of leadership came into being because of the individual's moral character, service to communities and business acumen, and because one had gained the respect of local, national or international communities.

Upon the death of Black leaders in activist and Protestant social networks, biographical sketches were published in Black periodicals and as bound books. The *A.M.E. Church Review* is emblematic of a culture of activist-themed sketches printed after the Civil War. The periodical's elegiac literature helps to contextualize the ideals of Black male leadership presented in the Ray sisters' and Washington's 1887 and 1910 sketches. Elegiac literature in respected news outlets promoted the political validity of Black leadership classes in the Northeast. The Ray and Washington sketches promote the professional respectability of Black women as cultural critics and educational advocates by crafting political taxonomies and providing a cultural history as means to influence the trajectory of Black leadership.

One print complement of activist biography was the press eulogy, a form that particularly provides insight into the news coverage of Black political leaders' deaths and memory-making practices of post-bellum America. As Lois Brown notes, Black-authored obituaries in antebellum America sought to reverse "anti-black sentiment and racist physiognomic theories."²¹⁸ Even after the Civil War, biographical eulogies were effective means by which Black people could use the life of an influential leader to further a cause. Newspaper readers were interested in death narratives. Readers were invited to identify with Black people's struggles for freedom and to celebrate their successes. Press eulogies honoring George T. Downing and Charles B. Way reflect public interest in defining and categorizing models of Black leadership. When read alongside the Ray sisters' and Serena Washington's sketchbooks, the biographical

²¹⁸ Brown, Lois, "Memorial Narratives of African Women in Antebellum New England." *Legacy*. 20.1-2 2003: 40.

form emerges as a decidedly popular form among Black writers for the purpose of storytelling, political endorsement of certain leadership styles, and political commentary.

Obituaries written about Blacks often recapped the deceased's activism in local communities and their participation in national race uplift; they hinted at the ways in which Americans developed a fetish for death narratives and the types of obituary literature with which the Ray and Washington sketchbooks were in conversation. The culture of death notices in the press proved alluring to both White and Black readers. Increases in racial violence throughout the nineteenth century may have fed Americans' fascination with death and death narratives: race riots in the 1830s and 1840s; fugitivity and the Fugitive Slave act of 1850; vigilante committees, slave revolts and insurrection attempts, such as John Brown's 1859 Harper's Ferry raid and the Civil War. In "Memorial Narratives," Lois Brown reminds us that antebellum anti-slavery newspapers often published articles on people killed by southern "mercenary overseers, diabolical owners, or slave catchers who pursued them when they fled north."²¹⁹ These narratives drove Whites to more earnestly pursue African and African American deportation to Africa. But by the 1880s, there was an equally compelling shift away from styles of obituary writing in antebellum anti-slavery newspapers. Many postbellum newspapers with pro-Black civil-rights-themed obituaries facilitated public mourning for Black men, such as George T. Downing and Charles B. Ray, two well-known reverends and businessmen. The often hagiographic

²¹⁹ Brown, Lois. "Memorial Narratives of African Women in Antebellum New England," 40.

newspaper obituaries about their deaths confirm White and Black people's interest in preserving memories about Black success, but also their interest in observing and engaging in the rituals that usually accompany death: funerals, public grieving and community remembrances in print publications. Race-related obituaries only intensified public interest in death narratives.

Celebrity or public figures' deaths were cause for public spectacle. Abraham Lincoln's 1865 passing prompted one of the most influential mourning periods in American history, and constituted a period of public grieving that was international in its reach. Dana Luciano argues that the language of eulogies published after Lincoln's death encouraged Americans to "identify intimately with Lincoln in the national commemorative ceremonies" and that they were "specifically encouraged to grieve him by *identifying with his own grief*, and to use that recollected grief as a means of strengthening the progress of the nation."²²⁰ In other words, eulogizers swayed American readers toward supporting anti-slavery policy and Black people's integration into society as free people, through declarations of Lincoln's "representativeness," or his "ordinariness," his humble background, and his interest in the humanity of all people.²²¹ The idea of representativeness is especially useful in understanding how print publications' language rhetorically positioned Blacks as moral figures upon their deaths in a way that allowed a high performing individual to become representative of Black communities as a whole.

²²⁰ Author's emphasis. Luciano, Dana. *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: NYU Press, 2007. 216-217.

²²¹ Luciano, *Arranging Grief*, 216-217.

Black leaders in struggles for freedom were situated as model ministers, pillars of communities, and selfless contributors to racial uplift in postbellum eulogies. Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*, a periodical with a predominately White audience, published a eulogy of Charles B. Ray and his religious and community-based activities after his death in 1886 in New York City. The eulogy reads much like an abridged biography, detailing Ray's birth, church leadership, editorial activities with *The Colored American*, and his prestigious acquaintances, such as Henry Highland Garnet, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, and Samuel E. Cornish, among others.²²² The *New York Tribune* was also interested in Ray's heroic activities, particularly his work as an Underground Railroad agent. He "gave substantial aid to fugitive slaves," the *Tribune* announces, "frequently giving to them at great risk to himself and family, the protection of his home, and securing for them safe conveyance to a land of freedom."²²³ The Black-run *New York Freeman* reprinted a nearly identical article, calling it a "mourning notice" and had reported that the *New York Times* had done the same.²²⁴ As the *New York Freeman* later reported, at Ray's funeral, the Black editor H. C. Bowen argued that Ray's public reputation was best defined by the "secret and private unassuming work [rather] than by his loud acclaim"—a nod towards Ray's underground railroad work. Another one of Ray's Black compatriots pointed out that

²²² "Death Notice." *New York Tribune*, 18 August 1886. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²²³ "Death Notice." *New York Tribune*. 18 August 1886. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁴ "Mourning Notice." *New York Freeman*. 21 August 1886. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

“the earlier men of [Ray’s] stripe were nearly all gone to rest,” thus creating a vacuum of pioneering Black civil rights agents. This no doubt inspired his activist daughters to seize an opportunity to fill the deceased “co-worker[’s]” void—one the public had clearly suggested existed—and to arrange his narrative through a framework inspired by their own political and moral convictions.²²⁵

Newspaper obituaries about George T. Downing also illustrate public interest in the deaths of Black reformers who regularly engaged in heroic activism. A few periodicals even mistakenly published death notices about well-known individuals before death had fully encroached upon them. To the amusement of many, *Pawtucket Times* of Rhode Island published an article entitled, “George T. Downing Read His Own Obituary Notice: Friend of Sumner Enjoys Today’s *Boston Herald*” in early January of 1903. The article meant to forestall public engagement in grieving over Downing who *Boston Herald* proclaimed to have died at his home. The misleading obituary notes his “success in business operations,” declares him “one of the best representatives of the colored race at the North,” applauds his promotion of Blacks by “practical” methods, and even suggests Downing to be “something like a precursor of Booker T. Washington, though more in an incidental manner.”²²⁶ According to the *Pawtucket Times*, Downing thought “the pleasure of reading his own obituary was permitted to but few people and he appreciated it accordingly.”²²⁷ When Downing did

²²⁵ “Funeral of Rev. Charles B. Ray.” *New York Freeman*. 28 August 1886. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁶ *Pawtucket Times*. 1 January 1903. 4. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁷ *Pawtucket Times*. 1 January 1903. 4. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

expire of natural causes seven months later, *The Colored American* verified public interest in his death: “His home here is remembered by the older of our citizens to have been the center of a refined and generous hospitality.”²²⁸ Like the Ray sisters, Washington was privy to funeral rituals emblemizing Downing’s successes. She was aware of public speculation about the type of activists that would follow Downing’s example. Washington’s biography frames Downing’s legacy as an entry into his life story, as much as it is an entry into political concepts about Black political organizing.

Although press-generated obituaries fed public fascination with Black deaths, these print modalities are less substantive than the book-length histories activist daughters wrote, according to their verifiable insight into the life of the departed. Black antebellum eulogies were often short, “unconventional” texts that explored “an untapped mine” of individual and familial social histories.²²⁹ Full-length memorial biographies of the postbellum period offer a more full-bodied investigation into the lives and deeds of renowned individuals and give more textual space for authors to advance their own political leanings. Authors and readers relied on the generic stability of biography and obituary from which they could communicate and glean information. Readers also often relied on a narrator and host publication to inform them of proper ways to remember the departed. On one hand, readers might rely on newspaper articles to rank or situate a Black leader in larger political contexts. However, various factors could undermine reader reception: the frequency of

²²⁸ *The Colored American*. 1 August 1903. *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²²⁹ Brown, Lois. “Memorial Narratives of African Women in Antebellum New England,” 38.

newspaper editions could bury newspaper death notices; notices often lacked authorial attribution; and readers could become concerned about credibility of a piece due to the newspaper's political leanings. On the other hand, as apparent in Brown's, the Ray sisters', and Washington's biographies, Black women biographers endorsed the biography because of its malleable format and because they could situate Black manhood and Black activism in the context of a larger question: upon Black activists' deaths, what would become of future leadership?

Mirroring eulogy writers' calls for Black leaders of the future and the Ray sisters' and Serena Washington's construction of Black masculinities, in 1891, the *A.M.E. Church Review* published two sketches about two highly touted church officials and convention leaders, Jabez Pitts Campbell and Isaac Myers, who represent many of the ideals associated with Black religious leadership during the late nineteenth century. The Baltimorean and church bishop Jabez Pitts Campbell expired in the summer of 1891, following a sixty-year career in ministry and church management. Ordained in 1831 at Richard Allen's Mother Bethel in Philadelphia, Campbell became engaged in several divisions of the A.M.E. church, as an editor to *The Christian Recorder* and *A.M.E. Book Concern*, and as a benevolent missionary—which led some to pronounce him one of the great negro philanthropists of his time.²³⁰ Described as “a gentleman of the highest integrity,” Isaac Myers served as editor and proprietor to *Colored Citizen*, “a weekly campaign newspaper published in Baltimore.”²³¹ He initiated and served as president for the 1869 and 1871 National

²³⁰ “Jabez Pitts Campbell.” *A.M.E. Church Review*. July 1891: 145.

²³¹ “Isaac Myers.” *A.M.E. Church Review*. July 1891: 354-356.

Labor Convention of Colored Men, reportedly “the largest and best represented convention of colored men ever held” in the United States by his death in January 1891.²³² Alongside organizing state fairs and running local associations designed to advance colored business and educational interests, Myers’ own business ventures and work as a special agent of the Post Office Department made the twice-married Baltimorean a local celebrity. Collaboratively written by a cohort of ministers, including the missionary and wife to *A.M.E. Church Review*’s editor, Mrs. Francis J. Coppin, the Campbell and Myer sketches outline the accomplishments the authors consider paramount to emerging leaders’ development.

Biographers framed famous men’s ascension within a genealogy of familial, political and religious networks as “Jabez Pitts Campbell” illustrates. In their view, enslavement, parental guidance and the development of work ethic at an early age imbued Black leaders with the ambition, frugality, industry, compassion toward others, and inner strength needed to battle the hostile climate in which African Americans lived. Sketches suggest that the character of parental figures, service to communities and pro-Black rights activism built the foundation necessary for future success. Campbell, for example, considered himself the connecting link between the A.M.E. founding fathers, Richard Allen and Morris Brown, and future generations. But, for his biographers, Campbell represented that which a young man could do to advance “some good in the world, however humble his birth, and meager his opportunities for acquiring knowledge.”²³³ The many calls to leadership in the

²³² “Isaac Myers.” *A.M.E. Church Review*. July 1891: 354-356.

²³³ “Jabez Pitts Campbell.” *A.M.E. Church Review*, July 1891: 145.

Campbell sketch suggest that the authors were anxious to pivot from Campbell's *modus operandi* to inspire the "young progressive minds of this day" and the "young student of the future" who would "turn over the back leaves of an old history" to discover his own worth.²³⁴

In these activist sketches, the preservation of an "aged hero's" legacy hinged upon the young men who would build upon his progress. For this reason, authors often framed the subject's ascension to greatness as simultaneously monumental and attainable. With palpable anxiety, a preacher out of the popular Zanesville, Ohio activist community, John Wesley Galaway bemoans in the Campbell sketch, "Who will fill his place? Upon whom shall his mantle fall?" John Brock declared: "Young men who were inspired by his earnest utterances in the pulpit, and were licensed and ordained by him, will, as they journey along life's pathway, recall some expression of his that served to heighten their ardor and influence their zeal. The work shall still go on."²³⁵ The White Methodist Episcopalian pastor, E. H. Stokes contended,

Young men, his star has set, but yours is rising. ... With all his disadvantages he was great. See to it, that with all your privileges *you shall be* greater. I look upon him as an illustration of what should be to every young man an inspiring fact, that in this day and country those who put their hands and hearts fully to their work may, in defiance of all difficulties and discouragements, helped of God, rise from the lowest to the highest positions.²³⁶

²³⁴ "Jabez Pitts Campbell." *A.M.E. Church Review*, July 1891: 149

²³⁵ Brock, John C., "Jabez Pitts Campbell." *A.M.E. Church Review* July 1891: 149.

²³⁶ Stokes, E. H., "Jabez Pitts Campbell." *A.M.E. Church Review* July 1891: 139.

In its circulation, sketches printed in periodicals helped to diffuse anxieties about who would occupy vacated political and social seats crucial to supporting communities' social, political and spiritual wellbeing. They intended to prove that genealogies of Black male leaders were not endangered by death but that, through the dissemination of famous men's life stories, the non-corporeal spirit and ideologies connected to them would continue to be adopted and practiced long beyond their lifetimes. In addition to recruiting new leaders, sketches helped to construct a classification system of leadership and to provide positive images of Black manhood. Myers and Campbell were Ray's and Downing's contemporaries. Their biographers are concerned with questions about the future of Black manhood, leadership, and activist integrity. The Ray sisters and Washington can be read in relation to the swell of activist biographies that emerged at the end of the turn-of-the-century.

Washington's construction of the public man in *George T. Downing* in many ways mirrors contemporaneous constructions of the self-made man, one who rises from rags to riches, and whose engagement in social, economic, political and religious sectors of public life offer opportunities to transform himself and society. As John Stauffer suggests in *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln*, the self-made man toiled with the life set before him to ascend to roles of influence in a way that his contemporaries found decidedly unparalleled. Such an opinion, however, often operates on notions of exceptionalism and genius such that the upward mobility achieved and social transformations perpetrated by men such as Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln could be and often were perceived by contemporaneous audiences as singularly divine or legendary—a popular opinion of the turn of the century when racist propaganda against Blacks and increased economic

competition in a nominally free American society skewed White public's imagination about the Black body. Like the self-made man, the public man's access to the public sphere was made possible by hard work, education and ingenuity and, as with the self-made man, women were imagined to play merely ancillary roles by way of their absence in descriptions of his development.

Serena Washington's public man fulfills important societal roles. He has "marked business ability."²³⁷ His presence across geographical spaces is well known, so that he often enters circles of the elite and renowned. He campaigns for his people, rising in favor because of his oratorical abilities and eloquent style of writing. The public man's personal sacrifice for greater causes, his independence and bold thinking engender affection among laypeople. In Washington's image of the public man, Downing is a "hero of many a conflict of mind and arm in the stalwart form, the flashing eye, the ardent manner, the eloquent voice and courtly demeanor of the brilliant conversationalist, a living epistle of inspiration unto young men, urging them to earnestness, manliness, courage and progress."²³⁸ Washington's use of "public man" as a descriptive agent for Downing operates as a signifier that references what would have been recognizable tenets of the self-made man, but resides under the arch of moral action and ideologies supporting Black rights agendas.

Likewise, the Ray sisters' concept of Black leadership was based on the activities to which they had been privy through their upbringing and proximity to

²³⁷ Washington, Serena A. M. *George T. Downing*, 9.

²³⁸ Washington, Serena A. M. *George T. Downing*, 9.

Charles Ray's activism. Born free in Falmouth, Massachusetts, Charles Ray's public reputation reflected the activism of a moderately known anti-slavery worker, Colored Conventions delegate, newspaper editor and ordained Congregational reverend. Ray became affiliated with the abolition movement and pursued business ventures while living in Massachusetts and New York. Before becoming a proprietor for *The Colored American* (1836-1842) in 1838 and editor in 1839, he worked as a subscriptions agent for the periodical, "a paper of acknowledged ability."²³⁹ *The Colored American* was considered to be a predecessor of the *Anglo-African* and won Ray the reputation of "a pioneer of colored literature in New York," according to the *Elevator's* editorial staff.²⁴⁰ Whereas many models of Black masculinities have been based on physical ability and strength, the Ray sisters' characterization of Black masculinity motions toward a somewhat subdued, honorable persona. Physical ability is constructed through a Black man's ability to continuously strive for a cause.

As the Rays describe, the "great host of workers" who helped secure the "liberation of the slave" fell into three classes; these classes were based on men they had come to know through their father's work and activism. The Rays define the classes in the following ways. One class "made eloquent appeals...with voice and pen" on the slave's behalf. This class of activists chiefly sparked the sentiments of apathetic communities or refuted "antagonistic arguments."²⁴¹ The second class were

²³⁹ "Death of Charles B. Ray." *New York Freeman*. 21 August 1886. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²⁴⁰ "Our Papers." *The Elevator*. 12 December 1874. *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²⁴¹ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 23.

philanthropic and vigilante activists who freely donated “of their means” to purchase the slave and to guarantee his freedom.²⁴² The third class works in the background, “quietly awakening an interest in the bondman,” interacts with bondmen, and offers “counsel, sympathy,” and shelter.²⁴³

Eloquent orators, vigilante committees, Underground Railroad agents and wealthy benefactors were crucial actors to activist classes, according to the Rays. The first class can be surmised to have included men such as Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. The Committee of Thirteen of Colored Men’s Conventions,²⁴⁴ Gerrit Smith, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, George T. Downing, and the society of White British women who purchased William Wells Brown, would fit the second mold. The third class included editors, preachers and Underground Railroad agents, a category in which the Ray sisters situate Charles Ray. Because the Ray sisters’ classification of antebellum activists follows their history of Charles Ray’s birth, early education and initiation into New York activist circles, the women frame the remainder of their

²⁴² Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 24.

²⁴³ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 24.

²⁴⁴ The Rays insert quotations from a variety of sources to define the work of vigilance committees. They mention at least three: The New York Committee of Vigilance, the 1835 Vigilance Committee of the city of New York, and the 1850 New York State Vigilance Committee. Quoting an inserted script of writing without attribution, the Rays define the New York Committee of Vigilance, as a “voluntary association of thirteen men (white and colored)” that established “legal investigations in defense in the case of any colored person who may be arrested upon pretense of being an escaping slave.” Ray worked with the latter organization as a member of the Executive Board, the Corresponding Secretary and a fundraiser.

narrative of Charles Ray's activism through their own political lens using the tenets they outline as classes of activism.

The Ray sisters' political classification organizes individuals and collective bodies, according to real events but also according to a newfound freedom the postbellum era granted to Black women writers to tell a more detailed history about Black and interracial activism. The Ray sisters orchestrate Charles Ray's form of practical aid to depend upon Black and White actors: cooperation with fugitive slaves, "others whose purse-strings were wont to be loosed at the call of humanity," and with his fellow activists. His home, the writers insist, became a hub "for an interchange of views" "of that grand moral conflict" and for "those measures for the aid and protection of fugitive slaves whose arrival during those times was almost of daily occurrence."²⁴⁵ The writers argue that quotidian activism, or the work of the third class of clandestine activists could endanger the ways their contributions would be remembered in public records; they write: "the deeds of those who came the nearest in every-day experience to the objects of their compassion, are often the least signalized."²⁴⁶ Of course, the success of secret missions to usher fugitive slaves through complex check points en route to safer free communities, offer free legal counsel to fugitive Black men and women without access to habeas corpus, funnel money into meaningful initiatives, and sustain fugitive parties across generations with vitals and the like, largely depended upon secrecy.

²⁴⁵ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 24.

²⁴⁶ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 24.

The Rays described political partnerships between White and Black men that were mutually beneficial. Coded letters between Ray and his fellow activists capture the practical and abstract significance of the Rays' third class of activists. Clandestine activists regularly employed laden language to plan, communicate and "secure concealment" of important "parcels" which included fugitives, funds or sensitive materials.²⁴⁷ Even when situated in different geographical spaces, they combined their means for secret causes. These means ranged from pecuniary support and available facilities to occupational expertise, such as in written communication and legal training. Secondly, the Rays' suggest that White anti-slavery workers were no wiser, no more committed nor more important than Black activists. The Ray sisters name no individuals in their classification system. This reflects the diversity of actors and roles that activism often required. Charles B. Ray appears within the sketch as an ideal of the classification of activists.

With Charles Ray as a connective link, the Ray sisters situate their father as an integral activist in the abolitionist movement, while also explicitly and implicitly situating Black women as abolitionists crucial to his activism between the 1840s and 1860s. The Ray sisters refer to abolitionists as a "noble band of men and women."²⁴⁸ Yet, a clear distinction emerges between the ways the writers situate gender in relation to Ray's role as a centerpiece of activism. On the one hand, the biographers position men as leaders and guides of fugitive affairs—they walk the streets late at night,

²⁴⁷ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 40.

²⁴⁸ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 25.

provide free legal defense for captured fugitives, organize correspondence, pay for fugitives' transport, and facilitate introductions between fugitives and their new communities, among many other tasks outlined in the sketch. Relations between Black and White actors within their respective classes of antebellum activists mostly depended upon immediate access to positions of influence. On the other hand, the biographers position Black and White women in a number of crucial roles: as genealogical forebears, such as Charles Ray's mother, Annis Harrington, "a woman of keen religious sensibilities and much general intelligence;"²⁴⁹ as distant pecuniary and intellectual contributors to Ray's activism as with the White British abolitionist Anna H. Richardson; as former fugitives now free because of Ray's activism as with Catherine Weims and her children, who were freed upon Ray and associates' payment to the Weims' owner at a Washington, D.C. city hall building; as local White educational activists such as the "zealous" and "untiring" Myrtilla Miner, who founded the D.C. Normal School for Colored Girls; and as anti-slavery convention attendees alongside their husbands, such as the White prison activist and lecturer Catherine S. B. Spears. Thus, across the sketch, the Rays articulate social relations between Black and White women through editorship—by soliciting and including women's written remembrances in the sketch.²⁵⁰

While the Ray sisters define classes of leadership that included religious leadership, some A.M.E. affiliates and sketchbook authors preferred that leaders with

²⁴⁹ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 7.

²⁵⁰ Ray, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray. *Charles B. Ray*, 14.

theological training ascend into social, political and religious positions of power. In the speech, “A Solemn Charge to a Christian Pastor,” delivered at the A.M.E. General Conference of 1864 and published in the *Church Review*’s “Jabez Pitts Cambell” sketch, Campbell contends that morality must be central to political leadership: “Indeed, it is his duty to be posted on all questions affecting the interests of the people with whom he lives and labors. He should look at all questions of a political matter from a moral standpoint, and from that standpoint show their relations to the government of God.”²⁵¹ Campbell in fact rebukes the “common politician.”²⁵² He celebrates the Christian minister as a man whose primary conviction to perform good deeds and represent Christian principles could balance power in America. The minister could accomplish this more so than the historian, philosopher, physicist, logician and rhetorician.²⁵³ However, Campbell’s construction of the Christian minister as savior to America’s political degeneracy fails to acknowledge that he appropriates facets from each of the less desirable fields of work to construct the ideal Christian minister. For others, ambition, “extraordinary natural ability” and savvy business sense were key.²⁵⁴ The *Church Review*’s sketch of Myers shows that some considered status as a symbol of leadership capacity; a model leader would be “a useful Church member in high official standing; a leading business man in the

²⁵¹ Tanner, Benjamin. “Jabez Pitts Campbell.” *A.M.E. Church Review* July 1891: 132.

²⁵² Tanner, Benjamin. “Jabez Pitts Campbell.” *A.M.E. Church Review* July 1891: 132.

²⁵³ Tanner, Benjamin. “Jabez Pitts Campbell.” *A.M.E. Church Review* July 1891: 132

²⁵⁴ “The Late Isaac Myers.” *A.M.E. Church Review* July 1891: 351.

community; and a politician of the higher rank.”²⁵⁵ These leadership models allowed authors and readers to imagine a secure future, despite the otherwise turbulent political climate in which Black Americans lived. In addition, portrayals of mobility, business acumen, and family values provided positive images of the Black community for readers. More readily, the sketches provided a hero-figure to admire and look up to.

The Ray sisters’ classes of activists were not created in a vacuum and were in conversation with activist-themed sketches published in the 1880s and 1890s. For instance, *Rev. Charles B. Ray* and “Jabez Pitts Campbell” similarly foreground activist classification systems, or leadership models as a way by which readers can situate their own interests or activist dispositions. The classification systems also anoint clearly defined types of leaders, making it easy for readers to raise discussions among themselves and to create their classes in their own writing. Classifying reformers likely appealed to biographers as a narrative strategy. They could deliver a hagiographic observance of a single man while also suggesting that a knowledge and understanding of a variety of leaders and roles lay at the heart of any formidable understanding of what Black communities would demand of a future leader.

Heroism, Narrative Mobility and the Black Home in Serena A. M. Washington’s *George T. Downing*

A race riot scene retelling a day of the famous 1854 Anthony Burns trial in *George T. Downing* demonstrates its author’s discursive presentation of the urban city

²⁵⁵ “The Late Isaac Myers.” *A.M.E. Church Review* July 1891: 351.

street. This street is a particularly volatile environment, a plot device that sets up Downing as a model of Black heroism, particularly as that model is shaped by the context of Black abolitionist activism. Such a presentation alerts us to the importance of the ways in which narratives act as a “dynamic partitioning of space.”²⁵⁶ According to Michael de Certeau, “[A] spatial story is in its minimal degree a *spoken* language, that is, a linguistic system” of demarcation that defines spaces.²⁵⁷ The activity and corresponding ideological principles that operate within narrative spaces constitute a place that has “distributive power and performative force when an ensemble of circumstances is brought together.”²⁵⁸ Washington’s depiction of a milieu of chaos in a downtown square illustrates the ways in which she constructs performance and power within the boundaries of narrative. As much as her depiction of a White mob and Black protesters in motion inscribes ideas about judicial hypocrisy and racial animosity in the streets of Boston, it concurrently shapes a place wherein a Black man’s heroism can emerge. Indeed, Washington’s depiction of a Boston city street aggravated by sounds emanating from crowds and congested with Black and White bodies in motion constitutes a site of action whereby the contours of her storytelling define the dangers of organizing while Black in America and the circumstance for Black retaliation.

²⁵⁶ de Certeau, Michel. “Spatial Stories.” *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984. Print. 123.

²⁵⁷ de Certeau, Michel. “Spatial Stories,” 130.

²⁵⁸ de Certeau, Michel. “Spatial Stories,” 123.

Setting the stage for the action of the classic hero trope, the streets of Boston are sites of racial heterogeneity and animosity in the *George T. Downing* sketch. Before Downing's climactic act of "courage and strength" can occur, Washington must first establish Boston as a known site of contention.²⁵⁹ In the story, Downing and other "friends of freedom" are urgently called from New Bedford to Boston to investigate escalating tension between Whites and Blacks:

It was at the time of the agitation over the fugitive slave Anthony Burns. While standing on the streets of Boston, a body of men from Worcester marched by with the banner inscribed, "Freedom," [and] a number of police assaulted the procession and captured the flag. Mr. Downing's whole nature was aroused, he rushed into the crowd and used his muscles, strength and agility. After a desperate struggle, in which the banner was torn almost to shreds, he captured it from the police, and amidst expressions of admiration at his courage and strength, and applause at his success, he bore the emblem to the office of Robert Morris, which was nearby.²⁶⁰

Because the men catch the first train to the "Hub" into a thicket of "agitation," Boston is quite quickly delineated as a location rife with pre-existing discord that is perpetrated by Bostonian police and that must be rebuffed by outsiders with an apparent knowledge of the city, particularly Downing and his company of abolitionists.²⁶¹ Boston functions as a battleground that authorizes a fight for the state's chief symbol of freedom, exposes judicial hypocrisy, and positions Downing as a hero of Black resistance.

²⁵⁹ Washington, Serena A. M. *George T. Downing*, 10.

²⁶⁰ Washington, Serena A. M. *George T. Downing*, 9-10.

²⁶¹ Washington, Serena A. M. *George T. Downing*, 9.

The distributive power of the Boston scene is evident in the ways in which Washington positions White and Black bodies as proxies of the state. Her denouncement of the state is evident within the multiple layers of White violence—physical, judicial and philosophical—that, in turn, justify Black retaliation. For Downing’s sensational act of bravery to occur and to expose the state’s inherent flaws, Washington defines the cracks in America’s purported philosophy of freedom by naming the actuality of its judicial practices. We arrive at this fissure due to both implicit action and live action in the story. The violence of slavery forces Anthony Burns to become a fugitive. The White-controlled state empowers Burns’ owner or an affiliated party to hunt and to arrest him in the streets of Boston. In this way, Burns is situated as a victim of slavery and of the American nation-state that condones forced labor.

During the scene’s live action, Boston police assault a peaceful procession of banner men whose sign with the word “freedom” mockingly reminds the angry crowd of the contradiction between America’s ideals and its jurisprudence. If the police are proxies of the state, just as legislation reflects the will of the state, their role in maiming the banner men’s flag symbolizes the state’s greed for power, its propensity toward violence and its disregard for national ideals outlined in the Declaration of Independence to which the flag bearing “Freedom” refers. White violence, then, is linked to the state in at least three ways, through slavery, legislation and police violence against peaceful protestors. In addition to the implication that Burns cannot receive a fair trial with Whites at the helm of power, there is also an implication that White violence rips to shreds the very philosophical ideals enmeshed into the fabric of

the flag bearing the word “Freedom.” In Washington’s construction of race relations in Boston, White violence defiles rather than adheres to the ideals of freedom.

As Washington deconstructs White authority by positioning it as an illegitimate means by which to protect true freedom, she simultaneously builds Downing’s character by situating him as a man with moral values to model. This is most evident at the narrative’s most climactic moment. Downing’s “whole nature” becomes aroused; he daringly recaptures the torn “emblem” from police possession and, “amidst expressions of admiration” and ringing applause, he leads a party out of the realm of danger.²⁶² In this moment, it is within the hands of Blacks such as Downing—a man of intellectual and physical capacity—to recapture and to properly codify true American belief systems. Downing’s reaction is a teaching moment: he quickly harkens to calls of need, throws his person into harm’s way, and has but his “muscles, strength and agility” to protect him from the armed aggression of White police. He signifies the most ardent and selfless example of one who is concerned with freedom and the state’s philosophical goals. Having initially presented Downing as an outsider, through narrative activity, Washington is able to play upon the city of Boston, members of the state and the American flag to incorporate her father as a model for Black American heroism. Herein, readers realize the force of meaning that occurs “when an ensemble of circumstances is brought together.”²⁶³

²⁶² Washington, Serena A. M. *George T. Downing*, 10.

²⁶³ de Certeau, Michel. “Spatial Stories,” 123.

Washington not only rhetorically crafts an animated portrait of her father as a representative man, she creates a Downing tradition of writing biography for publication. In 1887, the same year the Ray sisters published the bound book, *Rev. Charles B. Ray*, George Downing published “A Sketch of the Life and Times of Thomas Downing” in the April edition of *A.M.E. Church Review*. In the short sketch, Downing emphasizes the affluent caterer and educational activist’s humility and ambition. As its sole owner, Thomas Downing ensconces his restaurant in the midst of the lively 5 Broad Street New York locality—“the section of the city where the New York merchants had their counting-rooms, where banks and brokers’ offices centered” and where “an increasing number of customers” gathered to sip from the concaved shells of “big fat oysters.”²⁶⁴ “Downing’s Oyster House became not only a fashionable place to meet and eat, but also to leave messages,” and for elite and laypeople to conduct quotidian business.²⁶⁵ “New Yorkers were indulging in a passion,” as his perennial retinue made evident, “and [Thomas] Downing’s business thrived.”²⁶⁶ For Downing, his father’s forty-six years in business management and running “the favorite resort of distinguished parties from all parts of our land and

²⁶⁴ Downing, George. “A Sketch of the Life and Times of Thomas Downing.” *A.M.E. Church Review*. April 1887: 402-10.

²⁶⁵ Hewitt, John. “Mr. Downing and his Oyster House: The Life and Good Works of an African-American Entrepreneur.” *New York History* 74.3 1992: 248.

²⁶⁶ Hewitt, John. “Mr. Downing and his Oyster House: The Life and Good Works of an African-American Entrepreneur.” *New York History*, 74.3 July 1992: 238.

abroad” solidifies his venerable “good name” and “iron constitution” of character.²⁶⁷ How apt, then, it was for Washington to ordain Downing’s own Washington, D.C. Sea Girt Hotel and the Newport, Rhode Island Downing Block as extensions of her grandfather’s presence among New York City business and elite society? Washington’s iteration of family biography, however, defines her father’s greatness by his ability to be a public man and agent of “social political diplomacy,” as opposed to Downing’s concentrated efforts to craft an image of his father as a professional and humble restaurateur. Like the Ray sisters, Washington highlights Downing’s role in creating animated and protean environments that serve as political hubs of activism. Washington’s sketch continues a Downing family literary tradition and presents a definitive way by which to understand Black-run and orchestrated spaces.

Washington’s notion of social political diplomacy explains a successful strategy of the Black public man. Downing’s integrationist stance towards racial relations between public figures is the foundation of the notion. The sketches describe race relations between Black and White leaders of the Washington, D.C. elite. Downing and his circle of Black freemasons had articulated the disunion between White and Black masons. According to Maurice Wallace, early nineteenth-century Black masonry rituals “encourage[d] a conception of persons and bodies as artifacts that...[could] be made and remade,” an abstraction developed by the eighteenth-century freemasonry promotion of masculine productions.²⁶⁸ Wallace contends that

²⁶⁷ Downing, George. “A Sketch of the Life and Times of Thomas Downing.” *A.M.E. Church Review* April 1887: 402-10.

²⁶⁸ *Constructing the Masculine*, 63.

for freemasons such as Absalom Jones and Martin Delany, to which I add their fellow brother, George Downing, masonry and work became an exercise in artistic creations and reflections of Black masculinity.²⁶⁹ An important part of Black freemasonry ideology, and their practice of Wallace's notion of the Black masculine self-creation/re-creation ideal, was to undermine disunion between Black and White freemasons around the world by promoting Black success. In 1866, Lewis Hayden published *Caste among Masons: Address before Prince Hall Grand Lodge of free and accepted Masons of the State of Massachusetts, at the Festival of St. John the Evangelist, December 27, 1865*. The plain pamphlet made up for a lack of aesthetic decoration with its sharp, rational deconstruction of White perpetrated intra-fraternal prejudice within the freemason circles of which George Downing was a member.

When read in the context of Black freemasons' 1866 response to White exclusionary practices that targeted Black masons, Washington's concept of social political diplomacy suggests she was aware of the ways in which classes of Black leaders wielded public success as a way to undermine White-led exclusionary practices. Since the concept is embedded in numerous incidents perpetrated by acrimonious race relations between 1860 and 1870 in the sketch, Washington could have very well intended to answer calls for positive representations of Black success in her own volume. In his address, Hayden argues that the basis of disunion between Black and White freemasons is White prejudice toward Black fraternity members. He contends that White American freemasons promote irrational discrimination against Black freemasons on the basis of racial animosity as opposed to rational arguments.

²⁶⁹ *Constructing the Masculine*, 65.

He suggests that Black members' leadership in Christian ministry and their entrepreneurial and occupational successes prove that White freemasons reject full union with Black masons because of racial animosity. He asks: "What are the principles of Freemasonry that our White brethren avow, and how do they live up to them?"²⁷⁰ Listing universal freemason tenets and countering these tenets with actual examples of anti-Black freemasonry policies, Hayden argues: "But our white brethren, not satisfied with their violation of these fundamental principles of Masonry, wish no intercourse with certain brethren who are true, God-fearing, and conscientious Masons."²⁷¹ Hayden cites numerous examples of White exclusionary tactics on the basis of their aversion to "intercourse with negroes."²⁷² He offers counter-images to anti-Black freemasonry ideologies, particularly by highlighting the Black men's accomplishments and ascension narratives. The Black men excluded from White temples include:

Rev. Alexander Crummell, the head of the Church of England at Liberia; the Rev. Dr. Pennington, who received his degree of divinity in Germany; Alexander Dumas, the French writer of world-wide [*sic*] fame; the late Dr. McCune Smith; (Charles) L. Reason, who has been honored with the professorship of an American college; ... George T. Downing, chairman of our present delegation to Congress....²⁷³

²⁷⁰ Hayden, Lewis. *Caste among Masons: Address before Prince Hall Grand Lodge of free and accepted Masons of the State of Massachusetts, at the Festival of St. John the Evangelist, December 27, 1865*. Boston: Edward S. Coombs & Company, 1866. 47.

²⁷¹ Hayden, Lewis. *Caste among Masons*. 48.

²⁷² Hayden, Lewis. *Caste among Masons*. 48.

²⁷³ Hayden, Lewis. *Caste among Masons*. 47.

Hayden rhetorically promotes universal tenets of freemasonry, such as Christianity, brotherly love, fraternal order, liberty, and unity throughout his appeal even while angrily undermining the belief that Black men are not White masons' equals and thus do not deserve entry. His strategies are multivariate; he practices freemasonry principles of brotherly love by referring to racist White separatists as "brethren;" he situates Black free masons as internationally celebrated men, and he emphasizes Black masons' rise to public leadership upon merit within White-led or predominately White institutions of religious, national, political, and literary circles, among others. Washington likewise foregrounds Downing's leadership and popularity as a Black public man; she configures the notion of social political diplomacy as a means by which to define Downing's practice of Protestant brotherhood.

Washington indirectly asserts and conceptualizes freemasonry ideals in several examples that illustrate Downing's ability to unite Black and White public figures in socio-political settings. Washington's narratives portray Downing in the act of exercising integrationist leadership in his role as a congressional confectioner. As manager of the congressional House Refectory, or eatery, Downing had extensive access to senate leaders, such as Charles Sumner. He held the position at a height of volatile national disunion between the Union and southern secessionists in the 1860s and at time when Black leaders did not see their values reflected in the leading political parties. Washington argues that this post situated Downing as a representative colored man in the eyes of senate leaders and allowed him to become a conduit who could offer political counsel and win White legislators' trust, respect, and, in some cases, their affection. For example, Washington proclaims: "Mr. Downing had the Senate gallery at Washington thrown open to colored persons. He and his family were

the first colored persons to occupy a box in a Washington theatre, thus vindicating civil rights to the fullest extent.”²⁷⁴

In another example, Washington describes a Downing-hosted soirée held within a week of Ulysses Grants’ March 4, 1869 electoral win, arguing that the event and its aftermath is at the basis of what she refers to as social political diplomacy. She writes:

The first reception given in Washington of a social and political character, was given at Mr. Downing’s residence on Capitol Hill, during the first week of President Grant’s first inaugural, that is to say, it was the first time members and senators, judges and representative men and ladies were thrown socially in contact with leading colored representative society. This was indeed a fine stroke of social political diplomacy.... Many of those there, who knew of the colored people, only as freedmen, refugees and contrabands, had their eyes opened to the realities of a large, powerfully intellectual and highly cultivated social side of the colored question, which was to them very strange, a revelation, still gratifying, nearly every newspaper in the country, that had a Washington correspondent, made elaborate references to the royal entertainment....²⁷⁵

Washington declares that by the 1869 event, free Black people’s business and leadership gains in the North had largely escaped White public society in D.C., the nation’s mecca of policy and lawmaking bodies. In tune with commonly-held views among postbellum Black pro-integrationist leaders, Washington argues that close proximity between races, particularly leaders of races would undermine widespread racial antagonism between Black and White people. Washington brings attention to

²⁷⁴ Washington, 15.

²⁷⁵ Washington, 16-17.

the misconception that Black intellectual cultures were monolithic and reasons that White people's ignorance fuels such a perspective. In addressing a class-based spectrum of Black people—from Port Royal contraband to D.C.'s Black bourgeoisie, she asserts her personal acquaintance with Black socio-economic classes, while also declaring herself and her family as both perpetrators of social political diplomacy, as well as members of the Black elite.

Washington's notion of social political diplomacy suggests that strong leadership beholden to the principle of good will towards all people and reflective of intellectual ability can unite Black and White people for the greater good. She writes: "If a long life of usefulness and honor can make a man's name great, certainly no one has a higher claim than the one whose name heads this sketch."²⁷⁶ Washington's notion necessitated from a leader an earnest approach to politics, a belief in free and equal citizenship, a willingness to sacrifice personal gain for a just purpose, "superior intelligence," and most importantly, an ability to be a leader among his own race, while also attracting the trust and admiration of other races such that he could be a catalyst for racial harmony.²⁷⁷ By the time of his death in 1903, a living community of people could bear witness to Downing's fortitude as a public man, community leader, and as Washington suggests, a model of social political diplomacy. The living reputation, or legacy that Downing left behind validated Washington's claim to his representativeness as a model. It was her impression that "it was for the younger men

²⁷⁶ Washington, 4.

²⁷⁷ Washington, 17.

to gather inspiration from the lives and labor of their heroic seniors and carry on the work.”²⁷⁸ Her call to action for young Black men to carry Downing’s political baton cements a way by which to understand her biography; it was an intentional effort to nationalize Downing’s local successes by placing his life’s work in the context of major legislative and activist events occurring before and after the Civil War.

Conclusion: Black Women’s Political Biographies

When placed in conversation with other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century biographers, Josephine Brown, the Ray sisters and Serena Washington were among their peers. In a telling instance of a historic attempt at collaborative biographical writing, a delegation of colored newspaper editors and journalists gathered early in the morning on August 4, 1875 for the Convention of Colored Newspapermen. The delegation convened at Union Hall in Cincinnati among a “large audience” with a reportedly “lively interest in the proceedings” to champion the creation of an association of the Black press that would, in part, develop a multivolume centennial edition of sketches about figures and institutions the delegation considered indispensable to Black American life.²⁷⁹ The statistician, bibliographer, and future A.M.E. bishop Rev. Benjamin Arnett led the charge to

²⁷⁸ Washington, 17.

²⁷⁹ *Convention of Colored Newspaper Men Cincinnati, August 4th, 1875, Wednesday A. M.* Original publication information not available. *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/455. Original pamphlet available through Duke University Libraries.

“collect, compile and arrange” historical materials. He wanted the “religious, literary, educational, and mechanical interests of the negro fully represented.”²⁸⁰ Ladies were to join a Centennial Association “to raise money to carry out” Arnett’s proposal.²⁸¹ Arnett’s proposal for the tentatively titled, *The Centennial Tribute to the Negro* promoted such a biography’s ability to reflect “the light of truth” and to “let the coming generation know our true history.”²⁸²

Having voted in favor of Arnett’s proposal, the delegation of newspapermen reflected contemporaneous interest in representing in print the activism and leadership models they had witnessed and endeavored to embody. The vote is also an example of gender exclusion. In this case, Black men relegate Black women to fundraising roles instead of inviting them to join the project as authors, editors and content collaborators. Ultimately, the book—forecasted to be printed in time for the following

²⁸⁰ *Convention of Newspaper Men*, 4.

²⁸¹ *Convention of Newspaper Men*, 4.

²⁸² *Convention of Newspaper Men*, 4. An ardent book collector, Arnett was fondly known as a “the walking encyclopedia.” He published a ten-volume collection of speeches and sermons, *Negro Literature*, a set of books well noted among contemporaneous biographers such as William Simmons, Henry McNeal Turner, James Haley and Booker T. Washington. His 593-page *Centennial Budget* published in 1888 included statistical information and sketches revolving around the lives of Black men, women, institutions and events connected to the A.M.E. church, its initiatives and philosophies. He also collected a behemoth of a library of literature containing two thousand volumes, according to Simmons and Turners’ *Men of Mark*. A portion his library is now housed at the Schomburg Library and Fisk University.

year's July 4th festivities—never reached print as originally scheduled. What members to the Black press sought to curate in a centennial volume had however been conceived of and produced in smaller scale by many Black and White activists before 1875 and after: William Cooper Nell's *The Colored Patriots* (1855), William Wells Brown's *The Black Man, His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements* (1863), Lewis Tappan's *The Life of Arthur Tappan* (1870), Frances "Frank" Rollin's *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (1883), George T. Downing's "A Sketch of the Life and Times of Thomas Downing" (1887), Gertrude Bustill Mossell's *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* (1894) and Rosetta Douglass Sprague's "Anna Murray Douglass: My Mother as I Recall Her" (1923).

Indeed, literary genealogies emerge when we critically interrogate activist daughters' lives and literary production. Josephine Brown capitalized on a teacher-training program in Calais, Paris to correct French girls' fascination with her father. Through her writing, she discovered a higher intellectual purpose that her teaching career helped her to develop. She joined other writers who wanted to distribute instructional texts about American slavery to global readers. Cordelia and Florence Ray, even though they were politically active and immersed in the culture of fugitive benevolence within Charles Ray's home, were not mentioned by name in a leading commemorative eulogy about Ray that was published in the widely read *New York Freeman*. But they picked up on contemporaneous interest in Black activist classifications and published an egalitarian taxonomy of activism. Serena Washington, considered an elite debutante in public literature more than a political philosopher, wrote a lively *vue d'ensemble* about George Downing's activism. She crafted political terms to explain a science of successful Black political organizing.

Activist daughters' use of the hybrid, biographical format sheds light on real and hoped-for Black intellectual cultures rooted in American ideals about civil rights and equal opportunity between 1856 and 1910. The writers' race, gender and experience in educational advocacy deeply impacted the structure, content and reception of their activist literature. As cultural critics and collaborative editors, the biographers represented ways by which women activists approached narration, ideals surrounding Black public masculinity, and grassroots organizing. Americans and Britons produced and consumed abolitionist-themed literature as a way to close the social and national divisions that American slavery and racial discrimination broadened. Brown, the Rays and Washington doubly appropriated the popular culture trends surrounding textual hybridity. First, the women writers challenged notions, events and legislation that inhibited Black communities' wellbeing and long-term trajectory. Secondly, the biographers challenged prevailing gender codes that suggested that Black women writers should defer to Black male leadership classes. Through foregrounding editor-subject relationships, they modeled a gender exchange between the activist-minded sexes, wherein the terms of the narrative, political messaging and emphasis on Black public masculinity was a self-determined pursuit. Reading women-authored activist biography in this way highlights the nuance and complexity of their literature. However underemphasized, the biographers' authorial personas were not restrained in a phallogentric cage that trapped a female character in situations opposed to her wellbeing. Certainly, these books are not political tracts that centralize the author's first-person critical commentary on social life, such as Margaret Fuller's now-iconic *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Rather, their writing frames both parent and child as experienced knowledge-producers by way of the

design and execution of social justice activities (father as cultural subject) and by way of formal educational training, activism and observational recollection (daughter as cultural critic).

Arguably, the biographers' decision to embrace a hybridity of textual form is echoed in the hybrid ways Black writers often defined their political philosophies in relation to leadership, community and family. The emotional, physical and social stresses associated with Brown, the Rays and Washington's public lives and statuses as political progenies of celebrity leaders continue to be a worthwhile and long overdue area of study. For many readers, the dearth of stories about the men's wives and children may be astonishing. What did *they* do, think and feel? With whom did *they* meet? The underemphasized presence of the daughters' own activism as a primary narrative subject in comparison with the centrality of their fathers' social labor suggests the less public, yet textually visible repercussions of the men's public abolitionism and entrepreneurial endeavors. In addition to the biographers' minimized authorial attribution, the titular leader's family and values are often conflated with the wellbeing of communities as he espouses codes of moral values and advocacy. That is, the daughters' own activism *is* partly relayed through their commentary on the Black leaders' interaction with communities among which they lived, worked and resisted. Social justice planning and events at the leader's home, his neighbors and neighborhoods, connected societies, churches and gender-exclusive organizations—each of these sites of educational uplift and political action that appear in the biographies help to form a basis for the writers' ethos through professional respectability: observational insight, professional achievement and hopefulness towards the future. The biographers' editorial decisions and engagement with a

transnational editorial culture surrounding activist biography situate the books as a form of legacy documents among Black activist communities, as much as cultural critiques that challenge the distance between the will and spirit of moral leaders and the will, spirit and potential of nation states on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Chapter 4

“LADIES SHOULD READ NEWSPAPERS”: JULIA COLLINS’ ESSAYS AND THE NOVEL *THE CURSE OF CASTE IN THE CHRISTIAN RECORDER* AND CHARLOTTE FORTEN’S *LIFE ON THE SEA ISLANDS IN THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY*

“What knowledge, ornamental and useful, we gain from a continued course of reading! We are made acquainted with passing events and occurrences in various parts of the world, and enabled to repeat the sentiments of those who existed in ages past, and offer to our reflection all the most important circumstances connected with the improvement of human society.” – Julia Collins²⁸³

As a sign of cultural awareness and of familiarity with developing history, Black education advocates publishing in *The Christian Recorder* endorsed women’s newspaper reading, arguing that Black newspapers promoted Black women’s social and political competencies and would “qualify” them to speak intelligently about “the present world, to know what it is and to improve its condition.”²⁸⁴ One 1861 editorial in *The Christian Recorder*, “Ladies Should Read Newspapers,” argued that proper “female education” could acquaint women with “the actual world and its transpiring events;” thus, educators needed to “urge [Black women] to read newspapers and

²⁸³ Collins, Julia. “Mental Improvement.” *The Curse of Caste; Or The Slave Bride: A Rediscovered African-American Novel*. Eds. William L. Andrews and Mitch Kachun. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. 122.

²⁸⁴ “Ladies Should Read Newspapers.” *The Christian Recorder*. May 4, 1861.

become familiar with the present character and improvements of [their] race.”²⁸⁵ Furthermore, when properly ordered and situated in the center of the home, presumably by the lady of the house, newspapers reflected the values of the Black family. The family’s reading regime would be split between the day’s “fashionable literature” and an assortment of social and political items meant to inform readers of the condition of Blacks in America and in the Diaspora.²⁸⁶ “Let the gilded annuals and poems on the centre [*sic*] table be kept a part of the time covered with journals,” the article instructs.²⁸⁷

Encouraged by hopes of emancipation in the South and increasing public recognition of Black women’s role in public culture, Julia Collins likewise championed a bifurcated use of “ornamental and useful” literature for general instruction and for women’s instruction.²⁸⁸ In the 1864 essay, “Mental Improvement,” she argues that to cultivate the mind, one must “combine anew the items of knowledge.”²⁸⁹ Like other education advocates who believed that “history is of some importance, but the past world is dead,” Collins advanced proper reading habits in direct response to Black peoples’ emerging freedom in the U.S., following Lincoln’s

²⁸⁵ “Ladies Should Read Newspapers.” *The Christian Recorder*. May 4, 1861.

²⁸⁶ “Ladies Should Read Newspapers.” *The Christian Recorder*. May 4, 1861.

²⁸⁷ “Ladies Should Read Newspapers.” *The Christian Recorder*. May 4, 1861.

²⁸⁸ Collins, “Mental Improvement.” *The Curse of Caste*, 122.

²⁸⁹ Collins, “Mental Improvement.” *The Curse of Caste*, 122.

1863 Emancipation Proclamation.²⁹⁰ She believed that a multi-faceted reading program would improve Black people's social etiquette and unify Black people across the nation.²⁹¹ Collins understood that the Black press was capable of producing new, immediate histories. These histories would undermine widely held notions of Black inferiority and other white-propagated myths inciting racial animosity towards Black people in literature and science writing.

This chapter critically explores the themes and reception histories surrounding two women who published in Black and white newspapers as a way through which to engage in Black educational uplift. Progressive newspapers such as *The Christian Recorder* and *The Atlantic Monthly* provided forums through which Black women writers could respond to debates surrounding education. Thus, progressive newspapers are so named in this chapter due to their publication of Black women's literature alongside mostly-male contributors and their public support for the abolition of slavery and the institution of African-American citizenship rights by the 1860s. Embodying the *Recorder's* call to women writers and readers to participate in literary and political cultures in a serialized narrative appearing in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Charlotte Forten's teaching report *Life on the Sea Islands* captures the tensions and vibrancy surrounding South Carolinian freed people connected to the Port Royal Experiment (1861-1864). It explores the wage-labor program's political structures and

²⁹⁰ "Ladies Should Read Newspapers." *The Christian Recorder*. May 4, 1861.

²⁹¹ "Ladies Should Read Newspapers." *The Christian Recorder*. May 4, 1861.

the aesthetics of Black island life in a way that emphasizes the competing pressures that came with Black freedmen's racial identity formation as free people and the U.S. government's attempt to instate racial integration and assimilation through domestic policy.

Julia Collins and Charlotte Forten explored Black intellectual cultures and democratic ideals in the 1860s, while also practicing professional respectability as educator-advocates invested in literary production as a means of engaging in conversations about Black racial uplift. The first section of this chapter examines the ways in which Julia Collins articulates intra-communal discussions surrounding education in the Black weekly *The Christian Recorder*. The second section examines Charlotte Forten's teaching philosophy and notions of moral economies, as situated in the white-run *Atlantic Monthly*, and as part of contemporaneous practices in benevolence towards the Port Royal Experiment's freedmen. Both women found progressive news outlets such as *The Christian Recorder* and *The Atlantic Monthly* to be instrumental in disseminating women-centered philosophies about the future trajectory of Black Americans and the rising classes of Black intellectuals. Their democratic values, interests in shared leadership platforms between the sexes, and use of the rhetoric of moral economies helped to establish their intellectual position among activist peers in the teaching profession and in pro-Black rights publishing networks.

Julia Collins and Advocates for Women's Voices in *The Christian Recorder*

This section discusses Julia Collins' engagement in debates about Black education as they took place in the pages of *The Christian Recorder* in the period encompassing the American Civil War. It examines the implications of *The Curse of*

Caste's enslaved and mixed-race Black characters' relationships as they unfold on a Louisianan plantation. Themes and discussions in Collins' essays and serial novel are in conversation with *The Christian Recorder*'s education-related content. They provide an insightful look at the small-town teacher's educational philosophies in comparison to contemporaneous discussions about Black educational leadership. I argue that *The Christian Recorder* was a site of gender-based competition between Black men and Black women educators, out of which Collins emerges as a figure of reconciliation. The paper is loaded with discussions about the ways in which Black men and Black women educators are best suited to usher generations of African Americans into a new era of Black life after slavery. When placed in conversation with Mary Still and Alexander Crummell, both of whom published important literature on education during the ante- and postbellum eras, Collins emerges as a wartime figure who embodies antebellum calls for women's reciprocal political and literary engagement. By the end of the war, Collins emerges as a dynamic counterweight to the rhetoric of masculine duty that often dominated Black educational thought in news literature.

I examine Collins' notion of self-culture, a philosophy for Black educational improvement, and the ways it pivots upon Black readers' adherence to a proper reading strategy, as well as Black readers' purposeful embrace of intra-community skin complexions and economic difference. Collins presents a notion of self-culture that re-contextualizes intelligence, or the ability to learn, such that it refers to a state of consciousness *and* a form of wealth. In a reading of the ambiguous relationship between the fair-skinned Claire and the enslaved community in *The Curse of Caste*, I argue that complexional difference is undermined by an unspoken, unconscious

sameness within this Black community. The relationship embodies Collins' notion of self-culture by urging *The Christian Recorder's* Black readers to reject complexional difference as a reason to practice anti-intellectualism. Because the relationship between Claire and the bondspeople develops through mutual seeing and without dialogue, I offer a reading that gives voice to one of the novel's most puzzling loose ends.

A growing number of scholars examine Julia Collins' writing in relationship to themes apparent in *The Christian Recorder*. In *African American Review's* 2006 special issue on *The Curse of Caste*, Gabrielle Foreman argues, "both content and placement of Collins'...writing encourage [*The Christian Recorder's*] audiences to read histotextually," particularly in relation to information wanted ads concurrently circulating alongside the novel.²⁹² Eric Gardner has argued that readers' education was a primary concern for *The Christian Recorder's* editorial staff. Collins' writing would have helped to "reframe" notions of family and domesticity in "war (and peace)."²⁹³ In the 2006 Oxford edition of *The Curse of Caste*, William Andrews and Mitch Kachun argue that Collins advocates a "distinctive Black cultural expression" that formed out of the Black middle-class and aimed at "reinforcing racial identity and pride."²⁹⁴ I show how deeply Collins' cultural expressions were grounded in Black

²⁹² Foreman, Gabrielle. "The 'Christian Recorder,' Broken Families, and Educated Nations." *African American Review* 40.4 (2006). 709.

²⁹³ Gardner, Eric. "Remembered (Black) Readers: Subscribers to the Christian Recorder, 1864-1865." *American Literary History* 23.2 (2011). 250.

²⁹⁴ Williams, Andrew and Mitch Kachun, eds. "Editors' Introduction," *The Curse of Caste, Or the Slave Bride: A Rediscovered African American Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. xxxi.

educational improvement and that her literature was deeply entrenched in circulating debates about education. Part of what makes *The Christian Recorder* an important site of study is the wealth of information it holds about interrelated Civil War-era politics of race, gender, class and education.

Who Will Lead Us? : Gender Debates among Black Educational Advocates

Julia Collins' presence in *The Christian Recorder* and her ideas about educational improvement hinged on A.M.E. churchwomen's early activism for the increased involvement of Black women in church affairs and educational uplift in the 1850s. A.M.E. missionary Mary Still campaigned for an increase in women's participation in church matters after the A.M.E. church suspended the print organ *Christian Herald* and the first iteration of *The Christian Recorder*. By the time the printer Peter McKenna and Son released Still's pamphlet *An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* in 1857, the A.M.E. church had begun to raise funds for the reprisal of *The Christian Recorder*, which would appear in 1861 with Elisha Weaver as the weekly's editor.²⁹⁵ She did so with the understanding that the A.M.E. church wielded significant influence within Black newspaper cultures, school development planning and Black lifestyle discourse. Believing that "the moral or degraded condition of society depends solely upon the influence of women," Still summoned churchwomen to donate funds and to produce literature for *The Christian*

²⁹⁵ Newman, Richard, Rael, Patrick and Phillip Lapsansky, eds. *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. New York: Routledge Press, 2001. 254.

Recorder. In *An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, Still assumes moral and matriarchal authority.

It is women [*sic*] who gives impress to society; and her who teaches the young mind how to shoot, and how to articulate its earliest thoughts. How important then that we should decide [*sic*] wisely and judiciously upon a subject that involves the interest of so many intelligent beings.²⁹⁶

According to Still, Black women are responsible for Black people's earliest intellectual and political developments. In the context of the historical moment, Still recasts notions of republican motherhood, which had largely referred to white women's roles in society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for Black women audiences. While the "young minds" that Still mentions refers to the minds of children, it also refers to early learners across generations. In this light, her term is inclusive such that it considers the general Black population's uneven educational attainment by the middle of the century, and it also acknowledges Black people's lack of instruction in political institutions, processes and outcomes.²⁹⁷ Still casts the role of Black women as teachers as an indisputable fact. Moreover, she gives credence to the status of Black women as responsible actors in the work of shaping Black people's future citizenship practices in anticipation of the abolition of slavery. In the context of her pamphlet and in acknowledgement of the institutional influence

²⁹⁶ Still, Mary. "An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church," *Pamphlets of Protest An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. Eds. Richard Newman, Patrick Rael and Phillip Lapsansky. New York: Routledge Press, 2001. 256.

²⁹⁷ Still. "An Appeal." *Pamphlets of Protest*, 256.

that the A.M.E. Church and its print organs had amassed by this time, Still argues that Black women's ability to wield influence on Black communities' political and educational developments was linked to their ability to be part of A.M.E. decision-making bodies.

Mary Still's professional work as a teacher and a newspaper subscription agent created a foundation for the argument she poses about the roles of Black women as educational and political actors in Black newspaper cultures. By the early 1860s, Mary Still had opened a school in New Jersey and was travelling as a city and county canvasser for the newly resuscitated *Recorder*.²⁹⁸ Like many of her contemporaries, she believed newspapers underpinned African American communities' moral and intellectual improvement by "constantly instructing and encouraging them in the way to respectability and to Heaven."²⁹⁹ In addition to having blood ties to a prominent activist family,³⁰⁰ Still's remarkable selling power in newspaper subscriptions established her professional respectability among her peers. Having a reputation "as a warm and ardent friend of our people" and "a persistent advocate of educational and literary attainments," Still embodied an appearance of womanly intellectualism in "the wearing of glasses and the pleasant smile" that reportedly graced "her matronly countenance."³⁰¹ Reviews of Still's public persona and work ethic were important to

²⁹⁸ Newspaper canvassers were subscription agents and book promoters. "Our City and County Canvasser." *The Christian Recorder*. July 5, 1862.

²⁹⁹ *Pamphlets of Protest*, 258.

³⁰⁰ Mary Still is the sister of William Still, the renowned Underground Railroad agent.

³⁰¹ "Our Canvasser." *The Christian Recorder*. June 28, 1862.

the endorsement of Black teaching and to recruiting more Black teachers. The Black teachers' political work and teacher recruitment were two national-level political agenda items that many Black educational advocates championed in the era before, and immediately after, the Civil War.

Mary Still modeled a style of critique that praised Black men while centralizing the fundamental roles of women in Black life as a basis for Black women's heightened involvement in church affairs. While praising mostly male-led "General and Annual Conferences" for developing "a course of studies to be pursued by young men" and the "wise and judicious Committee" of the "Book Steward's Report" for developing in ministers the "best cultivated minds to be found among the colored people," she likewise calls on the "Daughters of Bethel" to "Go forth with courage bold/Nor fear the opponents [*sic*] power" in a zealous poem that closes the pamphlet.³⁰² She claims that Black male leaders had "yet to learn that when female labor is withdrawen [*sic*] the Church must cease to exist."³⁰³ Because Still understood that the power of influence often resided with decision-makers in leadership positions, she sought to emphasize Black churchwomen's ongoing participation in the quotidian activities that upheld core Black institutions: the Black church, school and newspaper. By endorsing multi-sex decision-making, Still asserted a strategy for *The Christian Recorder's* design that explicitly included Black women and that explicitly

³⁰² Still, "An Appeal." *Pamphlets of Protest*, 260-61.

³⁰³ Still, "An Appeal." *Pamphlets of Protest*, 256.

communicated the stakes surrounding the paper's inclusion of women's voices. Likewise, the public pamphlet encouraged Black women to embrace a sense of duty to representations of Black thought through their increased involvement in church affairs, as content contributors for *The Christian Recorder*.

By the end of the Civil War, Black advocates continued to argue that members of their own sex were best equipped to lead educational initiatives—debates that represent the centrality of gender in discussions about Black educational uplift. These debates reflect Black men's and women's interest in gaining political power. In a speech delivered at the 1865 National Education Teachers' Convention in Missouri, Alexander Crummell articulates a rising philosophy about Black empowerment through education:

Colored men are, without doubt, the best agents for this end. Teachers raised up from among themselves - men who know their minds - men who have a common feeling and sympathy with them - these are the men best adapted to instruct, to elevate, and to lead them. And it is only by such teaching and culture that the Black race in this country will be fitted for the duties which now devolve upon them in their new relations. These people are to be made good citizens. It is only by a proper system of education that they can be made such citizens.³⁰⁴

Crummell's assertion of masculine duty not only anticipates the passage of the fourteenth amendment that came three years later in 1868; it also reflects growing anxieties about whether or not Black leaders could agree upon a unified agenda for racial uplift. Like Still's recognition of Black women as invaluable leaders of racial uplift through *The Christian Recorder* at its embryonic stage, Crummell too harnessed

³⁰⁴ Crummell, Alexander. "National Educational Teachers' Convention." *The Christian Recorder*. September 9, 1865.

the press as a mouthpiece. In this case, he appropriated the momentum behind colored teachers' conventions to air his ideas about the future of Black leadership. In doing so, he hoped to assign authority to Black men for educational leadership roles.

Subscribers to Alexander Crummell's philosophy of Black educational leadership believed that Black men could better represent the race. Should the Black community empower Black men to design the course of educational progress, then Black men could better present a unified front in public arenas. They were also more likely to gain the respect of white men. As did others, Crummell believed that the "development of an educated class would rebut racist claims of Negro intellectual inferiority and prove Blacks' equality to whites."³⁰⁵ However, Crummell's position undermined the integrated nature of the colored teachers' convention at which he spoke. In the speech that appears in *The Christian Recorder's* pages, Crummell asserts a preference for Black male leadership before a multi-sex, politically engaged audience of colored teachers.

In comparison to Mary Still and Alexander Crummell, Julia Collins leaned toward reconciliation between both the races and the sexes. While many education advocates expressed separatist, hierarchical positions concerning Black educational leadership on the basis of gender, Julia Collins operated within a conciliatory realm. By the time Collins published in *The Christian Recorder*, the paper was hosting discussions about women's rights. The fact that "the woman question generated

³⁰⁵ Peterson, Carla. "Untangling Genealogy's Tangled Skeins: Alexander Crummell, James McCune Smith, and Nineteenth-Century Black Literary Traditions." *A Companion to American Literary Studies*. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2011. 508.

challenges over power” did not escape her.³⁰⁶ The former is evident in Collins’ treatment of *The Curse of Caste*’s heroine Claire, a young mixed-race, fair-skinned woman who is educated in the North; Claire is a character silhouette who bears similarities to Minnie, a well-educated, albeit race-conscious mulatto woman who later appears in *The Christian Recorder* serial penned by Frances E. W. Harper, *Minnie’s Sacrifice* (1868). In “Intelligent Women,” which explicitly comments on the relationship between gender and Black leadership, Collins characterizes the mid-1860s as “the dawn of the colored man’s ‘golden era.’”³⁰⁷ She predicts that the time neared “when the Black man will have only to assert his equality with the white, to have it fully and cordially awarded to him,” a position with which Crummell’s philosophy of male-led uplift is closely patterned.³⁰⁸ Yet Collins also posits that women are responsible for self-improvement as a social imperative “incumbent upon [women], as a duty.”³⁰⁹ As does Still, Collins publically acknowledges that both sexes are instrumental to racial uplift through education and that Black women have a responsibility to this cause.

Education advocates’ discussions about Black leadership and gender were of high import to Black communities. This was due to the fact that the work of Black teachers was directly linked to the “fierce and bitter contest between freedom and

³⁰⁶ Jones, Martha. *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. 4.

³⁰⁷ Collins, “Intelligent Women,” *Curse of Caste*, 125.

³⁰⁸ Collins, “Intelligent Women,” *Curse of Caste*, 125.

³⁰⁹ Collins, “Intelligent Women,” *Curse of Caste*, 125.

despotism” and the care of “the rising generation.”³¹⁰ By the end of the Civil War, struggles between the sexes for political power signaled the rising influence of Black women in social and political networks key to activism, organizational work and literary production. Both groups’ impulse to assert power concretized the significance of the other. Even if only claimed, power meant a faction’s political positions and functions might be prioritized, funded and publically supported. Furthermore, these gender battles also proved that Black progress was not wholly contingent upon the ideas and philanthropy of white abolitionists and benevolent financiers who “could be combatants for dominance over the educational agenda.”³¹¹

Public gender battles were evidence of a competitive realm developing within communities of Black intellectuals. These arguments in the public sphere reflected transforming sectarian politics of manhood and womanhood. Traditional notions of Black manhood and womanhood had to be re-conceptualized to make space for a variety of voices and perspectives. This was especially pressing since national-scale Black education agendas heavily relied upon the energy, experience and mobility of Black teachers well versed in geo-political issues. By the end of the Civil War, Black women had proven capable in these areas. This simply could not be ignored. Black women’s fiction and non-fiction about education and their participation in public debates through their social commentaries signaled an important contribution to the

³¹⁰ Mitchell, J. G. “Colored Schools.” *The Christian Recorder*, November 8, 1862.

³¹¹ Williams, Heather. *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005. 80.

ways in which they constructed a professional respectability among educator-peers and the ways in which notions of Black educational uplift were disseminated among popular audiences.

Julia Collins, Self-Culture, and *The Curse of Caste*

An avid reader of both classical literature and newspapers, Julia Collins merged her ideas about proper reading habits and feminine etiquette with terminology commonly used among racial uplift advocates. I refer to such terms in relation to, what I call, rhetorics of Black educational uplift. I use the plural *rhetorics* knowing that advocates such as David Walker, Maria Stewart, Frederick Douglass, Mary Still, and Alexander Crummell used familiar terms to associate their ideas with larger issues about Black education, while often doing so with different objectives. This terminology includes phrases such as “cultivation of the mind” and “the exercise of its facilities,” “the improvement of human society,” and the terms “self-elevation,” “industry,” “culture,” and “civilization.”³¹² Other mid-century rhetorical markers include “the woman question,” “the negro question” and the “elevation of the negro.” These regularly appeared in Black periodicals and were taught and practiced within literary societies and Black churches during the antebellum and postbellum eras. Black advocates’ use of common terms promoted unity among otherwise disparate advocates and fed readers and listeners with material to learn, recite and deliver in public and private settings.

³¹² See Julia Collins’ essays, especially “Mental Improvement,” *The Curse of Caste*, 121.

Julia Collins' appropriation of the rhetorics of Black educational uplift signaled her intention to present an approach to Black learning. She helped to dismantle a nineteenth-century notion that literary "high culture" belonged to the "privileged realm of male activities" when she published thematically linked fiction and nonfiction that often dealt with sensitive issues through aesthetic means.³¹³ Despite her knowledge of political culture, Collins avoided pronouncing explicit political perspectives in conjunction with her reading strategy, as would later become popular among Black women, such as Victoria Matthews who wrote for the *Woman's Era Magazine* and was active in the women's club movement during the late nineteenth-century.³¹⁴ Such an absence does not suggest that Collins lacked opinions on the state of Black affairs, the U.S. and the world; these subjects are active within the author's thematic and historical references to Black identity, nationhood and mental improvement. What I suggest is that Collins foregrounds approach before political belief in her reading strategy so as to encourage readers to formulate their own opinions over time, research and study and to then test the veracity of those ideas in spirited discussion circles.

Julia Collins believed that there was an art to reading. She supported the notion that if Black learners could achieve this reading strategy, then they could achieve self-

³¹³ Huyssen, Andreas. "Mass Culture As Woman: Modernism's Other." *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approach to Mass Culture*. Tania Modleski, ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. 191.

³¹⁴ McHenry, Elizabeth. *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. 238.

culture. Through reading and reflection, a self-cultured person could build a sophisticated outlook on the world that could transform her condition within it. As was popular in Enlightenment thought, Collins supported the belief that all people were born with the ability to learn, but that “much time and skill are requisite to mould [*sic*] the mind in strength and beauty.”³¹⁵ Race, gender, age and previous condition, i.e. enslavement, were not to encumber one’s zeal for educational attainment. In “Mental Improvement,” Collins assures multigenerational Black readers that they are “born with faculties and power, capable of almost anything” and that “severe, and sometimes painful exercise” would weaken “indolent humility,” a practice that promoted anti-intellectualism and diminished Black people’s civic and cultural reach in an important age of heightened opportunity.³¹⁶ In an effort to transform Black people’s outlook on life, Collins promoted a reading strategy that would ostensibly “bring about a reformation of habits and tastes.”³¹⁷

Collins claimed that a proper reading strategy could craft in her readers a “truer, higher and nobler existence.”³¹⁸ Collins suggests that readers adopt a purposeful reading regimen—a process ideally set to a timetable dividing study periods between reading and reflection. She describes this reading strategy in relationship to the notion of self-culture:

³¹⁵ Collins, “Mental Improvement,” *The Curse of Caste*, 121.

³¹⁶ Collins, “Mental Improvement,” *The Curse of Caste*, 121.

³¹⁷ Collins, “A Letter from Oswego,” *The Curse of Caste*, 127.

³¹⁸ Collins, “Life Is Earnest,” *The Curse of Caste*, 129.

It is well to select our reading matter from the best authors, and while absorbed with interest in the workings of a master-mind, close the book and carefully review with the mind's eye, that which we have just read. While thus communing with our thoughts, we involuntarily and unconsciously contrast and compare our ideas with the author's, and from the chaos of the mind comes forth new and beautiful thoughts, 'original ideas,' gems not another's finding, but as the reward of this effort of self-culture.³¹⁹

In this scheme the reader's experiences and unconscious cerebral activity make up the foundation of the reader's intelligence. Even after reaching the point of being self-cultured, one's intelligence included the knowledge she knowingly or unknowingly possessed before the period of study began. Collins rhetorically positions unconscious knowledge to bolster Black learners' self-worth, particularly by suggesting that one may possess intelligence without traditional education. In another way, self-culture undermines notions of Black inferiority, which prominently appeared in popular white newspapers in the North and in the South during the 1860s. The strategy's emphasis on unconscious intelligence also confronts relations between Black people with varying skin complexions. The notion of self-culture touts the idea that Black people in the North and freedmen in the South could view the other as equal and as a kind of relative bound by common ancestry, history and culture.

Self-culture represents a form of respectability for audiences such as impoverished learners and women readers. Through self-culture, one could attain a mind ready to supply valuable information in discussions, to reason independently of others and to intelligently judge the opinions of others. Humble respectability and

³¹⁹ Collins, "A Letter from Oswego," *The Curse of Caste*, 127.

abstract material wealth are deeply embedded in the notion of self-culture: a decorated psyche, cultivation and purity of taste, “brilliant gems of thought” and the ability to reflect and then draw new truths.³²⁰ This embellished language serves to associate respectability with one’s ability to assert self-worth through the language arts instead of material possessions alone. For the strategy to reach a variety of Black readers, Collins needed to impress upon readers the idea of economic sameness through education. The latter surmised that when one presented intelligence in conversation, the outer corporeal frame and its material apparel would not lessen the value of one’s ideas. On the other hand, self-culture would help women to secure a husband, to form a positive reputation among peers and to have a mind bent toward truth. Respectable women were refined, quick-witted, and cared less for clothing and leisure than for the day’s moral and intellectual culture.³²¹ Like many of her contemporaries, the rhetoric of motherhood and marriage, as well as other conventional women’s concerns, are central to Collins’ notion of self-culture.

In *The Curse of Caste*, the orphan Claire embodies important facets of the philosophy of self-culture. *The Curse of Caste* imagines the life of a well-educated young mulatto Claire, whose discovery of her Black roots is spurred by her travels to the South. Richard Tracy falls in love with, and marries, an enslaved quadroon, Lina. Lina gives birth to Claire. Richard is brutally shot by his father, who becomes enraged

³²⁰ Collins, “A Letter from Oswego,” *The Curse of Caste*, 127.

³²¹ Collins, “Intelligent Women,” *The Curse of Caste*, 125-126.

at the news of the couple's marriage. Richard recovers in France, while believing both Lina and baby Claire are dead. Brokenhearted, Lina dies. The independent and kind Black nursemaid Juno raises the parentless Claire in the North, a set-up that Richard's conniving friend, George Manville arranges. After graduating from L—seminary in New England, Claire becomes governess for the Tracy family, who are wealthy, slave-holding Louisianans. They are also the very family revealed to be Claire's father's relatives. Claire believes she is a white woman until her tenure with the Tracys slowly unveils to her the truth about her ancestry. Although the novel is left unfinished due to Collins' untimely death in 1865, the narrative suggests Claire will meet her long-absent father Richard, as well as learn the truth about her mother Lina.

Although Claire buckles beneath the weight of difference, knowledge and her search for truth prove to be the sources of her vitality. Claire is described as forming a “beautiful and striking picture as she sat, with bowed head and drooping figure, the seeming embodiment of grief.”³²² To cope, Claire resorts to study for strength: “[...] I will cease to repine, and will school myself to hope that all will yet be well.”³²³ And when a school friend declares she will eventually discover that her parents “were persons of purity and refinement,” Claire responds, “I feel, too, my parents were pure and good; it is only when I think of the vague mystery that surrounds my birth and parentage, that the doubt comes.”³²⁴ Claire repeatedly locks eyes with enslaved men

³²² Collins, *The Curse of Caste*, 3.

³²³ Collins, *The Curse of Caste*, 4.

³²⁴ Collins, *The Curse of Caste*, 6.

and women on the plantation. These moments foreshadow Claire's journey to truth. When she stands spellbound by the sight of the enslaved, it is in these moments that Claire first subliminally recognizes their relational ties.

Claire increasingly becomes aware that her truth is hidden within the Tracy family, a truth signified by the mutual attraction between the young girl and the enslaved community. "At almost every step (Claire encounters) the gaze of the negroes, who looked wonderingly at her"—a refrain repeated as Claire acclimates to her surroundings.³²⁵ The bondsmen's unflinching stares trigger an impulsive self-consciousness in Claire, and she perceives herself to be "an object of curiosity even to the negroes, who regarded her wonderingly, and talked mysteriously of somebody or something Claire knew not what."³²⁶ As Orlando Patterson posits, "the refusal formally to recognize the social relations of the slave had profound emotional and social implications."³²⁷ It is clear that the enslaved possess no legal rights over their own bodies. The enslaved do not speak. However, the repeated refrain actualizes mutual recognition. Moreover, their interaction through mutual seeing is a real—soulful even—form of communication. The narrative enigma surrounding the community of bondsmen and women evidences a palpable social life, therein, while also suggesting that which draws the two parties together is recognition of racial sameness.

³²⁵ Collins, *The Curse of Caste*, 11.

³²⁶ Collins, *The Curse of Caste*, 15.

³²⁷ Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. 6

Even though the enslaved community seemingly moves in the evasive backdrop of *The Curse of Caste*, I champion a reading that considers Claire and the enslaved community active in the simultaneous recognition of sameness. Although the enslaved flutter in and out of the narrative, we can imagine that they speak and share rumors of Richard and Lina's love story and of the explosive argument that leads to Richard's estrangement. "What happened to the child? Is it not Claire?" they would ask. Surely the bondsmen recognize Claire's "striking resemblance to the Tracy family" as does Claire, as do members of the family and their acquaintances.³²⁸ The fact that the Tracys' purchase of the estate included the enslaved community is evidence of the enslaved community's untapped knowledge. The enslaved community's attention to Claire is not one-sided; it is a reciprocal gaze, as one has to look in order to know that one is being looked at. Claire—unnerved and with psyche nearly "torn asunder"—lacks the linguistic maturity to convey the evidence to prove the realness of their connection.³²⁹ The darkness that settles over her frame, which encompasses her "jetty hue" and "purple Black hair" and her very soul further suggests that Claire's physical features and emotional disposition bear witness to her racial identity even before evidence can satisfy the epistemological impulse.³³⁰

In her grief and in the moments she stands mesmerized, staring back at the curious bondsmen, Claire unconsciously recognizes their racial sameness. We might

³²⁸ Collins, *The Curse of Caste*, 79.

³²⁹ Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Cambridge: University Press John Wilson and Son, 1903. 12.

³³⁰ Collins, *The Curse of Caste*, 4.

understand their ambiguous relationship as Collins' theory of involuntary recognition or a pre-Duboisian notion of double consciousness. In *Souls of Black Folks*, Du Bois writes about African Americans' experiences with emotional and psychological dissonance: "One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."³³¹ When speaking about the Black reader's hunger for knowledge, Collins describes the learner's two incompatible yearnings in strikingly similar ways. "We may enjoy life; but there comes to us all an inward longing, longing; ...we feel it, and are vainly seeking...after some thing that is intangible. It is...the yearning of the soul after a truer, higher and nobler existence!" she writes.³³² As Crummell would put it, "Race feeling, like family feeling, is of divine origin. [...]Indeed, a race *is* a family."³³³ Where it is strongly implied that father and daughter are to be rejoined, I argue that Claire and the plantation laborers, too, may have come together in truth. For *The Christian Recorder's* Black readers, particularly fugitives and freed people, this silent relationship announces the complexities of Black identities and captures mutual, if unnamed, connections with one's kind.

³³¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 12.

³³² Collins, "Life Is Ernest," *The Curse of Caste*, 129.

³³³ Crummell, Alexander. "The Race Problem in America." *African-American Social and Political Thought 1850-1920*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2009. 184.

Black Educational Philosophies in the Nineteenth Century

Julia Collins' fiction and nonfiction are in conversation with contemporary Black education advocacy, debates about leadership and circulation trends in *The Christian Recorder*. Arguably, debates between race leaders about social roles contributed to rhetorical traditions among Black activist-intellectuals and strengthened their argumentation skills in public discourse. The contexts in which the rhetorical moves are lodged appear in the print byproducts of many Black institutions including Black churches, Colored Conventions, society meetings and newspapers. *The Christian Recorder* allotted a great deal of textual space to literature about Black identity, respectability politics and educational uplift during the Civil War era. As such, it opens many opportunities to study Black-centered reading strategies, the activities that empowered women to gain professional respectability for their literary and political contributions to *The Christian Recorder*, and activist agendas for racial uplift through education. Still's and Collins' professional respectability is apparent in the ways they intertwined teaching and advocacy work. It is apparent in the ways they launched conversations about the complex relationships between miscegenation, geopolitics and designs for Black mental improvement through the Black press.

We might conclude that Still and Collins help to educate and empower Black women readers, in part, by defining their perceptions of the gender dynamics that were often central to Black intellectual cultures connected to the A.M.E. Church and to *The Christian Recorder's* publishing practices. Since Black writing had first appeared in print and since African Americans emerged on the lecture circuit in the antebellum era, African Americans embraced the power of rhetoric as a method by which they could bring about the abolition of slavery, gain civil liberties and instill hope in multiple generations throughout the Black American diaspora. In "Series of Letters by

a Man of Colour” (1813), the wealthy activist James Forten opened his litany against white oppression of Blacks in America with a recitation of phrases from the Constitution. In the opening lines of the letter, Forten writes:

We hold this truth to be self-evident, that GOD created all men equal, and is one of the most prominent features in the Declaration of Independence, and in that glorious fabric of collected wisdom, our noble Constitution. This idea embraces the Indian and the European, the Savage and the Saint, the Peruvian and the Laplander, the white Man and the African, and whatever measures are adopted subversive of this inestimable privilege, are in direct violation of the letter and spirit of our Constitution.³³⁴

Here, Forten highlights the distance between American ideals and the “inhumanity and impolicy” of congressional measures that “deprive [Blacks] of those inestimable treasures, Liberty and Independence.”³³⁵ The idea and demand that Forten asserts pivot on the notion that rhetoric is at the core of material thought, including laws, social codes and other practices of ideology. So, in the absence of legislative power Forten and his peers such as Frederick Douglass harnessed influence through capturing attention across race, gender and class through the power of words.³³⁶

³³⁴ Forten, James. “Series of Letters by a Man of Colour.” *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 67.

³³⁵ Forten, James. “Series of Letters by a Man of Colour.” *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. New York: Routledge, 2001. 67.

³³⁶ Barack Obama’s 2008 speech, “Don’t Tell Me Words Don’t Matter,” delivered at the Democratic Party of Wisconsin Founders Day Gala, comes to mind. President Obama’s speech can be found on YouTube.

Indeed, rhetorical idealism entreated whites to reckon with the distance between Constitutional citizenship rights granted to all men and the codification of racism at their hands. Rhetorical idealism also confronted whites with the actuality of social prejudice against Blacks, another hindrance to Black uplift. Considering Black women's use of the jeremiad in revivalist antebellum America, Shirley Logan writes, "[It] has been pointed out that such charges against American society, by demonstrating faith in the ultimate triumph of democracy, actually highlighted the inherent optimism of the jeremiad."³³⁷ Jeremiadic speakers, such as David Walker and Maria Stewart, "pushed always toward an idealized notion of this society, raising the bar, so to speak, as each ideal approached reality."³³⁸ Too add, Walker's *Appeal* and Stewart's ministrations printed in William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* in the 1830s and 1840s had begun to more forcefully marry achievable solutions such as Black literacy with the idealism of Black educational uplift discourse.

Mary Still's and Julia Collins' discussions surrounding reading practices among women prepare readers for the multidimensionality of *The Christian Recorder*, a site wherein educational idealism was practiced in a variety of ways. Following a tradition concretized by women such as Maria Stewart, who were connected to religious and benevolent organizations, and who heralded racial uplift through women's participation in societies, Still believed *The Christian Recorder's* A.M.E.

³³⁷ Logan, Shirley. *"We Are Coming": Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-century Black Women*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999. 31.

³³⁸ Logan, Shirley. *"We Are Coming": Persuasive Discourse of Nineteenth-century Black Women*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999. 31.

founders were divinely inspired; she writes: “The impulse that moved them to action, was doubtless of divine origin, having a desire to light up the literary path” particularly “for thousands yet unborn” and for those who floated aimlessly adrift without proper guidance.³³⁹ The “literary path” in this capacity is less a singular trail than it is an accumulation of metaphorical trails. They represent the many avenues “for the diffusion of knowledge” (259). More specifically, Still’s literary path represents a diverse set of genres within the newspaper: news, addresses, minutes, histories, advertisements, and serial fiction. Accordingly, these forms are laid out in *The Christian Recorder* “for the dissemination of religion, morality, literature and science.”³⁴⁰ One form, the serialized novel was a site wherein Collins could imagine the real-life grief that befell people of African ancestry. It was a site wherein Collins could give voice to Black women’s often underrepresented beliefs and values.

Charlotte Forten’s *Life on the Sea Islands* in *The Atlantic Monthly* and Cultures of Morality and Professional Respectability Connected to the Port Royal Experiment

On a cloudy day in late October of 1862, Charlotte Forten landed at the coast of Beaufort, South Carolina. Forten was part of an inaugural group of northern missionaries who travelled to the islands off of the South Carolinian coast in the early

³³⁹ Still, Mary, “An Appeal to the Females of the African Methodist Episcopal Church,” *Pamphlets of Protest*, 259.

³⁴⁰ This phrase is taken directly from the *Recorder*’s masthead. 16 April 1864, the issue in which Collins’ “Mental Improvement” essay is published.

years of the Civil War conflict. She immediately took an oath, swearing to support, protect and defend the U.S. Constitution and government, as she commenced her teaching post with the Union Army's Port Royal Experiment (PRE). Charlotte Forten's teaching narrative, *Life on the Sea Islands*, published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1864 describes her PRE teaching experiences with "little colored children of every hue" and adult learners, as well as her struggle to cope with the "great dangers of Rebel attacks."³⁴¹ The experience removed Forten from the comforts of her previous northern surroundings, though it was clear that the convictions that she held as part of Philadelphia's leading Black organizers and intellectuals—including her grandfather and the renowned businessman and activist James Forten—deeply influenced her teaching philosophy and relationship with Black island students. Before joining the PRE, she lectured at venues hosting abolition-themed events. She wrote opinion editorials on popular literary culture and equal rights for African Americans in the United States.

Forming the basis of what would later become *Life on the Sea Island*, Charlotte Forten penned diary entries describing her teaching materials for her new role. She used picture books and abolitionist-themed newspapers for instruction. She taught her youngest pupils the song "John Brown's Body," which memorialized the named abolitionist's insurrection at Harper's Ferry in Virginia. And she gave lessons on the Haitian revolutionary, Toussaint Louverture. The entries also capture "the rather trying" struggles that beset her role as an African American freedmen teacher among a

³⁴¹ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

white cohort of northern missionaries.³⁴² She, for instance, often taught as many as 54 students in one class with classmates ranging from “restless” toddlers to elderly learners.³⁴³ She also expressed immense dissatisfaction with the poor health, educational levels and need for resources among freed people she encountered, along with dissatisfaction with the ways Union Army personnel treated the recently-freed.³⁴⁴ In addition to diary entries that capture the ways her northern abolitionist upbringing impacted her instructional selections for the PRE, the teacher’s engagement with the periodical press, during and after her two-year teaching post, indicates the ways *Life on the Sea Islands* spoke back to broader public discourse about Black loyalty to the Union and white spectators’ anxieties about Black people’s ability to be self-sustaining communities as free people.

By the time the *Life on the Sea Islands* narrative began its run in *The Atlantic Monthly* in the summer of 1864, the author’s poetry and essays had appeared in *The Liberator*, *The Christian Recorder*, *The Anglo-African Magazine* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. The teaching narrative appeared in several iterations between 1862 and 1864. She first drafted short, detailed passages about her island stay in her diary and continued to do so until an illness forced her to relocate to Philadelphia in 1862. William Lloyd Garrison published three of Forten’s letters in *The Liberator* between December 1862 and January 1863. The first letter appeared in *The Liberator*

³⁴² Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁴³ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁴⁴ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

in mid-December 1862 to a warm welcome. Garrison published a second letter written by Forten a week later—proposing that Forten continue a series of Port Royal letters. A third epistle appeared January 23, 1863. John Greenleaf Whittier on behalf of *The Atlantic Monthly* solicited Forten’s *Life on the Sea Islands* narrative in 1864. In comparison to *The Liberator* letters, *The Atlantic Monthly* narrative was more verbose and given in an ethnographic-style of self-reporting. It was also more candid in its juxtaposition of army decorum towards freemen and the intra-communal relations between the freemen.

Charlotte Forten’s letters to the abolitionist press and the two-part, 12-paged *Life on the Sea Islands*, serialized in May and June of 1864 in *The Atlantic Monthly*, reports on the nation’s first freedmen’s wage-labor experiment. The PRE and its reception, as documented in military reports and American newspapers, reflected several different value systems, special interests and voices. These included the Union Army, benevolent organizations, and individual activists. Writing as an intellectual and education advocate, Forten articulates her relationship to the PRE’s organizational structure and cultural significance, as much as her writing reflects a desire to document South Carolinian freed people’s political resilience, cultures of moral decorum and intellectual aptitude.

Life on the Sea Islands explores competing identities attached to the PRE. On the one hand, the Union program is presented as a government-led moral venture that was undergirded by democratic values and that encouraged Black people’s literacy, Christian beliefs and civic learning. In many press reports, the value-system connected to the PRE constituted a positive view of Union-mandated uplift strategies, even as this representation risked underplaying the minutia of everyday hardship that could

leave newly freed communities at a disadvantage as the government transitioned from the PRE to the Freedmen's Bureau. On the other hand, the PRE is presented as a contraband relief program that fulfilled the Union's short-term goal of overseeing displaced and vulnerable communities that ground battles between the Union and the Confederacy in South Carolina negatively impacted. This view often implicated freedmen as a burden on Union resources and normalized nominal freedom as a way by which to attend to human contraband.

Life on the Sea Islands' serialized appearance in *The Atlantic Monthly* was a point of entry for Forten to address the North-South political divide that resulted from the Civil War, as well as competing views of the PRE's purpose and outcomes. Appearing in a widely circulating progressive white newspaper, *Life on the Sea Islands* had the capacity to address white American intellectuals'—and public readers'—anxieties about the outcome of the Civil War. It provided a lens through which to view the war in a way that privileged Black islanders' responses to the political turmoil surrounding the PRE. A reflection of her role as a public educator-intellectual and a moral economist in the context of the Civil War era, *Life on the Sea Islands* illustrates the paradoxical position Forten contends with as she speaks on behalf of the experiment as a government contractor—representing its values—and while also attending to South Carolinian freedmen communities' political liminality and educational deficits in ways that did not engender a self-aggrandizing moral mission as an elite or detached Black leader seeking only to represent the government in a positive light.

Readings demonstrate Forten's use of descriptive passages in *Life on the Sea Islands* that celebrate Black islanders' resilience and creative ingenuity through self-

dress practices, while also contesting popular notions of Black inferiority as a means to promote national reconciliation between northern and southern factions that the war divided. I argue that Forten's status as a contracted Union loyalist shaped her rhetorical strategies as a moral economist, as much as her abolitionist past had shaped her instructional choices. Readings benevolence rhetoric and fundraising strategies that simultaneously promote the PRE and its associated freedmen connects *Life on the Sea Islands* to broader conversations taking place in popular public outlets, particularly *The New York Tribune* and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*—news sources with potential northeastern giving communities as readers. Taken together, this section unpacks why Civil-War era notions of moral economies constituted rhetorics through which several actors sought to frame the Port Royal Experiment and African American island people as a way to further political causes.

Naming and Greeting Practices in *Life on the Sea Islands*

Charlotte Forten joined the first group of missionaries that travelled to the islands off the South Carolinian coast to educate approximately 10,000 freed men and women after Union victories led to the reclamation of the islands. Teachers, missionaries and political commentators regularly referred to free communities as contraband in personal accounts and news editorials. Bondsmen and women were also legally considered to be Union *contraband* and then were eventually referred to as *freedmen*, such that they came to embody the spirit of Union loyalism—both legalistic and celebratory in its representation of the North's value system. Commissioned and non-commissioned soldiers, officers and third-party personnel such as missionary-teachers committed loyalty to the Union Army, its leadership and efforts in different

ways. As Union affiliates, all groups were expected to follow direct orders, to pursue the enemy with vigor and to implement a new, if temporary social dynamic among residents on the abandoned islands that more fully attuned to democratic values of social equality.

News coverage on the Port Royal Experiment captures the public's sentiments as well as the Union's rationale. The PRE's public reception reflects the ways in which the experiment became a symbol of progress and solidarity. In the spring of 1862, the *New York Tribune* ran an editorial that billed the effort as a:

new social experiment, the success of which will redeem this State and reconstruct its fabric on a principle heretofore deemed chimerical or fanatical in practical application, or which at best was reckoned the birthright only of Caucasian races—a principle not indistinctly enunciated in the Declaration of Independence: that all men are created free and equal, and have certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.³⁴⁵

The name given to the project is a sociological demonstration of free labor progressivism, but the term “experiment” also makes concessions to those who backed gradual emancipation and those who touted racial separatism.³⁴⁶ In another way, these concessions are rooted in the “chimerical” and “fanatical” characterizations of integration policies since the term “experiment” inherently acknowledges failure as a possible outcome.³⁴⁷ Politically, the term “experiment” exudes willingness to explore

³⁴⁵ “From South Carolina. Affairs at Port Royal.” *New York Tribune*. 2 April 1862.

³⁴⁶ “From South Carolina. Affairs at Port Royal.” *New York Tribune*. 2 April 1862.

³⁴⁷ “From South Carolina. Affairs at Port Royal.” *New York Tribune*. 2 April 1862.

a democratic-based ideal.³⁴⁸ It also exudes a careful hesitation towards government-based institutional permanence on behalf of racial uplift policies that sought to empower African American populations with freedom and a path to citizenship. The tenuous nature of the experiment's name embodied both a hopefulness characteristic of American values as well as the tenuous nature of the government's record of applying democratic values of equality to people of African descent in America. While the news article strongly advocates for a democratic ideal, the program's name opened a door for Abraham Lincoln's administration to either lay claim to the successes the PRE produced or to deflect the program's failures.

As Paul Alan Cimbala and Randall M. Miller argue in *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front*, scholars know relatively little about the intricacies of the Civil War and its intersectional conflicts as it relates to Black people's experiences. A vast amount of information about the Civil War has been presented through the perspectives of "political and military leadership."³⁴⁹ Moreover, northern white abolitionists have served to embody the crises of republicanism and conflicts among political factions, resulting in expressions of intellectual anxiety about how the elemental beliefs undergirding abolitionist and anti-slavery creeds could be practically implemented through domestic policy, particularly in terms of racial integration in American social life. To attend to the archival gaps relating to Black experiences in

³⁴⁸ "From South Carolina. Affairs at Port Royal." *New York Tribune*. 2 April 1862.

³⁴⁹ Cimbala, Paul Alan and Randall M. Miller, eds. *Union Soldiers and the Northern Home Front: Wartime Experiences, Postwar Adjustments*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002. 484.

the larger American Civil War narrative, Robert Butchart's *Schooling the Freed People* and Heather Williams' *Self-Taught* examine Black peoples' goals to self-educate, to practice modes of civil life (i.e. citizenship) and to self-determine the causes and consequences of their loyalty to American democratic values. I argue that publication histories connected to the educator-activist Charlotte Forten also provide documentary-style insight into war-era Black communities: *their* struggles, *their* beliefs and *their* vision and instrumentality towards making full citizenship a reality for all Black people.

The image of the North that abolitionist writers such as Forten articulated projected a necessary opposition to southerners' loyalty to the Confederacy, slave law and so-called free market principles.³⁵⁰ The legal status of the Port Royal community plays a significant role in the ways in which the project's teaching and governing staff engaged with, and understood, the Islands' freedmen and women. Forten alludes to the contract associated with her participation in the opening paragraphs of *Life on the Sea Islands*. Before the assembly of teachers hailing from Boston, Philadelphia and other cities were "allowed to land," military personnel "set forth fearful penalties," should the cohort evade their oath to the Union.³⁵¹

Each member was obliged to take the following oath of allegiance before being...accepted: I, _____, do solemnly swear that I will support, protect, and defend the Constitution and Government of the

³⁵⁰ Moore, Frank, ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, ETC*. Fourth volume. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1862. 228. [Hathitrust.org](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020703867;view=1up;seq=398).

³⁵¹ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

United States against all enemies, whether domestic or foreign; that I will bear true and faithful allegiance and loyalty to the same, any allegiance, resolution, or law of any State convention to the contrary notwithstanding. And further, that I do this with a full determination and pledge to perform it, without any mental reservation whatever; and further, that I will faithfully perform all the duties which may be required of me by law. So help me God.³⁵²

The federally organized Port Royal Experiment commissioned these teachers and missionaries to increase industry, religion, and education among the contraband community living on the largely abandoned, ransacked, and in some instances, incredibly lucrative islands. The government special agent Edward Pierce, appointed to supervise affairs surrounding the Port Royal Experiment, recruited teachers and missionaries to educate and to provide Christian training for Black islanders during the first half of the 1862. Pierce oversaw “the general superintendence and direction of such persons as might be employed upon the abandoned plantations, with a view to prevent the deterioration of the estates, to secure their best possible cultivation, and the greatest practicable benefit to the laborers upon them.”³⁵³ Pierce commissioned teachers and missionaries holding membership with, or association with societies. composed of “judicious and humane citizens.”³⁵⁴ Societies that sent instructors

³⁵² Moore, Frank, ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, ETC.* Fourth volume. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1862. 228. *Hathitrust.org*. babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020703867;view=1up;seq=398.

³⁵³ Moore, Frank, ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, ETC.* Supplement—First volume. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864. 315. *Hathitrust.org*. babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015023273009;view=1up;seq=357

³⁵⁴ Moore, Frank, ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, ETC.* Supplement—First

include the Educational Commission of Boston, the National Freedmen's Relief Association of New-York and the Port Royal Relief Committee of Philadelphia.³⁵⁵ These associations subsidized the Port Royal Experiment by commissioning and employing teachers and missionaries and by sending donations to the Port Royal Experiment. On February 6, 1862, the Union Army General William T. Sherman issued General Order No. 9, which supported Pierce's efforts to encourage northern benevolent organizations to supply aid and teachers and missionaries for the nation's first real attempt at repositioning freedmen in American society.³⁵⁶ Many historians recognize the experiment as the seminal precursor to the Freedmen's Bureau (1866 to 1872) of the Reconstruction era (ended 1877).

The Union Army's oath of allegiance strongly influenced the teachers and missionaries' relationship with the Sea Islands Army personnel and the freedmen. It dictated the ways in which the Sea Islands' governing body described the experiment in a series of reports issued at its end in 1865 and after. Although self-proclaimed abolitionists constituted a sizable portion of teachers traveling south to teach, as

volume. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864. 315. *Hathitrust.org*.
babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015023273009;view=1up;seq=357.

³⁵⁵ Moore, Frank, Ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, ETC.* Supplement—First volume. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864. 315. *Hathitrust.org*.
babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015023273009;view=1up;seq=357.

³⁵⁶ Moore, Frank, Ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, ETC.* Supplement—First volume. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1864. 315. *Hathitrust.org*.
babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015023273009;view=1up;seq=357.

Ronald Butchart in *Schooling the Freed People* contends, not all teachers and missionaries traveling south identified as abolitionists, nor were they particularly sympathetic to Black people's plight—a point extended to Union personnel, including soldiers. As Forten reports, the freed people were taunted, sneered at and mistreated by the soldiers enlisted to protect them. On this matter, she writes: "One's indignation increases against those who, North as well as South, taunt the colored race with inferiority while they themselves use every means in their power to crush and degrade them."³⁵⁷

Even though aspects of ethnographic-style reports published to describe the Port Royal Experiment often frame northern Union personnel as superior to, and as saviors of the freedmen, Forten's and Union officials' reports also helped to dismantle widely-held notions of freedmen's inferiority in relationship to so-called civilized society. Such a notion had been implied in the Union's use of the term, "contraband" as a legal title. Forten and Edward Pierce, the author of *The Negroes at Port Royal: Report of E. L. Pierce, Government Agent, to the Hon. Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury* contested the propriety of the term "contraband."³⁵⁸ The word contraband, in its legal meaning within the context of the Port Royal Experiment, largely referred to acquisitions of war, including southern fugitive slaves who had sought out the Union Army, and abandoned slaves on the Islands. Forten, for example,

³⁵⁷ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands. The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁵⁸ Edward Pierce published several iterations of his compiled reports on the Port Royal Experiment during the span of his service as a government special agent. His review of the project appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1863. The US Department of Education also published his work in 1865.

put the word “contrabands” in quotation marks in the first paragraph of *Life of the Sea Islands*, a typographical signifier that threw suspicion upon the term and its impact on public’s perceptions about freedmen.³⁵⁹ She shunned the term from that point forward, proceeding with the terms *freedmen* and *freed people* instead. Forten’s naming practices implicitly reject the legal identity imposed upon the Black islanders, while also taking a moral stance on acknowledging the islanders’ identity transformation through the Port Royal Experiment.

Charlotte Forten’s *Life on the Sea Islands* sought to preserve Black islanders’ previous cultural practices as a means to represent the consistency of their own moral decorum with that which the PRE mission sought to impose upon them. In doing so, Forten tackles potential preconceived notions among readers concerning former slaves’ behavioral cultures.

These people are exceedingly polite in their manner towards each other, each new arrival bowing, scraping his feet, and shaking hands with the others, while there are constant greetings, such as, “Huddy? How's yer lady?” (“How d’ ye do? How’s your wife?”) The hand-shaking is performed with the greatest possible solemnity. There is never the faintest shadow of a smile on anybody's face during this performance. The children, too, are taught to be very polite to their elders, and it is the rarest thing to hear a disrespectful word from a child to his parent, or to any grown person. They have really what the New-Englanders call “beautiful manners.”

In the passage, Forten comments on a code of respect between Black islanders across age groups that undermines the notion that vernacular dialect is a signifier for moral or intellectual degradation. Slave dialect had regularly been used in anti-abolition

³⁵⁹ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

literature in the antebellum and Civil War era as means to construe a sense of racial difference and intellectual disparities between southern slaves and northern white populations. By arranging Black southern dialect as a mode of describing “beautiful manners” that resembles New-England greeting practices, Forten engages in rhetorical sameness that promotes regional consolidation and mutual respect. Because Black islanders’ dialect is positioned in the middle of a passage about the formalities of Black southern mannerisms, it is a mode of evidence rather than mockery to support the notion that they are well-mannered people. Such a move could appeal to *The Atlantic Monthly*’s northern reading base to see reflections of their own habits in forms of Black cultural agency.

Given in multiple forms that are both physical and oral, Black islanders’ intra-communal greeting practices reflect a cultural “performance” that hints at self-determined modes of resistance to the past cultural dynamics that were prevalent in slavery. The islanders are no doubt aware of the observing groups of predominately white missionaries that would have likely been in frequent proximity to Forten. That is, readers can assume that Forten’s presence among Black islanders is indicative of a frequent or regular *collective* presence of missionaries and military personnel who are documenting or observing the islanders’ habits. Forten’s emphasis on performative greetings less likely intends to draw attention to a disingenuous display of moral practices and more likely seeks to demonstrate modes of community and racial solidarity practices that bind individuals living and working in public spaces as empowered individuals.

Black performances in greeting practices that include bowing, foot movement, hand-shaking and earnest facial expressions illustrate an awareness of the gravity of

change that had befallen the Black islanders through the advent of freedom and the Port Royal Experiment on their home front. In another way, the performance of “solemnity” is a performance of a resistance to the past modes of interaction between them as enslaved people. Previous interactions would have been mediated by the control of white actors connected to the system of slavery. Forten’s writing practices demonstrate her ability to portray morality and decorum as important aspects of an education and wage-labor government program. The commentary on moral agency embedded in this scene would have demonstrated for white *Atlantic Monthly* readers Forten’s own awareness of the social currencies of community wellbeing that were key to individuals thriving in a democracy.

While Forten highlights moral mannerisms among former slaves in a way that discredits notions of Black people’s moral inferiority and suggests commonalities between Black islanders and northern *Atlantic Monthly* readers, she likewise implicitly admonishes white soldiers’ lack of moral leadership and the real white-to-white economic exchanges that ignore the financial claims that the Black islanders have to the island’s material contraband. According to Forten, “the masters, in their hasty flight, from the islands, left nearly all their furniture” and some clothing even though “much of it was destroyed or taken by the soldiers who came first, and what they left was removed by the people to their own houses.”³⁶⁰ Thus, according to Forten’s narrative, the initial claims to material byproducts of slavery had seemingly gone to military personnel even as plantation owners would have accumulated money and other possessions at least, in part, through coercive slave labor. Forten contends

³⁶⁰ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands. The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

that the freed people “certainly...have the best right to it” and that the missionaries “made up our minds to dispense with all luxuries and even many conveniences.”³⁶¹

Forten’s commentary draws a sharp moral contrast between military personnel and teaching personnel. She addresses the soldiers’ lack of moral respect for the rightful distribution of wealth and property abandoned by fleeing plantation owners. However, in the context of the PRE contractual agreement, which demanded all personnel members’ loyalty to Union Army directives “without any mental reservation whatever” on the basis of “duties which may be required...by law,” Union soldiers may have very well have sought to follow orders for a number of strategic purposes.³⁶² This may have included gathering or destroying small weapons, artillery and other goods deemed essential for the army’s use. Nonetheless, Forten’s implicit rebuke reflects an abolitionist value-system that seeks to bring justice to people unduly oppressed within the institution of slavery. In connection to the ways material goods had been distributed among people across Army status and class on the island, Forten addresses the dire consequences of Black islanders’ lack of access to proper clothing prior to the PRE.

Forten’s use of anecdotes in *Life on the Sea Islands* that bring attention to clothing needs and other forms of material need among freed people further rebukes notions of racial superiority and insensitivity towards Black islanders’ right to claim

³⁶¹ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁶² Moore, Frank, Ed. *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events with Documents, Narratives, Illustrative Incidents, Poetry, ETC*. Fourth volume. New York: G. P. Putnam, 1862, 228. *Hathitrust.org*. babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015020703867;view=1up;seq=398.

abandoned property and household materials on the island. The soldiers' immoral sense of right to property is further accentuated through images of Black islanders who were supplied with improper clothing while enslaved and by those who, on the other hand, demonstrate creative re-use of the remaining abandoned property. Black islanders' self-dress practices acknowledge their own sense of worth even as it demonstrates the dangers associated with slave apparel guidelines enforced by former slave masters. Celia, a cripple former slave with a "kind, sympathizing face" performs home visits to the sick and troubled living on one of the smaller plantations among the islands. Forten celebrates Celia as a stand-out instance of intra-communal solidarity. Because Celia's "master...was too mean" to provide proper clothing for protection from the elements, "her feet and legs" became "so badly frozen that they required amputation."³⁶³ Nonetheless, Celia travels to homes where "her services were always the most acceptable."³⁶⁴ Celia is a symbol for the resiliency of the Black islanders and, more broadly, southern bondspeople who suffer physical and emotional trauma in slavery. Celia also represents silences in parts of the *Life on the Sea Islands* narrative and, more broadly, the Union Army's documentary histories. Celia's "services" are not shared in detail, though they might include spiritual leadership, ministry or counseling, among others. According to Trouillot in *Silencing the Past*, the positivist position:

still inform[s] the public's sense of history in most of Europe and North America: the role of the historian is to reveal the past, to discover or, at

³⁶³ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁶⁴ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

least, approximate the truth. Within that viewpoint, power is unproblematic, irrelevant to the construction of the narrative as such. At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won.³⁶⁵

Even though the islanders have nominal freedom, Forten and the military personnel represent the winning side. Forten is further empowered as the author of the narrative to document island people. Forten's characterizations of island people potentially point to the silences that she may practice as author in refusing to share more details about the domestic spheres in which people like Celia fluidly move; or Celia abstained from elaborating on the details of her mobility. Rhetorically avoiding an absolutist form of describing Black islanders, Forten also illustrates the ways in which freed people engage in counter-protest in the form of self-dress and cultural expression by way of (re)claiming material property abandoned by former plantation owners.

Forten contrasts the physical hardship associated with enslaved people's experiences on the island with the creativity and pride associated with islanders' self-fashioned dress practices in freedom. In one example, the "jubilant" Scipio—also called by a name likely taken from his previous master, Doctor Crofts—reclaims decorative household amenities in a way that hints at the skill and craftsmanship associated with clothes making and apparel design among the Black islanders.³⁶⁶

A very queer-looking old man came into the store one day. He was dressed in a complete suit of brilliant Brussels carpeting. Probably it had been taken from his master's house after the "gun-shoot"; but he

³⁶⁵ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power in the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995. 5.

³⁶⁶ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

looked so very dignified that we did not like to question him about it.³⁶⁷

In another scene, Forten remarks upon the frequency with which marriage ceremonies take place, “which was formerly scarcely known among them.”³⁶⁸ In doing so, she addresses the ways Black women’s self-dress practices defy their former class status and legal access to state-sanctioned conjugal unions.

...there were six couples married. Some of the dresses were unique. One was particularly fine, --doubtless a cast-off dress of the bride’s former mistress. The silk and lace, ribbons, feathers and flowers, were in a rather faded and decayed condition. But, comical as the costumes were, we were not disposed to laugh at them. We were too glad to see the poor creatures trying to lead right and virtuous lives.³⁶⁹

In these scenes, Forten suggests Black men and women claim possession of material goods that formerly signified the master class’s economic, social and legal difference. Before slavery’s demise on the islands, fine Belgium carpets featured in plantation homes and intricate dresses worn by members of the upper-class would serve as lines of demarcation between the Black bondspeople who worked under the duress of enslavement and the white and free islanders who demonstrated financial excess through their aesthetic presentation. Moreover, the Black islanders’ self-dress practices signaled a larger transformation among Black people’s access to legal unions and intra-communal kinship ceremonies such as marriage.

³⁶⁷ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁶⁸ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁶⁹ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

Perhaps more importantly, Forten's anecdotes in *Life on the Sea Islands* that describe Celia's, Scipio's and the new brides' roles in the new free PRE-based society make visible the creative, intellectual ingenuity among oppressed Black islanders. It brings into focus the larger significance of aesthetic and practical roles connected to manual labor classes in the former slave society. Stories about fugitive and PRE freed people's clothing needs, such as Celia's, were commonplace representations disseminated in northern progressive newspapers that hoped to garner northern financial and material support. Stories such as Celia's were in many ways the basis of benevolence cultures connected to the Civil War. This includes markets of pecuniary giving that benevolence organizations formed and the rhetorics that a variety of actors employed to support such markets. But when viewing Celia, Scipio and other personalities Forten remarks upon, their societal roles also emerge as core processes of societal (trans)formation that the war and the PRE demanded of the Black islanders, PRE personnel and reading publics.

Building on Antonio Gramsci's understanding of intellectuals in society, intellectual roles include entrepreneurship, religious leadership, administration and individual ecclesiastics. As a missionary-educator for the PRE and bonded by contract to its religious and military ideology, Forten served as an ecclesiastic. Members of the freed communities also embody professional roles including Scipio, Celia and other Black island people whose duties and talents contributed to society before and after slavery is abolished. According to Gramsci's "The Formation of the Intellectuals," part of *Prison Notebooks*, all social groups that perform "essential functions" in societies based on "economic production" give rise to "one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only

in the economic but also in the social and political fields.”³⁷⁰ Rejecting an “idealist philosophy” that privileges the notion that individual categories of intellectuals function autonomously, Gramsci argues for a method of classifying intellectuals by way of parsing “the ensemble of the system of relations in which [intellectual] activities...have their place within the general complex of social relations.”³⁷¹ Gramsci identifies the distinction between the “intellectual elaboration or...muscular-nervous efforts” of professional activities such that “nonintellectuals do not exist.”³⁷² Gramsci’s taxonomies for intellectuals suggest that “even...the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms” do not necessarily create classes of intellectuals. In the context of Forten’s articulation of a stratum of professional classes among Black islanders by way of anecdotal commentary on Black islanders’ personalities and habits, I add: the social disruption and political transformations that the Civil War and the Port Royal Experiment perpetrated made apparent to *The Atlantic Monthly* readers *already-existing* professional respectability that was nurtured and honed through intra-communal ties and that was articulated through Forten’s intellectual role.

³⁷⁰ Gramsci, Antonio. “The Formation of the Intellectuals.” *An Anthology of Western Marxism: From Lukacs and Gramsci to Socialist-Feminism*. Ed. Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 113.

³⁷¹ Gramsci, Antonio. “The Formation of the Intellectuals.” *An Anthology of Western Marxism: From Lukacs and Gramsci to Socialist-Feminism*. Ed. Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 114-5.

³⁷² Gramsci, Antonio. “The Formation of the Intellectuals.” *An Anthology of Western Marxism: From Lukacs and Gramsci to Socialist-Feminism*. Ed. Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. 115.

Character portraits about Black islanders such as Celia and Scipio represent the professional respectability, and thus, the intellectual roles Black islanders occupy in *Life on the Sea Islands*. Celia's unnamed but widely appreciated "services" not only demonstrate enigmatic gaps in information about Black islanders in *Life on the Sea Islands*.³⁷³ She also represents a valuable practice among islanders that serves needs. Because Forten announces that Celia's "services were always the most acceptable," Celia's practice, even as it remains unnamed, is portrayed in a respectable light.³⁷⁴ Scipio's "complete suit of brilliant Brussels carpeting," which Forten's cohort thinks to be "so very dignified that we did not like to question him about it" most certainly required the professional capacities of a seamstress or tailor capable of transforming stiff, woolen fabric into a wearable garment.³⁷⁵ Take as another example, the Black islander and shop assistant to Mr. H, a white shop runner on the islands, Cupid:

Cupid was his most valuable assistant. Gay handkerchiefs for turbans, pots and kettles, and molasses, were principally in demand, especially the last. It was necessary to keep the molasses-barrel in the yard, where Cupid presided over it, and harangued and scolded the eager, noisy crowd, collected around, to his heart's content.³⁷⁶

Cupid is not only a leader among his people and a source of humor for Forten and other missionary-teachers on the island, he represents an administrative role in business that the Black islanders recognize and respect.

³⁷³ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁷⁴ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁷⁵ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

³⁷⁶ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands*. *The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

In these examples, men and women like Cupid occupy business and artistic functions in society that bring attention to existing professional skill sets among Black formerly enslaved people in ways that lend respectability to Black islanders despite their previous condition as slaves and despite their legal classification as contraband. While Forten as author of *Life on the Sea Islands* rhetorically and explicitly articulates the respect teaching personnel have for their roles, it is also apparent that their skills were already respected among Black islanders. In northern news outlets, the people and moral stances connected to the Port Royal Experiment served as a basis for benevolence messages. The latter sought to support causes and vulnerable populations connected to the Civil War. These messages also sought to build sympathy and financial giving platforms for fugitives, new-freed slaves and benevolence organizations. This system hoped to alleviate vulnerable populations' needs such as the need for clothing. As such, benevolence-messaging practices indicated the ways in which moral acts and notions of morality were part of money-raising campaigns. These practices also brought to bear the role sociological and ethnographic-style reporting like Forten's *Life on the Sea Islands* served to further benevolence fundraising for PRE and fugitive Black populations.

Moral economies: Benevolence Messages and Fundraising Connected to the Coverage of the Port Royal Experiment in Progressive News Outlets

The movement of teachers to southern states helped to sustain a substantial branch of benevolence fundraising during the Port Royal Experiment. Teachers' exodus to the South energized multiple markets. It energized advocates for slavery's demise and advocates for Black upward mobility. It represented a tangible monetary

market for commerce in transportation, food and boarding services and publicly circulated literature. For advocates, especially, this group represented a base on which to construct benevolence messages aimed at northern giving communities. Such fundraising messages often merged Christian values and itinerant missionary ethics with racial justice beliefs to support the idea that donating to displaced and vulnerable freedmen and women was a significant public exercise of one's personal belief system. Still, fundraising messages had the potential to further contribute to social hierarchies among benevolence or giving communities and the Black communities who were in need.

Problematically, rhetorical messages in media that targeted predominately-white giving communities in the Northeast still had the potential to knowingly or unintentionally reiterate expressions of social and moral white dominance that were widely practiced prior to the Civil War. This was chiefly because rhetorics of benevolence positioned white donors and Black freedmen on a stratum of need with donors occupying positions of superior moral and financial ability while freedmen were shown to be incapable of self-sufficiency. The white press' use of the Port Royal Experiment as a case study or precedent for fundraising among white northern giving communities reflects the ways in which benevolence rhetorics could fail to negate the historical belief systems that situated Black people as morally and intellectually inferior and white people as morally and intellectually superior. Popular belief systems valued representations of white people as self-sufficient bodies, whereas fugitive, freed or enslaved Black people were represented as having extremely deficient bodies.

Likewise, rhetorical messages could overestimate the utility of certain types of activism on behalf of abolition and equal justice for Black people in America. In

Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of Slave Labor Economy,

Julia Holcomb argues:

Free produce was the first consumer movement to transcend the boundaries of nation, gender, and race in an effort by reformers to change the conditions of production. Even when they acted locally, supporters embraced a global vision, mobilizing the boycott as a powerful material force that could transform the transatlantic marketplace. . . .Not every abolitionist abstained from slave-labor goods, but abstention attracted every kind of abolitionist: conservative and radical, Quaker and non-Quaker, male and female, white and black.³⁷⁷

In one telling example, Holcomb points to editor of *The Liberator* William Lloyd Garrison's initial support and eventual reproach of the movement. After the free produce movement had run its course for about thirty years, Garrison had accused supporters of ultimately "giv[ing] to an inch the importance of a mile."³⁷⁸ Holcomb's study gestures at the limited historical research on the free produce movements; by extension, I add, it also gestures at limited studies on the marketplaces based on benevolence strategies and rhetorics connected to Black political liminality derived out of, and situated in the Civil War era, particularly concerning Black people connected to the Port Royal Experiment.

The Port Royal Experiment was cited in the newspaper *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* and other print forms such as government reports because it helped

³⁷⁷ Holcomb, Julia. *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of Slave Labor Economy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016. 3-4.

³⁷⁸ Holcomb, Julia. *Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of Slave Labor Economy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016. 4.

to represent America's democratic values, as well as its political and legal attitudes towards formerly enslaved communities. The PRE provided a model for American benevolence. Rhetorics of benevolence that formed on the basis of the PRE and regional centers where fugitive slaves took up residence had the potential to be embraced by individuals, communities and organizations in the Northeast to further advocate for racial justice. The PRE provided opportunities for northern communities to be active in the dissolution of southern slavery and slavery's institutional resonances in social life even from a distance. A report-styled article entitled, "Help the Contraband" brings to bear the dire issues related to Black fugitives' and freed peoples' lack of proper clothing. It reflects the rhetoric of benevolence that *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* circulated:

In ministering to the sufferings incident to this time of war, our anti-slavery friends should not overlook the contrabands who come under government protection. ... letters have been received in this city (Philadelphia) appealing for aid, in the way of clothing, etc. At Washington, says H. Hamlin (cousin of the Vice-President), President of the Association there, the number [of contraband] 'has increased to 1,500 nearly double the number at any previous time.' Three hundred arrived in one day 'half naked and exhausted by a long journey. Our stock of clothing is *wholly used up* and we are in immediate and most pressing want for more.' 'For the present, the common thin clothing for working women will do very well. We have also a large number of children. We also need men's clothing, such as has been sent to Port Royal and other Southern places.'

The PRE provided the infrastructure and belief system through which many Americans could relate to the values of American democracy and hone their own moral stance on abolition policies at the governmental level. Press outlets such as *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The National Anti-Slavery Monthly* provided for activists and

benevolent organizations communities of readers and opportunities for *financial* engagement as a means of *moral* support.

The economics of morality, during and after the span of the PRE, were often rooted in public speakers' ability to efficiently perform two duties. They needed to prompt feelings of benevolence that encouraged monetary and material donations. And they needed to meet the widely-reported needs of recently freed and still-enslaved peoples of African descent in the U.S. The *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, for example, directly cites readers as participants in uplift projects connected to vulnerable fugitives and freed people: "There is a great need of dresses, plain stuff. Would it not be less expensive to appeal to the public for second-hand clothing?"³⁷⁹ The currency of connection between benevolent actors, sociological reporting and active engagement sought to entice others to invest in the social and pecuniary currencies of morality as a means to support democratic ideals, African-American liberation from slavery and Black upward mobility to varying degrees.

Some benevolent actors often considered the white northeastern citizenry as a principle population that had the potential to invest in social and pecuniary markets of morality, particularly through requests for freedmen's donations. Such appeals appeared in newspapers such as *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*. For anti-slavery communities, providing material dress for fugitive and recently-freed slaves was an act of benevolence because it brought attention to a willful choice to help denizen parties, in addition to, or perhaps instead of, white citizens who also suffered from

³⁷⁹ "Help the Contraband." *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. 4 October 1862.

wartime conflict. In the same month that Forten arrived at the South Carolina coast to launch her teaching role there, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* made such a case:

Whilst it is very proper that anti-slavery people should aid other classes of sufferers from this war, yet knowing that while others have nearly the entire community to sympathize with them, the contrabands' friends may be said to be few and far between—it becomes the friends of the colored people not to overlook them in this time of trial and suffering.³⁸⁰

This memo brings attention to the corporeal embodiment of political liminality by concentrating on the literal wardrobe that would outfit a mobile segment of the American populace. Forten's attention to South Carolinian freemen's self-fashioning practices represented freedmen's self-determined embodiment of a willingness to assert creative ingenuity in the face of clotheslessness or situations of physical lack. I argue these moments in Forten's *Life on the Sea Islands* reflect Black islanders' practices in resistance as well as a hoped-for citizenship. Moreover, pairing these scenes with the discourse of moral benevolence grounds *Life on the Sea Islands* in broader conversations about freedmen's empowerment through the PRE when clotheslessness was a typical representational rendering of freedmen's neediness.

Black Women Intellectuals and Newspaper Culture in the Civil War Era

Black teachers like Charlotte Forten, Mary Still and Julia Collins were intellectuals of wartime public discourse. Forten, who had been active in the antebellum abolition and anti-slavery movements, found a home in war-related

³⁸⁰ "Help the Contraband." *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. 4 October 1862.

organizational activities and government agencies, including the Treasury department, where she served as a clerk, following her Port Royal commission. She joined Still and Collins as teachers who voiced their educational philosophies in various textual forms including personal narratives, essays, political pamphlets and novels. Despite the limited known literature connected to Mary Still and Julia Collins, their extant writing illuminates their philosophies towards Black educational uplift. It provides valuable insight into the ways Black women connected to the A.M.E. Church's *The Christian Recorder's* approach to meta-conversations about Black education in America during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. *The Curse of Caste* reinforces the idea that Black communities desire self-representation. In this way, Collins' work of fiction counters contemporaneous stereotypes about Black people in the popular media. *The Curse of Caste* might have very well inspired in African American readers a sense of racial pride and, for those in the North, regional pride. Still's and Collins' news literature also shows that Black women writers practiced rhetorical traditions employed by speakers and writers that preceded them. In doing so, they encouraged forms of women-centered political expression, while also launching their own ideas into mainstream forums for Black religious and secular thought. *The Christian Recorder* continues to be a site, whereby scholars can analyze Black philosophies for moral living and identify formation in America.

Charlotte Forten's teaching narrative rejects the notion that South Carolinian islanders reflected a larger crisis that would come should the Union win and successfully release southern slaves. In the editorial note introducing *Life on the Sea Islands*, Forten's narrative is described as "graceful and picturesque," a description belying the conditions in which Forten lived and worked. It also belies the tensions

that arose between the northern Union personnel and the freedmen population.³⁸¹ From the perspective of some white northerners, Union officials and some Black abolitionists such as Forten, in the years between 1862 and 1865, the freedmen's fortitude in moral discipline and work ethic held enormous sway among white Americans as to how the Port Royal freedmen represented the larger circumstances that would stem from complete emancipation of enslaved people in the South. Importantly, the Sea Island freedmen's own cultural traditions demonstrated their capacity to assert loyalty to their own individual and collective identities, even as they practiced social decorum of Black loyalty to the Union cause as PRE participants. Practices in moral mannerisms and self-dress collectively raised among freed people indicated the ways in which they retained and asserted cultural identity both in defiance, and in celebration, of the Union Army's presence at the Sea Islands. *The Atlantic Monthly* provided an intellectual platform by which Forten could demonstrate the value of South Carolinian freed people.

Other Black men and women who were educators engaged in political itinerancy for the Union cause. Mary S. Peake joined the American Missionary Association as a teaching-missionary to the South. Novelist and poet Frances E. W. Harper traveled to canvass for Black rights while teaching in a freedmen's school in the Upper South. Upon failing to organize a Black soldiers regiment in Ohio, the Colored Conventions delegate and public official John Mercer Langston eventually became one of most well-known traveling agents for the Freedmen's Bureau and, by extension, the Johnson administration's Reconstruction policy. Hundreds of southern

³⁸¹ Forten, Charlotte. *Life on the Sea Islands. The Atlantic Monthly*. May 1864.

teachers and community leaders organized schools and campaigned for Black suffrage and social equality. Many ethnographic, statistical and political reports about freedmen and Black teaching appeared in newspapers during the 1860s. These speakers shared visions for live mixed-sex and mixed-race audiences and reading publics with messages that campaigned for Black educational and civil justice. Regularly capturing their work for freedmen's education in print, Black intellectuals circulated freed people's voices, beliefs and accomplishments apart from, and in relation to, their own passion for democratic and moral ideals.

This chapter makes apparent the ways the role of the educator of free and enslaved African Americans offered Black women such as Mary Still, Julia Collins and Charlotte Forten opportunities to directly impact Black educational uplift and the reception of Black cultural ingenuity. Their pursuit of social, political and economic equality for Black people placed them in positions of power and authority at varying degrees. Nonetheless, through the framework of moral economies that I conceptualize throughout this chapter, African American women-educator's literature importantly reflects commonalities among Black intellectuals who spoke out for Black empowerment in the decade encompassing the Civil War. They sought to represent Black life through real and imagined situations, hoping to shape moral values that would persuade local, national and international communities to promote and directly engage in intellectual and organizational activities that moved Black Americans across social classes closer to equal treatment and equal opportunity. Women like Charlotte Forten, Mary Still and Julia Collins are important to our understanding of the nexus of race, education and literary production in the nineteenth century. In the thicket of collaborative activism as they were, their individual contributions helped to chart

Black women's educational advocacy and their strategies to devise platforms for Black justice.

Chapter 5

“AS THE TRUE GUARDIANS OF OUR INTERESTS”: THE RISE OF BLACK DEMOGRAPHY AND THE 1843 NATIONAL COLORED CONVENTION

“...With the most sympathizing and heartfelt commiseration, [we] show our sense of obligation as the true guardians of our interests, by giving wholesome advice and good counsel.” -First Annual Convention of the People of Color, 1831

“Figures cannot be charged with fanaticism. Like everlasting hills, they give cold, silent evidence, unmoved by the clouds and shadows of whatever present may surround them. Let us see what they say of the slaves of the South, and of the free blacks of the North.” -James McCune Smith in the *New York Tribune*, 1844

In 1844, James McCune Smith effectively defied a developing American political institution: the Bureau of the Census. John Stauffer describes Smith as a lover of words and “a pioneer in the use of statistics to combat pseudoscientific theories of racial inferiority”—a combination that propelled Smith’s analyses of discriminatory perspectives on race to one of the foremost voices in American news. An exceptional statistician and a dedicated New York Colored Conventions delegate, Horace Greely’s *New York Tribune* published Smith’s scathing review that challenged the accuracy of the 1840 federal census; he drew attention to blatant errors in census documents and a culture of “fanaticism” that littered ensuing census analyses and debates in newspapers and at legislative meetings and community forums.³⁸² Critiquing white politicians’

³⁸² “Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans.” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. 8 February 1844.

and slaveholders' political positions, Smith argued that their analyses were without merit. They championed Southern slavery's continuation and widespread socio-political blockades that either revoked or codified the denial of free Black people's civil rights in the north and the west. David Jenkins, a Columbus, Ohio-based Colored Conventions delegate and *Palladium of Liberty* editor, joined a similar crusade to dismantle Black codes during the 1840s.

In comparison to James McCune Smith, David Jenkins was a far less popular but an equally dedicated political agitator. The editor's tenacious abolitionist spirit and knowledge of Black Ohioans' experiences drove Jenkins' short-lived publication to occupy an important intellectual gap that the state's foremost white news periodicals, the *Ohio State Journal* and the *Ohio Statesman*, had largely neglected during *Palladium of Liberty*'s 11-month run, which lasted between late December 1843 and November 1844.³⁸³ Emboldened by "members of the black middle class [who] formed temperance and moral reform societies," "reported their activities in the pages of *Palladium*" and bought subscriptions, he believed sociological reports about Black Americans helped to undermine ideas about Black inferiority and to undermine state legislative measures that codified discrimination.³⁸⁴ Such measures promoted white Americans' socio-economic potential while reinforcing Black codes. Smith and Jenkins were among a crucial cohort of Colored Convention leaders engaged in

³⁸³ Hollins, Charles Dennis, *A Black Voice of Antebellum Ohio: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Palladium of Liberty, 1843-1844*. Ann Arbor: Ohio University Press, 1978. Unpublished dissertation. 87.

³⁸⁴ Hollins, 146.

performing administrative duties of self-governance, despite feverish political obstructionism and the scarcity of skill sets in demography among fellow delegates. The activists' provocations reflect two fundamental goals of delegate roles heralded in the opening address of the 1843 National Colored Convention of Colored Citizens: "the diffusion of truth, and...the elevation of our own people."³⁸⁵

This study critically reads Black leaders' attempts to institutionalize demography and subsequent petition exercises as education-based activism. This chapter examines notions of leadership among the Black elite in the North and the West to articulate diverse practices in the Black protest tradition in antebellum America. In *Black Identity and Black Protest*, Patrick Rael examines the Black public protest tradition of the antebellum era by situating spokespeople as elite figures active in cultures of Black identity formation in relation to dominant modes of power and authority in antebellum America. To unpack notions of representation among the Black northern elite, Rael does not present a history of "institutions or the movements for black equality and the abolition of slavery but of African American identity and social structure in the North" that produced protest thought.³⁸⁶ However, institutionalized community study and subsequent activism helped to train Black

³⁸⁵ National Convention of Colored Citizens (1843: Buffalo, NY), "Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens; Held at Buffalo; on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1843; for the purpose of considering their moral and political condition as American citizens," *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/278.

³⁸⁶ Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. 4.

convention delegates as representatives and helped to educate public audiences, including audiences who attended conventions and reading publics who encountered convention-sponsored reports on the condition of Black communities in various genres of literary production. Convention delegations' interest in demography reflected their engagement in cultures of democratized knowledge among free Blacks and multi-racial reading publics.

As a greater history of the nineteenth-century Colored Conventions movement (1830-1900)³⁸⁷ becomes available through print and digital channels, it behooves us to critically seat understudied practices in American demography within two bodies: the Black political networks through which demographic records about Black life circulated and the white-led political debates that reflect the authority demography had in antebellum America's socio-economic outlook and governing infrastructure. Notable examples of the former, reports embedded in the proceedings of the 1843 national convention at Buffalo challenged contemporaneous claims about African Americans' dwindling industrial and social value in an age of rapidly developing industrialization, social mobility and public engagement in the U.S. and abroad. The 1843 convention leadership embraced enumeration practices to validate their position as vocal representatives. Its numerical and sociological reports served to debunk

³⁸⁷ The Colored Conventions Project, for which I have served in leadership positions, offers a digital archive capturing the nineteenth-century Colored Conventions movement, 1830-1900. In addition to housing convention minutes, *ColoredConventions.org* makes available a growing corpus of tables visualizing convention census data and metadata that illuminates a diversity of labor enterprises, monetary and real estate holdings, mobility patterns and populations among free Blacks in the northeast and the emerging "west."

public perceptions that “suppose[d] [Colored Convention leaders] indifferent to the state of things by which they [were] surrounded, and that they [made] little or no effort for their relief,” as the Philadelphian commentator Joseph Willson posited.³⁸⁸

While antebellum national Colored Conventions failed to establish a successful, comprehensive demography system, their assessment processes nevertheless reveal collective intent to rise as “true guardians” through community reporting, assessment and advocacy.³⁸⁹ The term demography systems refers to the organizational processes through which delegates studied the communities they represented and then produced reports describing their findings and subsequent political evaluations concerning the condition of Black people in America. This chapter traces the organizational politics connected to Colored Convention demography leading up to the 1843 National Colored Convention, as well as the challenges that weakened convention reporting. A critical survey of convention demography captures a development of rhetorics of socio-political guardianship, which brokered real and imagined relationships between Black leaders, participating communities and public spectators. Self-reporting processes anchored activist-delegates’ notions of leadership, allowing them to learn the culture and capacities of Black communities, including a diversity of labor enterprises, organizations, monetary and real estate holdings, mobility patterns and populations among free Blacks in the

³⁸⁸ Willson, Joseph. *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Willson’s Sketches of Black Upper-Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia*. Ed. Julie Winch. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. 102.

³⁸⁹ Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831: Philadelphia, PA), *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/72.

Northeast and the emerging “West.” Namely, convention demography attempted to debunk the idea that people of African descent and African Americans were inherently inferior to white Americans. Furthermore, I argue that individual delegates such as James McCune Smith and David Jenkins implemented notions of guardianship through civic engagement in the Northeast and the emerging West. Smith’s and Jenkins’ activist careers reflect the ways notions of guardianship developed at the nexus between an ethos of convention demography and activism in political spaces.

Convention demography and its print formats are educational materials through which Black convention leaders, delegates and associated publics learned about Black life in America. I recognize Colored Conventions as intellectual forebears to the political thought associated with Black women writers examined throughout this dissertation. Josephine Brown, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray, Mary Still and Charlotte Forten were the daughters and granddaughters of political leaders who served as delegates for antebellum Colored Conventions. Julia C. Collins’ cultural essays and novel *The Curse of Caste* appeared in *The Christian Recorder*, a newspaper that the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME Church) produced. The AME Church was a significant organizational foundation for early Colored Conventions, and several AME Churches hosted antebellum Colored Conventions. Early Black conventions’ production of census-style reports and sociological reports constituted a hybrid form of political literature that set the stage for later Black educational philosophers. In many ways, Black convention reports may be read as a type of curriculum of Black protest cultures and ideals. Given convention delegates’ use of numerical and narrative formats to describe and comment on Black American populations and culture, the reports mediate the most popular antebellum forms of

Black biographical writing: the slave ledger and the slave narrative. As learning materials, these documents helped clarify the ways in which Black leaders understood notions of socio-political guardianship, or acts of representing Black communities.

Civic engagement was a key part of the ways in which Colored Conventions sustained racial uplift agendas. In *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*, social scientist William Banks argues that early Black congressional-style conventions reflect a passionate performance in democratic ideals often remembered for the oratorical genius of men, such as Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet, whose resiliency contributed to gains in civil justice for Black people.³⁹⁰ Banks argues that “because no other venues were available, the conventions usually took on the air of tournaments, where orators competed with one another to enhance their reputations among their peers.”³⁹¹ Anthony Daniel Perez and Charles Hirshman suggest, “Discourses about place can effectively produce experiences of space, and that which African American literature does with a lucidity and richness is make place into a theatre of deliberation.”³⁹² John Ernest, in pursuing the idea of “the

³⁹⁰ Banks, William. *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998. 17.

³⁹¹ Banks, William. *Black Intellectuals: Race and Responsibility in American Life*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998. 17.

³⁹² Perez, Anthony Daniel and Charles Hirschman. “The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the US Population: Emerging American Identities.” *Population Development Review* 35.1 (2009). 2.

theatre of history” in the context of “the considerable illusions of white Americans,” argues that nineteenth-century

African American historical writing... would need to identify the terms of its own existence—... defining the African American community both with and against the terms used by white Americans by which African Americans found themselves with common experiences set off from but fundamental to the white national story.³⁹³

When we read Black convention minutes as cultural documents that mediate political “necessity and possibility,” then antebellum Colored Convention minutes and associated petitions, pamphlets, and news articles are textual sites that host Black leaders’ political ideals *and* practice towards community leadership, particularly through the framework of guardianship.³⁹⁴ Smith articulated this, proclaiming that “freedom has not made [free Blacks insane]; it has strengthened our minds by throwing us upon our own resources, and has bound us to American institutions with a tenacity which nothing but death can overcome.”³⁹⁵

An ethos of Black leadership revolving around concepts of guardianship is reflected in one of the most understudied textual corpora connected to antebellum Colored Convention cultures—census-style and sociological reports produced in connection to Colored Conventions. The roles associated with convention delegate

³⁹³ Ernest, John. *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1784-1861*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004. 40.

³⁹⁴ Madera, Judith. *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth Century African American Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. 2.

³⁹⁵ Smith, James McCune. “Freedom and Slavery for Afric-Americans.” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. 8 February 1844. (Reprinted from *New York Tribune*.)

positions included accumulating knowledge about Black communities at local and national scales and helping to make accessible delegations' collective knowledge to diverse audiences, especially for free Black communities as well as for public audiences across race, nationality and walks of life. Plans for delegates to study Black communities developed around the idea that elected and (self-)appointed delegates should understand their communities in order to provide sound representation. This chapter intervenes in scholarship that examines the antebellum Black protest tradition by articulating a cultural framework of leadership particular to northern *and* western Black leaders—both established and emerging—as represented in Colored Convention-sponsored literature. This chapter also engages contemporaneous literature such as petitions, political essays, and news articles, by which Black representatives of the antebellum Colored Conventions movement attempted to educate collaborators and peers in Black organizational networks.

Census-style and sociological reporting—both written and orally spoken at antebellum Colored Conventions—reflects concerted, yet disorganized and sometimes contradictory attempts to provide educational access to a range of classes of Black convention leaders, connected intellectual-activists and public readers even as “the relative personal success of those who claimed to represent the mass might instill in” Black leaders “interests that drew them away from the very ones they championed,” as Rael argues.³⁹⁶ As the following case studies illustrate, the lives and personal

³⁹⁶ Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. 13.

successes of some of the most popular Black elites attending antebellum conventions were vastly different from the represented Black lower classes' everyday struggles in terms of living environments, geographical mobility, labor opportunities for upward mobility and formal education. Still, through convention-sponsored sociological and census-style reports, delegates challenged state and federal structures of formal education that were often restricted to white Americans in the antebellum era. Delegates also created public information about economic opportunity and places where Black people's living conditions might improve. Thus, convention reports offered alternative methods for educational advancement in the form of verbal reporting and discussions at convention sessions for public consumption. Two other important forms of convention proceedings, independently-circulating convention proceedings, and those published in newspapers, hosted information about the condition of free and enslaved Black people.

The following case studies consider the ways Colored Convention delegate roles, temperance beliefs, gender and racial markers influenced delegations' notions of socio-political guardianship by examining convention demography across the first 13 years of national Colored Conventions. This study has a dearth of Black women's voices, as represented populations and as intellectual contributors, due to a lack of their voices in convention proceedings and related literature. Still, the 1843 reports and delegate activism reflect ideals associated with long-term trajectories for Black advancements. Comparative readings of activist-delegates capture the ways in which James McCune Smith's and David Jenkins' activist careers helped to contextualize the centrality of vocal representation to the men's embodiment of delegate roles, during and after the dates of individual convention forums.

A Rise of Activist Ideals: Notions of Socio-political Guardianship at Early Colored Conventions

As an incredibly ambitious civil rights enterprise, Colored Convention demography attempted to understand the dynamics that ordered the social, political and economic status of Black Americans. Not only did many Black convention leaders express commitment to the U.S. nation-state by pride of birthright and upbringing; they also laid claim to the New World's political apparatus. Population fluctuation and increased geographical mobility tested America's early efforts in the democratization of public life; with rapidly expanding urban centers, such as New York City and Philadelphia, "Americans were on the whole eager to pursue economic opportunities—whether this meant jobs with higher wages, goods at lower prices, or investments with better returns."³⁹⁷ Some abolitionist, anti-slavery and benevolence organizations used demography to champion the ability held by people of African descent to be productive members of society. A popular society in the Northeast, the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, reported having trouble articulating "the value of the colored people" in Philadelphia, "when the census of the alms-house is made the criterion by which they are to be judged."³⁹⁸ In its 1838 pamphlet, the society concluded,

³⁹⁷ Sokoloff, Kenneth L. and Georgia C. Villafor. "The Market for Manufacturing Workers during Early Industrialization: The American Northeast, 1820 to 1860," *Strategic Factors in Nineteenth Century American Economic History*. Eds. Claudia Goldin and Hugh Rockoff. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

³⁹⁸ Foner, Phillip and Ronald Lewis, eds. *The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978. 145.

...owing to the feelings and prejudices of the community, the colored people are almost altogether deprived of the opportunity of bringing up their children to mechanical employments, to commercial business, or other more lucrative occupations, whereby so many of our white laborers [*sic*] are enabled to rise above the drudgery in which they commence their career in life, and in turn, to become the patrons of their younger or less fortunate fellow citizens.³⁹⁹

White Quakers that established and ran the Pennsylvania Abolition Society documented Black Philadelphian population dynamics and political interests as they promoted the Abolition movement. However, some Black leaders disagreed with the political direction of the society, or with the idea that Black communities' wellbeing could best be achieved without the voices of Black people participating as leaders in the abolitionist cause. Moreover, the society represented a modicum of the condition of the Black populace while many Black leaders in the North and the West were interested in expanding the scope of demography-based abolition and racial uplift efforts to analyze a broader swath of Black populations.

The 1843 proceedings reflected the ways united Black populations could build political power and educate public audiences. Even as suffrage for free Blacks was constricting in the 1830s and 1840s, and their economic upward mobility was extremely limited, the U.S. government counted these populations to ascertain tax apportionment and to allot seats in the House of Representatives. On its way to becoming "one of the fastest growing and most heterogeneous populations in the world," the American population had climbed to approximately 17,069,453 in

³⁹⁹ Foner and Lewis. *The Black Worker*, 145. See, *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color, of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts, as Exhibited by the Report of a Committee of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, &c. (Philadelphia, 1838)*.

1840.⁴⁰⁰ Of that count, Black people made up an estimated 16.8% of the total population, an increase of about 23.4%, compared to the white population's increase of about 34.7% since 1830.⁴⁰¹ After an eight-year hiatus since the last national meeting was held in 1835, Black organizers of the 1843 national convention expressed "hope that...every city, town, hamlet, and village (would) be represented as well as Literary and Benevolent Societies" at the five-day series of meetings to contend with social and economic matters affecting Black populations.⁴⁰² Many periodical press and church leaders attended the forum, including Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet and Charles B. Ray. Sessions included lively debates about voting rights, regional representation, temperance, slave insurrection and economic advancement. The sessions helped to educate public followers.

The convention's advocacy for better public representation confronted U.S. federal and state population reports that misrepresented Black communities. Erroneous census records had proven to intensify the problems Black convention delegates addressed. Distorted census calculations pertaining to Black populations supplied

⁴⁰⁰ Anderson, Margo J. *The American Census: A Social History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. 3. *Negro Population, 1790 – 1915*. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968. 25.

⁴⁰¹ Cummings, John and Joseph Adna Hill. *Negro Population in the United States 1790 – 1915*. New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1968. 25.

⁴⁰² National Convention of Colored Citizens (1843: Buffalo, NY), "Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens; Held at Buffalo; on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th of August, 1843; for the purpose of considering their moral and political condition as American citizens," *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/278.

legislators and communities with rationale for discriminatory practices. Political theories frequently upheld the belief that free Black populations were disproportionately insane, impoverished and rapidly decreasing. Inaccurate federal censuses, at least in part, supported beliefs that Black populations were degenerate.⁴⁰³ Freemen and women were regularly regarded as unwanted competition in white-dominated labor markets. White citizens believed Black people were unfit for civic duties and the benefits of civil liberties and services such as access to common schools. Even small populations in the expanding West were often thought to have the potential to grow into economic threats. White speculators suggested that these growing Black populations could provoke civic disorder or further contaminate a general population's moral and political integrity. A number of northern states and western territories in antebellum America passed a series of Black laws. These laws limited Black travel in and out of the state. They disallowed or restricted Black people's ownership of land and chattel. They disallowed or restricted Black voting and court testimony rights. They required free Blacks to meet difficult measures in order to live and work. States carrying iterations of these legal regulations included Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Ohio. The latter's exclusionary laws against Black settlers provided an impetus for the seven-decades-long Colored Conventions movement.

The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church offered systems of education and self-governance for free Black men interested in developing leadership skills. It supported Black leaders as they challenged oppressive, discriminatory practices that

⁴⁰³ *Negro Population in the United States 1790 - 1915*, 25.

targeted free Black people. Seven national conventions were held between 1830 and 1843. Five conventions were held in Philadelphia. Five of the first seven national conventions took place in churches. These churches include Mother Bethel AME (1830), Wesley AME Zion Church (1831, 1835), Chatham Street Chapel (1834) in New York City and Park Presbyterian Church (1843) in Buffalo, New York.⁴⁰⁴

According to Erica Armstrong-Dunbar, “As the church became the nucleus for early black Philadelphia, it also became a complicated theater for the public and private lives of black men and women.”⁴⁰⁵ As a result, “the church sanctuary and the homes of its members” were sites wherein “the experiences of African American men and women were most closely examined, nurtured and supervised.”⁴⁰⁶ Mother Bethel hosted public meetings with Black men participating as community representatives more than a decade before the first Colored Convention. Representatives practiced procedural-style rules of order to pass resolutions that asserted, on behalf of Black Philadelphians, a strong “confidence in the justice of God” and faith in the benevolent “philanthropy of the free states” towards securing Black people’s civil rights.⁴⁰⁷ These meetings should be viewed as precursors to later conventions’ educational platforms for Black leaders.

⁴⁰⁴ See *ColoredConventions.org/conventions*.

⁴⁰⁵ Dunbar-Armstrong, Erica. *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 51.

⁴⁰⁶ *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 51.

⁴⁰⁷ “Philadelphia, January 1817.” *The Genius of Liberty*. 10.17.1817.

The AME denomination under Richard Allen’s leadership played a significant role in shaping early conventions’ fervent religio-political value system. Early delegates collaborated to construe what self-determined community guardianship would entail. Richard Allen and his Philadelphian peers James Forten, Absalom Jones and Russell Parrott expressed tenets of socio-political guardianship to combat “unmerited stigma... cast upon the reputation of [free] people of color.”⁴⁰⁸ Three central values became increasingly popular. A lack of literacy and civic education among Black people—“without arts, without science, without a proper knowledge of government”—diminished free people’s ability to achieve full political rights.⁴⁰⁹ Secondly, it was important to “never separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population in this country.”⁴¹⁰ Thirdly, the Black disenfranchisement experience in Philadelphia constituted an issue the majority of free Blacks confronted. These populations would share their sentiment of entitlement “to participate in the blessings of [America’s] luxuriant soil.”⁴¹¹ These values are reflected in antebellum convention proceedings. Allen and the AME Church encouraged other communities, religious institutions, non-religious organizations and individuals with shared values to send delegates to Colored Conventions and to eventually host their own. AME churches provided organizational infrastructure that convention delegates built upon, while developing notions of community guardianship.

⁴⁰⁸ “Philadelphia, January 1817.” *The Genius of Liberty*. 10.17.1817.

⁴⁰⁹ “Philadelphia, January 1817.” *The Genius of Liberty*. 10.17.1817.

⁴¹⁰ “Philadelphia, January 1817.” *The Genius of Liberty*. 10.17.1817.

⁴¹¹ “Philadelphia, January 1817.” *The Genius of Liberty*. 10.17.1817.

Richard Allen helped to establish an early ethos of moral leadership that deeply resonated throughout convention demography in the 1830s. On September 20, 1830, Black representatives assembled for the inaugural, public Colored Citizens convention at Mother Bethel Church. The group assembled to discuss news that Black Ohioans had encountered devastating racial violence. The group also assembled after learning that Ohio's anti-immigration laws coerced over a thousand Black people to leave the state. In his opening address, Reverend Allen proclaimed, "Our forlorn and deplorable situation earnestly and loudly demand of us to devise and pursue all legal means for the speedy elevation of ourselves and brethren to the scale and standing of men."⁴¹² In the audience, Black men and women and public spectators bore witness to Allen's passionate appeal to the 26-member fully Black male delegation. Allen and his contemporaries' early public surrogacy for Black urban communities modeled ways for emerging Black public intellectuals at Colored Conventions to assert a "moral critique of slavery and slaveholding that shaped abolitionism for years to come."⁴¹³ Allen and his peers highlighted the differences between the U.S. Constitution statements on equality and African Americans' social condition.⁴¹⁴ Allen's leadership

⁴¹² American Society of Free Persons of Colour (1830 : Philadelphia, PA), "Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour, for improving their condition in the United States; for purchasing lands; and for the establishment of a settlement in upper Canada, also, The Proceedings of the Convention with their Address to Free Persons of Colour in the United States." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/70.

⁴¹³ Newman, Richard. *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founders*. New York: New York University Press, 2008. 5.

⁴¹⁴ Newman, Richard. *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founders*. New York: New York University Press, 2008. 5, 79.

philosophy and AME church traditions survived well beyond his role in the convention movement. He died two months before the 1831 national convention. Conventions' procedural order, for example, reflected the AME Church's ceremonial and leadership ethos. This chapter argues that delegate positions and convention demography provided educational training grounded in Black communal experiences and U.S. civic education. Convention demography attempted to train convention delegations as archivists of Black cultural values and socio-political histories through data collection, documentation practices and the preservation of information in printed minutes.

The Organizational Politics Surrounding Colored Convention Demography, 1830-1843

Conventions' interest in collecting and publishing data reflects their interest in educating delegates and reading publics. Antebellum delegations did not establish a permanent parent organization that would organize national forums and oversee data collection. The 1830 national convention's printed minutes carried the title, Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour. Delegates intended for convention's resolutions to outline the organizational structure for delegate roles. They especially intended to outline rules that controlled the number of representatives attending conventions. Delegates resolved to create a "Parent society" responsible for appointing delegates.⁴¹⁵ Instead of one parent society that articulated goals, oversaw

⁴¹⁵ American Society of Free Persons of Colour (1830: Philadelphia, PA), "Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/70.

initiatives and made decisions, many versions of a parent society sprang from antebellum Colored Conventions. Convention-sponsored minutes capturing national meetings held between 1830 and 1835 document piecemeal efforts that articulate organizational and ideological standards for espousing “wholesome advice and good counsel.”⁴¹⁶ Early convention demography can be traced to antebellum and postbellum state conventions held in Washington, D.C., California, Tennessee and Kentucky. As the postbellum era dawned, state and local issues would dominate demography and the resulting ethos of convention leadership. The launch of the Colored Conventions movement in connection with its demography efforts lends understanding as to how later conventions with more advanced styles of quantitative and sociological reporting followed in the footsteps of the movement’s early political engineers. The formative stages of a Black intellectual convention culture are evident in the 1830 convention minutes. The convention introduced delegates to processes of political institution building and educational training in public representation. The 1830 delegation’s recommended organizational structure for future conventions constitutes an educational document with political strategies that future delegates could use and amend.

Convention committees created a curriculum to study Black public life. Delegates’ educational training is reflected in committees’ investigative work and

⁴¹⁶Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831 : Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, held by adjournments in the city of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831.,” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/72.

subject areas. The 1830 National Colored Convention set an important organizational standard for national convention record keeping. Its delegation outlined a set of committees that would provide organizational consistency in the future through the American Society of Free Persons of Colour (ASFPC). Committees were designed to manage new cohorts of delegates, voting records, action plans and other content. This material constituted an archive of convention-related documents. These print materials would include attendance rolls, donation records and subscriptions. The recording secretary would have been an important position for data reception: “He shall be provided with a book, wherein shall be recorded the proceedings of the Society, of the Board of Managers, and of the Committees, or any persons entrusted with the care or concerns of the Society,” as outlined in Article V of the Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour [*sic*].⁴¹⁷ Especially important was the Committee of Correspondence. It was a liaison between the convention parent society (the ASFPC) and all other societies connected to conventions. It would “receive intelligence concerning the operations of the different societies throughout the United States, and from other persons aiming to improve the situation and condition of the people of colour [*sic*]; and also receive all essays on the subject, with such other information as may conduce to the accomplishment of the great object of the society.”⁴¹⁸ In theory,

⁴¹⁷ American Society of Free Persons of Colour (1830: Philadelphia, PA), “Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/70.

⁴¹⁸ American Society of Free Persons of Colour (1830: Philadelphia, PA), “Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/70.

this committee would have been extraordinarily instrumental. Its census-style reports and evidence-based political views could predict or affirm Black Americans' outlook. This committee's name and its membership changed over the course of the decade. However, subsequent meeting proceedings did not articulate where and how its archive of literature would be or had been stored.

Following the 1830 forum, demography at national Colored Conventions reflects the development of rhetorics of socio-political guardianship among delegations and the pursuit of liberty through collective uplift. Socio-political guardianship refers to the sentiments and activities associated with early conventions' concept of the delegate position. The 1831 Committee on the Condition of the Free People of Colour influenced the print materials that attempted to undergird Black educational advancement. It made two important interventions at the convention: requests for demographic reports and annual meetings. By the 1831 National Colored Convention, a new committee had assumed the responsibility of collecting information about, and reporting on, the state of Black Americans. The Committee on the Condition of the Free People of Colour was responsible for instituting "an inquiry in the condition of the people of colour throughout the United States, and report their views upon the subject at a subsequent meeting."⁴¹⁹ The committee included Junius

⁴¹⁹ Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, held by adjournments in the city of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/72.

Morrel, Abraham Shadd, William Duncan, Robert Cowley, Henry Sipkins and Thomas Jennings, with these members representing Black communities in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, Maryland and New York. Its first intervention requested that delegates supply demographic information for represented Black communities and organizations. The newly initiated committee on Black social conditions would oversee collection, organization and dissemination of data reports. The committee anticipated the challenges an undetermined annual national convention schedule would pose to producing politically advantageous, evidence-based depictions of Black America. So, its second intervention strongly recommended that national conventions meet annually to improve the consistency of aggregated information. In doing so, the committee first articulated the ultimate goal of data collection efforts at Colored Conventions: to develop and strengthen a socio-political guardianship between convention leaders and the larger Black U.S. populace.

Demography challenged delegates to maintain a scrupulous balance between denouncing amoral behavior and offering opportunities for moral improvement. The 1831 delegation intended to abet the gradual improvement of Black working and lower classes by promoting “education, temperance and economy.”⁴²⁰ The Committee on the Condition of the Free People of Colour articulates the potential for tensions to arise out of faulty classifications:

⁴²⁰ Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, held by adjournments in the city of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/72. 4.

[The committee] would also respectfully submit to your wisdom, the necessity of your deliberate reflection on the dissolute, intemperate, and ignorant condition of a large portion of the coloured population of the United States. [The committee] would not, however, refer to their unfortunate circumstances to add degradation to objects already degraded and miserable; nor, with some others, improperly class the virtuous of our colour with the abandoned [...].⁴²¹

The committee acknowledges a spectrum of target audiences for uplift. The groups considered for uplift initiatives included undereducated, the amoral and morally ambiguous individuals. Vulnerable populations were often excluded as named offenders to the dictates of the committee's notions of moral behavior. This was because the delegates wanted to attract populations in need of benevolent and political support. Intensive focus on highlighting and rooting out behaviors considered unbecoming of representative populations could strain relations between convention leadership and communities.

Convention proceedings reflect the belief that Black communities' morality and respectable behavior allowed delegates to articulate Black communities' contributions to images of the nation's exceptionalism. If Black communities' economic stability and positive growth in social standing could not be proven, delegates suggested that moral behavior reflected an individual's ability to *rise* to socio-economic stability. One's character, sound decision-making and adherence to the calls of religious leadership exhibited this ability. Early delegations particularly

⁴²¹ Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, held by adjournments in the city of Philadelphia, from the sixth to the eleventh of June, inclusive, 1831." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/72. 4.

struggled to contend with the circumstances that undermined certain groups' ability to learn and adapt to calls for temperance, economy and education. These groups included orphans, the aged and infirm, invalids and widowed parents. Convention delegation's temperance rhetoric could more feasibly take as subject for criticism able-bodied, un(der)employed men and women. It also critiqued individuals who engaged in intemperate activities such as imbibing, gambling, "petty crimes" and raucous nighttime entertainment.⁴²² These groups, for delegates, were most obviously in need of temperance training. Indeed, early Colored Convention delegations believed that "the destroyer, Intemperence [*sic*], directly counteracts the influence of...redeeming qualities, and what is worse, nurtures in their stead every thing loathsome," as the 1833 National Colored Convention's Committee on the subject of Temperance later argued.⁴²³

The 1831 proceedings demonstrate the ways in which delegates highlighted temperance as a principle means of suitable socio-political guardianship. The 1831 Committee on the Condition of the Free People of Colour's opening statement in the proceedings suggests that delegates were required to exhibit a sensibility of understanding based on real experiences working with Black publics. A delegate's sensibility of understanding may be defined as one's sensitivity towards the

⁴²² Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

⁴²³ James Pennington led this committee. Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

circumstances that affect individuals' moral character and lifestyle. Compassion or empathy would shape a delegate's advocacy. Experience or delegates' "wisdom" allowed them to discern when poor lifestyle choices required chastisement and when individuals' circumstances reflected a plea for additional support.⁴²⁴ The 1830 and 1831 convention delegations' intensive espousal of temperance ideology suggests that much of early delegations' notions of guardianship focused on shaping individuals' moral character and lifestyle choices. This likely reflects the fact that delegates often had little power over the circumstances that contributed to a person's behaviors or social condition. This point is further emphasized by early convention delegations' regular calls for the formation of temperance and benevolent organizations. Delegations regularly contended that pro-temperance activism encouraged positive moral behavior among Black populations that, in turn, would improve educational attainment and economic advantages.

Leadership experience derived out of labor and organizational ventures held as much influence on attending activists' notions of guardianship as temperance beliefs. Convention participants' organizational activities, alongside convention participation, demonstrated the centrality of leadership experience to those who became delegates. For example, several 1831 national convention delegates participated in fugitive affairs and led, or were connected to Black-run societies, which influenced the conventions' overall understanding of leadership roles at Colored Conventions. The

⁴²⁴ Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/72. 4.

forum included budding businessmen whose entrepreneurial acumen eventually led to trade ventures as well as organizational activities. The delegate and temperance activist William Whipper had been a secretary for the Philadelphia-based Reading Room Society for the Men of Color.⁴²⁵ A member of the Committee on the Condition of the Free People of Colour, Abraham D. Shadd “inherited not only his father’s occupation as shoemaker but also part of an estate estimated at \$1,300” in 1819;⁴²⁶ he eventually became known as a dedicated Underground Railroad agent in Delaware. By 1870, the 1831 convention’s president, a tailor named John Bowers, had launched a Philadelphia-based second-hand clothing store, owned property estimated at five thousand dollars and had founded the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows to support networks of Black trade organizations.⁴²⁷ Delegates’ organizational activities and occupational labor had acquainted them with local politics affecting Black communities. Their experiences introduced them to communities’ habits and interests, especially in places, such as New York City and Philadelphia, which sent some of the largest delegations to early Colored Conventions.

Because espousing temperance beliefs achieved uneven results, the 1831 convention combined moral improvement messages with practical steps to support

⁴²⁵ McCormick, Richard P. “William Whipper: Moral Reformer.” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, 1976, pp. 22–46. 25.

⁴²⁶ Silverman, John. “Mary Ann Shadd and the Search for Equality.” *A Nation of Immigrants: Women, Workers, and Communities in Canadian History, 1840s-1960s*. Eds. Franca Iacovetta, Paula Draper and Robert Ventresca. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. 101.

⁴²⁷ U.S federal government, “John C. Bowers.” 1870 Federal Census.

demography efforts. The convention supplemented their sentiments of guardianship, which were largely based upon experience and attending to the role of delegate, with a proposal for a “highly important” “general fund, to be denominated the CONVENTIONAL FUND, for...advancing...the public good.”⁴²⁸ After the 1840s, “Black reformers shifted from moral perfectionism to examine labor as central to the black community’s efforts at uplift,” particularly as Black New York abolitionists, a dominating faction of convention delegations, realized that they “had to rely on the limited resources of blacks themselves,” as Leslie Harris contends.⁴²⁹ Still, the 1831 minutes illustrate one of antebellum Colored Conventions’ perennial struggles: creating an index that categorized Black identity and life in ways that could serve as an ideal or standard for interested readers. In general, convention demography lacked a sense of the ways to aggregate data given the varied hardships generational oppression, white obstructionist politics and one’s gender presented to the enumeration process.

However, the absence of categories for enumeration or ideal metrics that reflected delegates’ definition of social classes and proper lifestyle dynamics may have encouraged a sense of equality and unity across participating publics. Hierarchical categories would group individuals into poor and lower classes, middle classes and wealthy or elite classes. Categories for education level, personal income,

⁴²⁸ Convention of the People of Color, First Annual (1831: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/72. 4.

⁴²⁹ Harris, Leslie. *In the Shadows of Slavery: African-Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. 218.

land and chattel ownership and occupation, for example, would suggest static metrics of success. On the other hand, absent metrics for social classes might have been due to a lack of understanding of the widely divergent classes of Black represented communities. It might have been due to a lack of trained statisticians and social scientists among early delegations' ranks. What is clear is that delegations devoted less attention and fewer resources to convention demography in comparison to the time and funds dedicated to documenting and printing minutes. While convention records do not present a case for why social classes were not defined for enumeration purposes, the absence of such metrics likely contributed to a sense of equality among communities.

Gender and Racial Markers in Early Colored Convention Self-Assessment Efforts

Early delegates' rhetorics of guardianship also emphasize the ways in which convention infrastructure reinforced the notion that the fight for freedom was to be won through the civil empowerment of Black men. In another way, numerical and qualitative reports impressed upon readers a sense of which aspects of social life delegates valued. Rael argues,

By the standards of the late twentieth century, the body of public protest speech crafted in the antebellum North tended to be elitist. On balance, it may have done more to reinforce the gender subjugation of black women and the class subjugation of working-class blacks than it did to liberate them from their respective yokes.⁴³⁰

⁴³⁰ Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. 10.

Even by nineteenth-century standards, Rael's summations align with the distance between elite convention leadership classes and represented communities. Many groups were less visible in comparison to celebrity-like orators and well-known delegates, who were featured in minutes. These groups included working-class, destitute and financially strained individuals, and the unacknowledged Black women who were often active advocates and professionals. The loudness of Colored Convention publicity often drowned out the beats of Black women organizing in homes, in churches and neighborhoods, and as part of societies for moral and educational improvement. Undoubtedly, forums carrying the moniker Colored Convention enjoyed a certain level of public respectability. Elected and appointed delegates claimed representative power to speak on the behalf of communities that had demanded the public representation of their interests. Public news outlets from *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper* to *New York Tribune* carried reviews of convention-groomed intellectual cultures and ideals across free and slave states and territories in the U.S. and abroad to nations, including Canada and Great Britain. Even as fugitive slaves and entrepreneurs who struggled with financial stability regularly filled the ranks of delegations, conventions often sponsored an official brand that emphasized the exceptional aptitudes and successes of united delegations of Black men. Presentations of successes tended to outweigh presentations of delegates' working-class, impoverished and illiterate condition, and more so than the Black women's exceptional qualities and successes that all-male delegations knew and were connected to.

As the "Colored Convention" moniker attained social value and attracted more attention in the public sphere during the 1830s, Black women's absence from ranks of

all-male delegations undermined Black women's leadership credence and activist experiences and endorsed the notion that Black men could best provide strategies for racial uplift. All-male delegations implied that Black women were not fit to lead alongside Black men. These exclusionary practices on the basis of gender mirrored the U.S. Congress's style of leadership. As a result, all-male delegations may have been acceptable or even expected among participating publics. In a paradox of leadership ethos, Black convention leaders rhetorically represented the idea that Black women, families and communities gained power by way of Black men's empowerment in public society, even as they made recommendations that reflected the appropriate qualifications for Black women to become delegates.

A patriarchal approach percolated throughout convention activism, including the documentation of Black communities' habits, accomplishments and social conditions. As early as the 1830 national convention, delegates promoted the creation of societies among participating communities: "Resolved, That this Convention enjoins and requires of each of its members to use their utmost influence in the formation of societies."⁴³¹ According to bylaws for delegate positions, leading a society would have enabled a man to become a delegate. The 1833 national

⁴³¹ American Society of Free Persons of Colour (1830: Philadelphia, PA), "Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/70. By the 1830 national convention's nominal standards for delegate positions, any person including a woman representing an "auxiliary" or society could be a delegate: "Resolved, That the next General Convention shall be composed of delegates appointed by the Parent Society and its auxiliaries: provided always, that the number of delegates from each society, shall not exceed five, and all other places, where there are no auxiliaries, are hereby invited to send one delegate." iii-iv.

convention reiterated this call with a specific call to women: “We take the liberty farther to recommend as powerfully tending to advance the Temperance reformation, the formation of Societies, in religious congregations; in each ward of large cities, and in each large village in the UNITED STATES, where circumstances will admit. We also recommend the organization of Female Societies.”⁴³² Similar recommendations appeared in minutes in the 1840s. As a result of these calls, the 1843 national convention reports recorded existing societies. These reports either collapse men and women’s identity markers—male and female, women and men—into macro-scale summaries about communities or neglect to provide details about the gender dynamics of populations described. However, the census-style reports in the 1843 convention minutes do document the existence of several women’s societies. Whereas gender categories are collapsed in labor, property and inhabitants categories, women are recognized in society categories. These listings include more than a dozen women’s benevolent societies in Bath, Geneva, New York City and Schenectady, New York and in Cincinnati and Columbus, Ohio. The 1843 reports recognize conventioners’ calls for women’s societies, with these calls appearing in minutes from as early as the 1833 national convention. The reports thus reflect a paradox of leadership, wherein Black women may have met criteria to become delegates, but were still excluded based on their gender.

⁴³² Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in these United States,” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275. 19-20.

Antebellum national conventions' insistence on male exclusivity in leadership limited efforts to depict a robust image of Black America.⁴³³ Despite palpable interest in organized data collection, convention leadership did not publish in minutes an index to reflect leaders' attitudes about desirable income, educational attainment and occupation. Black women also had little stated involvement in structuring the national conventions' burgeoning enumeration processes beyond constituency, though connected women often embodied the ethos of conventions: a moral responsibility engaged in Black uplift activism. Black women were certainly counted and recorded as a population in convention reports, but held no stated leadership roles in designing, aggregating and presenting reports for public consumption. During the 1832 national convention, "[A] lady most friendly to the attainment of the rights of the people of color, delivered a most feeling address on the miseries attendant on our present situation;"⁴³⁴ the minutes do not include details about the content of her speech or her name. Although "it was agreed that a vote of thanks be tendered the lady, for her friendly expression," no evidence suggests that the woman orator's comments or information were collected or further researched.⁴³⁵ Such omissions, then, make it

⁴³³ Convention leadership refers to convention executive boards, delegates and committee members, who were mostly delegates, but in rare instances included Black women.

⁴³⁴ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Second Annual (1832: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color," *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/229. 11-12.

⁴³⁵ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Second Annual (1832: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual

difficult to perceive of women's instrumentality to demography efforts beyond women as constituents and beyond celebration of white alliances. Still, Black women regularly attended national meetings, delivered addresses and were newspaper correspondents and leaders of important politically aligned organizations with temperance, benevolence and religious foci. Free Black women were also financial and intellectual contributors to Black communities' progress through entrepreneurship and family rearing.

Delegate positions reflected a paradoxical leadership ethos wherein a woman might exhibit appropriate qualities for leadership, but was still denied opportunity based on gender. By the 1834 National Colored Convention, gendered limitations excluded Black women from leadership positions in committees that oversaw self-assessment efforts. All-male delegations likely undermined efforts to better understand represented communities. According to the 1830 federal census, Black women slightly outnumbered Black men.⁴³⁶ However, as stipulated in the 1834 minutes, regular delegate positions remained exclusive to Black men above twenty-one years of age, who had maintained six-months residency in a "village, town, city, or county" in the U.S. or who represented a society or institution facilitated by Black people.⁴³⁷ In

Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in these United States." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/229. 11-12.

⁴³⁶ United States Government. *Fifth Census; Or, Enumeration of the inhabitants of the United States, 1830*. New York: Norman Ross Publishing INC, 1832. 163. Black women outnumbered Black men by 12,693 persons.

⁴³⁷ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Fourth Annual (1834: New York, NY), "Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention for the

addition to attending convention meetings and working as liaisons between conventions and communities, elected delegates were expected to provide statistical and qualitative reports describing Black communities' characteristics, challenges and successes, including legal parameters that undermined their future success. The 1834 delegation named the proposed parent society, "The National Convention of the people of colour." They had adopted a system for appointing delegates that was similar to the American congressional policy for elected representatives.⁴³⁸ Similar to the congressional appointment and tax apportionment system, the proposed organization intended to calculate delegate representation according to represented populations' size and monetary contributions to the convention. By the end of the 1834 convention, a committee had collected twenty-five delegate reports. The reports suggested "institutions for moral, religious and literary improvement throughout the non-slave holding states increased in numbers, but that they have during the past year assumed a character of decided superiority."⁴³⁹ Black women may have very well been co-authors or intellectual contributors. However, the formal dictates of the convention's delegate structure heavily influenced the omission of any such women as named contributors to its report archive.

Improvement of the Free People of Colour, in the United States,"
ColoredConventions.org, coloredconventions.org/items/show/276. 32.

⁴³⁸ 32.

⁴³⁹ 25.

In addition to gender exclusion, delegations undermined self-assessment efforts by recommending that racial markers be discontinued in convention-sponsored political expression and printed materials. 1835 was a decisive year in convention demography. The moral suasionist William Whipper had successfully campaigned to establish the American Moral Reform Society (est. 1836) at the 1835 National Colored Convention held in Philadelphia. While dealing with an influx of information managed by an assortment of committees, the 1835 convention voted to excise the word “‘colored,’ when either speaking or writing concerning themselves; and especially to remove the title of African from their institutions.”⁴⁴⁰ Conflicting conversations and decisions at early forums illustrate two key challenges that self-assessment procedures presented. Instead of one committee overseeing enumeration as was stipulated by the 1831 national delegation, a number of committees were deeply involved in collecting, presenting and printing data reports on the condition of Black Americans at the 1834 convention. However, the following year, the 1835 convention voted to stop using racial markers to describe Black communities. This decision undermined the usefulness of data on communities that the 1834 convention collected since racial markers could not be linked to race, according the 1835 delegation’s decision to stop using racial markers to describe Black communities.

The decision to quit the use of racial markers undermined 1834 delegates’ vibrant investigative spirit reflected in their studies of Black communities’ habits, accomplishments and lifestyles. The 1834 convention’s data-collecting committees include a committee for colored students of medicine and a committee on colored

⁴⁴⁰ 14-15.

mechanics; a committee on high schools open to colored students; a committee on manual labor schools; a committee on Black American immigrants in Liberia; a committee on “the exclusion of our people in church privileges and travelling by steamboat;”⁴⁴¹ a committee on the “actual number of coloured slave holders” in the US;⁴⁴² and a committee to condense reports submitted by delegates. Taken together, the convention’s attitudes toward racial markers and their enumeration practices create a paradox that threatened to weaken reporting efforts in the future. These decisions undermined the goal to examine and better understand Black Americans as a politically divested minority group in the U.S. “Hegemonic ideologies of language,” Jennifer Leeman argues, have shaped relationships between “language, race and national identity,” particularly in the ways the U.S. Census officially construed a sense of difference between individuals in America.⁴⁴³ This has happened through “institutional practices and policies” that produced terminologies of race and ethnicity, which regularly favored white Americans and which regularly created power differentials between white and non-white Americans.⁴⁴⁴ The disuse of racial markers

⁴⁴¹ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Fourth Annual (1834: New York, NY), “Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour, in the United States,” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/276. 11.

⁴⁴² 13.

⁴⁴³ Leeman, Jennifer. “Racializing language: A history of linguistic ideologies in the US Census.” *Journal of Language & Politics*. 3.3 (2004): 507-534. 507.

⁴⁴⁴ Leeman, Jennifer. “Racializing language: A history of linguistic ideologies in the US Census.” *Journal of Language & Politics*. 3.3 (2004): 507-534. 508.

in convention enumeration would make *more* unclear Black people's accomplishments and social condition in relation to white Americans. The data collection should have educated delegates and reading publics. It should have served as a basis for convention policy recommendations as articulated in debates and resolutions in printed proceedings. However, the 1835 convention passed two contradictory resolutions that undermined the usefulness of convention demography to citizenship activities, such as petitioning.

A conflict arose between the 1835 resolution to strike color markers from convention reports and the 1835 resolution to encourage petition exercises that delegates regarded as an instrumental political tool to improve the condition of Black people. In most cases, an endorsement of petitioning at the local level would reinforce an important correlation between enumeration and public protest in American politics. An activist's access to statistical and sociological information about certain types of communities strengthened his or her ability to describe grievances and demands. The strategy is reflected in a resolution to support petition efforts. Passing "after much discussion," delegates resolved to

recommend to the free people of colour throughout the U. States, the propriety of petitioning congress and their respective state legislatures to be admitted to the rights and privileges of American citizens, and that we be protected in the same.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁵ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Fifth Annual (1835: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in the United States; Held by Adjournments, in the Wesley Church, Philadelphia; from the first to the fifth of June, inclusive; 1835.," ColoredConventions.org, coloredconventions.org/items/show/277. 9.

In the passage, the delegation encourages Black people to demand citizenship rights by way of practicing a citizenship right: the right to petition. The vote to discontinue the use of racial markers intended to make a firm, yet willing declaration of intent towards assimilation. That is, the latter vote announced that color should not revoke access to citizenship, while it also modeled a peaceable embrace of an American identity without an emphasis on racial heritage. Nonetheless, the vote against self-identifying race terminology in convention-related literature, which would include demographic reports and convention-sponsored petitions, undermined the convention call for increased political engagement.

The 1843 delegation disregarded the 1835 vote on racial markers because of a long temporal gap between national conventions and contemporaneous population trends, as the 1843 national convention's sociological and census-style reports illustrate. The 1835 delegation did not articulate how shunning racial descriptors to encourage assimilation could obscure and undermine self-assessment processes and subsequent petitioning. Secondly, the decision went against the grain of federal and state demography, which increasingly adopted specificity as immigration, wage labor and urban centers became leading topics of national discourse. Ultimately, the earlier 1835 delegation's recommendation did not stick. The 1843 demographic and sociological reports evidence the use of racial markers to describe Black populations. More broadly, the very name of the convention demonstrated a lack of interest in the 1835 vote. The 1843 delegation seized an opportunity to counter circulating myths about Black economic stagnancy by including statistical and qualitative reports that could reframe readers' understanding of Black communities' progress. The 1843 convention strategically appointed data collection leaders with access to socio-

economically diverse Black populations. And, because political philosophy played an important role in data collection processes, these leaders undoubtedly needed the intellectual acumen to move reports from aggregation to publication.

Data reports featured in the 1843 convention proceedings reflect delegates' engagement in Black population trends. Organizers directed delegates to submit statistical and qualitative information about their constituents and later compiled and printed reports in the minutes. Reverend James Gloucester chaired the reporting Committee on the Condition of Colored People, which included members Abner Francis, William Munro, Sampson Talbot, Theodore Wright and William H. Yancy. Black elected representatives might have asked simple, survey-style questions: What sort of work do you do? How much money do you earn on an annual basis? What types of societies host meetings? How many in your congregation have signed a temperance pledge? They also consulted local, state and private organizations' statistical data. Their reports accumulated and organized information about Black communities that the U.S. State department would not gather until 1850 and portrayed a more diverse image of Black free communities than the Census Bureau had in 1840. They also provided insight into the sorts of intellectual inquires that represented their view of free Blacks' economic vitality and platforms for educating Black leaders and their constituents.

The 1843 population reports' limitations represent the limitations of delegate's political power and mobility. Delegates initiated the 1843 statistical report with the intent to foreground a large-scale portrait of Black American life. They intended to collect information about Black communities' characteristics, divisions of labor and state of well-being or disunion as they existed in the East, West, North and, perhaps

most quixotic in ambition, the South. However, the 1843 statistical report ultimately provides occupational, population, organizational and economic data only for three states: New York, Massachusetts and Ohio. It depicts New York City as an organizational hub for numerous societies, including men and women's benevolent and literary societies, an educational society and a public library. Mechanics, merchants and agriculturalists are among occupations most represented in Albany, Buffalo and Rochester, New York and in New Bedford, Massachusetts and Columbus, Ohio.

The 1843 population reports allowed delegates and reading publics to assign value to certain geographical locations, types of labor and to the educational potential that convention literature held. Colored Convention leaders believed that 1843 statistical data and sociological reports about Black experience in different parts of the country could prove beneficial to Black populations. The reports intended to illustrate that Black people could sustain themselves—that the condition of Black people was improving and could be further improved. Readers and listening publics could wield the reports for a variety of reasons. Reports allowed Black readers to more effectively choose destinations for personal, business and political travel. They encouraged Black people to imagine how they measured against the condition of other Black communities with whom communications varied from nonexistent to robust. Black leaders could inquire to newspapers or named individuals in convention minutes to learn how such progress was achieved; they could mirror, transform or supplement their own initiatives using that which was described in reports. For delegates, giving and receiving reports on the condition of colored people was an accountability

measure connected to roles associated with delegate positions and the ethos of convention cultures.

The 1843 national convention's numerical and sociological reports reflect the sort of informational enterprises and connected debates that constitute an important education-based training platform for delegates. Colored Conventions sought to challenge economic exclusion and promote local political associations that could provide guidance and information to represented communities. How would ambitious Black entrepreneurs know where to settle to start a new business venture? How likely was it that talented Black teachers would travel to and seek out employment in a seemingly economically stagnant school district? The 1843 convention delegation's self-reporting efforts were responses to at least two conversations. They should be viewed in relation to racially discriminatory data collection practices apparent in federal censuses and the power federal reports subsequently apportioned. They should also be viewed as responses to intra-communal concerns about Black people's general elevation. Examining the first thirteen years of convention reporting clarifies the intellectual ideals and organizational processes that led to the first comprehensive report published in national convention minutes. Colored Convention delegations' accumulated action over the course of thirteen years of demographic reporting reflects a concerted dedication to campaigning for Black rights and educating Black leaders and reading publics on the nature of Black life in America.

The Ethos of Guardianship in Action: James McCune Smith and David Jenkins

This chapter begins with a critical survey of the internal political climate that instigated a proliferation of reports on the condition of Black people in America

during the first two decades of the Colored Conventions movement. It charts the organizational circumstances and obstacles delegates faced throughout the self-assessment process, arguing that the development of rhetorics of population guardianship among delegates was an important byproduct of convention demography. In other words, accountability measures and belief systems associated with delegate positions impacted the creation of documents. Those documents subsequently educated leaders and communities on the nature of Black publics connected to Colored Conventions. Styles of socio-political guardianship or leadership ethos and processes espoused at Colored Conventions are embedded in the formal infrastructure of early Colored Conventions, as much as they are embedded in delegates' individual words and actions. Both social and political, byproducts of convention demography such as numerical and qualitative reports about represented communities sought to enhance intra-communal unity, while providing a basis from which to make political arguments about racial justice and uplift. Readings of two men with uneven successes in campaigning for Black people's civil rights help to contextualize the ways Black convention leaders participated in civic life through vocal representation on behalf of Black communities: New Yorker James McCune Smith, whose very public and largely well-received denouncement of the 1840 federal census was aided by his affiliation with prestigious institutions of higher education; and the lesser-known Ohioan David Jenkins, who lacked financial resources, yet perennially endeavored to collect and distribute population data on Black people to support Black suffrage. Undoubtedly, differences in the men's regional affiliation and the social environments in which they moved played dominant roles in ordering the nature of the outcomes of Jenkins' and McCune Smith's use of population data, on

behalf of Black communities' interests. Their use of population reports educated peers and reading publics. Their use of population reports also reflects styles of socio-political guardianship that occurred, during and after individual convention events.

Active in Colored Convention - related petitioning against erroneous New York state and national census records, James McCune Smith continued to practice an ethos of socio-political guardianship or the value system connected to delegate representation following the release of 1843 national convention's census and sociological reports. However, fellow New York delegates representing smaller Black populations in Schenectady and Troy, New York met Smith's style of representation with heated dissent. In the early summer of 1844, the *New York Tribune* and William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* ran stories about a Colored Convention meeting held in April in Brooklyn, New York ahead of the better documented late-September Colored Convention in Schenectady, New York. At the former, James McCune Smith met with fellow New York delegates to dispute negative characterizations of Black people embedded in the 1840 state and federal census reports. Joining an eleven-member committee that included Charles B. Ray, Theodore Wright, Charles Reason, Phillip Bell and John Zuille, Smith read aloud a memorial before "a very large" crowd gathered at Zion's Church in Brooklyn, May 1844.⁴⁴⁶

A popular genre employed by Black convention delegates in addition to formal petitions, memorials were drafted as legislative documents to articulate one or more requests on behalf of a group, organization or institution and were usually addressed to state and federal legislatures, governor's offices and congressional district

⁴⁴⁶ "John C. Calhoun, and the Free Colored People." *The Liberator*. 31 May 1844.

representatives. Colored Convention memorials differed from standard formal petitions because they often prefaced requests with an exemplary example of the success of an individual who embodied opportunities for success that the petitioners felt should be common or accessible to all individuals; or they would preface a request with an exemplary example of that which petitioners disputed. Colored Convention-sponsored memorials also tended to include proceedings of a convention event. In an unprecedented move, the pool of New York Black delegates expanded the ethos of guardianship to include not only acting in the best interest of represented populations, but also denying the right of individual groups of New York delegates to respond to issues affecting their represented populations, should those delegates neglect to receive permission from the state convention to do so. The second convention body took offense that Smith and his delegate peers had not received permission to host a convention. Thus, the second convention dismissed the first convention's political action on the grounds that the first convention had not received permission. This frustrated Smith and his cohort of peers who attended the first convention because their petition was not accepted by the second convention.

The incident presented a case where internal conflict undermined efforts to educate New Yorkers on the condition of Black people in the state and undermined Smith's attempt to combat injustice as a delegate in order to fight against oppression through legislative petition exercises. Smith and his New York peers who attended the April meeting drafted a petition on behalf of Black New Yorkers that was addressed to the U.S. Senate. It directly denounced U.S. Secretary of State John C. Calhoun's portrayal of Black people, according to census calculations regarding free Blacks. The petition requested that the Department of State take necessary measures to procure

“correct statements” regarding “the condition of the various classes of its populations of these States.”⁴⁴⁷ Public uproar over miscalculations in the 1840 census certainly reached Calhoun’s attention; the cabinet officer requested that congress allot additional funds to the Census Bureau to make the Bureau a “permanent” office and to increase its staff, arguing that “it is obvious that it must at times prove embarrassing in a Department” to be understaffed.⁴⁴⁸ At the September convention at Schenectady, Smith made a motion for the petition to be read aloud, accepted and documented in the convention record. After Smith read the petition, aloud along with other motions towards convention petition activities, however, Smith lost the motion for the petition and other motions to be accepted by the convention in an 11 to 38 vote. With dissent most vocally coming from Henry Highland Garnet and Schenectady and Troy delegates, the convention made a strong stand against “the cunning delegates of New-York,” as Garnet was recorded to have said before the word “cunning” was recommended omitted from documented proceedings.⁴⁴⁹ In debate, delegate William Johnson wished the motion would be “crushed beneath the feet of the Convention,”

⁴⁴⁷ “John C. Calhoun, and the Free Colored People.” *Liberator*. 31 May 1844.

⁴⁴⁸ *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1899*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900. 641. This volume contains the *Fourth Annual Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission* and its collection, *Correspondence of John C. Calhoun*. Digitized journal provided courtesy of *Archive.org*.

⁴⁴⁹ Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York, Fifth Annual. (1844: Schenectady, NY), “Report on the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York, Held at Schenectady, September 18-20, 1844.,” *ColoredConventions.org*.

having called the petition “unrighteous” and its parent meeting “illegal.”⁴⁵⁰ In other words, Smith and his peers had not gained permission from the larger New York state delegation to host the convention, thus rendering the petition moot from their perspective. Garnet, Johnson and the like-minded voting majority denied the petition on the grounds of the principle that state Colored Conventions and action items needed to be approved and authorized prior to convening. Smith’s camp, on the other hand, argued that the vote amounted to a power play that allowed other New York delegates to “admit or deny the right of petition,” with the latter contradicting a fundamental U.S. citizenship right that the convention purported to recognize as a core value that it championed on behalf of all Black Americans, free and enslaved.⁴⁵¹ Because of this contradiction, Smith withdrew his standing as a delegate on the basis of the principle that he and co-petitioners had the right to petition on behalf of Black New Yorkers, according to American citizenship rights. This is important because it illustrates the ways internal conflict undermined delegates’ attempts to spread information about the condition of Black people in New York and petition on behalf of represented populations.

⁴⁵⁰ Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York, Fifth Annual. (1844: Schenectady, NY), “Report on the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York, Held at Schenectady, September 18-20, 1844.,” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/602.

⁴⁵¹ Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York, Fifth Annual. (1844: Schenectady, NY), “Report on the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York, Held at Schenectady, September 18-20, 1844.,” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/602.

Sometimes marked by internal conflict as they were, New York Colored Convention delegations exemplified a form of representation that was based upon an interest in serving Black populations' interests at the local level that worked in relation to, and apart from, notions of Black-led socio-political guardianship construed at national Colored Conventions in the 1830s. Delegations representing New York at state conventions in 1844 had demonstrated that delegates representing differently-sized populations in New York were willing to resist convention authority systems or American citizenship rights (petitioning) in order to fervently support their own populations' interests. Such a focus undermined the larger value system of Colored Conventions that sought to promote the political and intellectual, or educational advancement of Black communities through community leadership. According to New York delegates at the supposedly unauthorized 1844 convention held in Brooklyn in April, of "49 votes cast, about 33 were from Schenectady and Troy, nearly all in the negative: thus these two places with a joint total colored population of less than 1,000 rejected the petition of New York, containing 20,000 free colored people."⁴⁵² They implicitly argued that delegates representing smaller populations should not have the power to undermine other delegates' petitioning activities, particularly when these

⁴⁵² Convention of the Colored Citizens of the State of New York, Fifth Annual. (1844: Schenectady, NY), "Report on the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York, Held at Schenectady, September 18-20, 1844.," *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/602.

activities favored the interests of a larger state Black population or the general Black American populace.

The Schenectady-Troy camp, however, proved tenacious in its assertion that the entire state representative body, through its appointed board, must approve collective bargaining activities that were presented through the state convention infrastructure. The move was similar to the 1835 National Convention delegation's vote to disapprove color markers at a time when the federal census' population identification protocols increasingly shifted towards specificity that supported an understanding of the American population. Like this delegation's decision to honor its own beliefs towards self-representation, certain sects of New York delegates had illustrated a firm interest in self-guided principles of socio-political guardianship. Indeed, their vote at the 1844 Schenectady forum reflected a refusal to support another New York delegations' core citizenship right—the right to petition outlined in the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution—in favor of maintaining the power to authorize state-level collective bargaining efforts that were sponsored through New York conventions.

Despite the controversy, James McCune Smith embodied and modeled an increasingly well-received ethos of socio-political guardianship, during his mid-century career as an activist-intellectual. His form of representation championed the right for individuals and groups connected to Colored Conventions to engage in cultures of civic protest under the named sponsorship of Colored Conventions, even if those activities took place beyond a convention event approved by a board empowered by state-level convention delegates. His style of representation highlighted the ways one's profession and activism could be mutually beneficial. While strategizing to plan

and implement racial uplift initiatives on behalf of Black communities, Smith encountered numerous Black-organized institutions, including libraries, societies, churches and schools. Such experiences encouraged experiential learning, which he applied to his apothecary ventures and his tenure with the Brooklyn-based Colored Orphans Asylum, among many other organizations.

By the 1840s, Smith had launched a robust literary career in public politics. His writing appeared in abolitionist and trade periodicals such as the *New York Tribune*, *The Colored American*, *The Liberator*, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, *Hunt's Merchant Magazine* and *Frederick Douglass' Newspaper*, throughout that decade and the next.⁴⁵³ Smith had achieved a glowing and highly respected reputation among northeastern Black activists and among many white intellectuals associated with educational institutions and statistical reasoning, including the statistician Edward Jarvis, M.D.⁴⁵⁴ In one example, the Black convention delegate and printer William Cooper Nell praises Smith's "extensive learning and tact in statistical expression" in his iteration of the minutes of the 1847 National Convention of Colored Americans and Their Friends.⁴⁵⁵ Later, Smith was "formally honored by white scholars when they elected him a member of the prestigious American Geographical

⁴⁵³ Stauffer, John, ed. *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*. Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2006. 77.

⁴⁵⁴ Stauffer, John, ed. *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, xv.

⁴⁵⁵ Wesley, Dorothy Porter and Constance Porter Uzelac, eds. *William Cooper Nell: Nineteenth-Century African American Abolitionist, Historian, Integrationists*, 97.

Society” in 1856.⁴⁵⁶ These recognitions did not escape the Black convention community, but served to emphasize that, “What is worth the doing at all, deserves being well done,” as Nell proclaimed.⁴⁵⁷ While Smith rose to high regard, yet encountered mixed reactions in response to his out-spoken representation in national-level civic discourse, David Jenkins fervently campaigned for local petition exercises that could negate the suppression of Black Ohioans’ interests in social and political life.

Similar to the ways James McCune Smith’s 1844 petition efforts became embroiled in internal convention controversy, so too did David Jenkins’ participation in sociological reporting at the 1843 National Colored Convention meet with palpable dissent. Politically, Jenkins was a serious man with strong temperance leanings—characteristics that marked him as a public figure willing to engage with previous national delegations’ deep interest in moral decorum, alongside educational advancement. In his debut year as a national-level delegate, Jenkins attended the 1843 national convention as a member of the Committee Upon Agriculture. In this role, Jenkins reported on the condition of Black people living in and around Carthagenia in Mercer County, Ohio—partly defying the requests of the farming-based community. White Ohioans had accused the community of being “idlers, thieves, and drunkards,” had reportedly championed Black laws to hasten their downfall and had rejected the

⁴⁵⁶ Stauffer, John, ed. *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, xv.

⁴⁵⁷ Wesley, Dorothy Porter and Constance Porter Uzelac, eds. *William Cooper Nell: Nineteenth-Century African American Abolitionist, Historian, Integrationists*, 178.

community's previously submitted petition to the Columbus legislature requesting the reversal of "laws that oppress us."⁴⁵⁸ Despite the community's self-articulated rejection of the 1843 convention's attendance invitation as published by William C. Nell in *The Liberator*, Jenkins and the Agriculture committee praised emigration from northeastern cities to Midwestern cities such as Ohio, Indiana and Michigan, on the basis the success of communities such as Carthagenia.

David Jenkins became a dynamic figure in Ohio's politics well into the 1860s, a reputation undergirded by his activism on behalf of oppressed Black communities. In one respect, Jenkins' use of petition forms in his newspaper modeled a proactive form of civic engagement and helped to concretize *Palladium of Liberty's* profile as a burgeoning mouthpiece for the otherwise underrepresented interests of Black Ohioans. In the inaugural issue of *Palladium of Liberty*, Jenkins ran an article titled "Census of Colored People in Ohio," in which he argued that 2500 subscribers of the state census-documented 17,362 members of the Black population could sustain the paper for "the benefit of the whole colored population."⁴⁵⁹ In addition, Jenkins published a facsimile of a previously submitted petition representing "96 citizens of color of Franklin county, praying for the repeal of certain laws," namely "to repeal the 4th section of the act of 1807." Boasting that "now is the day star of our night dawning," Jenkins

⁴⁵⁸ Wesley, Dorothy Porter and Constance Porter Uzelac, eds. *William Cooper Nell: Nineteenth-Century African American Abolitionist, Historian, Integrationists*, 126-27.

⁴⁵⁹ *Palladium of Liberty*. 12-27-1843. Issue 1, vol. 1, p. 3. *The African-American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920*. The Ohio Historical Society.

pleaded for readers “send in [their] partitions;”⁴⁶⁰ this request he followed with an example of a petition form, the script reading:

Form Of A Petition. *To the Honorable General Assembly of the State of Ohio.* We, the undersigned colored citizens of the county of [black space] and State of Ohio, do humbly petition your honorable body, to abrogate all those laws in said State, that make a distinction on account of color, and your petitioners as in duty bound, will ever pray.⁴⁶¹

In addition to modeling an ethos of socio-political guardianship or community representation as an editor and petitioner, David Jenkins’ intensive engagement with numerical observation as a mode of political agitation brings to bear an important counter-approach to degradation and dismissal in public literature: census records, Black codes and incendiary newspaper literature.

Power Plays: Professional Respectability and Moral economies on the Colored Convention Stage

The ways that convention delegations asserted an ethos of guardianship in relation to communities raises questions about the nature and perception of power as represented in convention minutes and census-style reports embedded therein. As Jennifer Leeman argues, “Censuses play a key role in the definition of national and group identities, and they are closely linked to the assignment and legitimation of

⁴⁶⁰ “Petition Presented.” *Palladium of Liberty*. 12-27-1843. Issue 1, vol. 1, p. 3. *The African-American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920*. The Ohio Historical Society.

⁴⁶¹ “Form of a Petition.” *Palladium of Liberty*. 12-27-1843. Issue 1, vol. 1, p. 3. *The African-American Experience in Ohio, 1850-1920*. The Ohio Historical Society.

political power.”⁴⁶² To whom did power belong and by what decree? Considering the largely absent voices of *the represented* in convention proceedings, power relations between convention leaders and Black communities can be difficult to fully grasp and measure. Owing to the roles self-empowerment and the espousal of ideals of American citizenship rights play as primary means by which convention delegates and broader communities of Black activists asserted authority, it is unsurprising that scholars such as Erica Armstrong-Dunbar, John Ernest, Daniel Anthony Perez and Charles Hirschman draw attention to performances of leadership and theaters of identity formation in early nineteenth-century African American religious and organizational communities and in African American literary production. Rhetorics of socio-political guardianship can be understood through delegations’ construction of power as real and imagined performances of moral aptitude.

Representations of convention leaders as God-ordained conduits for political change, as well as Black leaders’ recognition of the limitations of their earthly power, are embedded in convention literature produced between 1830 and 1843. In passages wherein delegations seek to define guardianship, organizational language and measures and the espousal of empowerment ideals are means by which to define and assert notions of organizational permanency in an ever-shifting political environment. These notions of socio-political guardianship might be understood as moral economies, a belief system that sought to accomplish two things. Moral economies combined practical measures with spiritual beliefs to form a set of attributes that were

⁴⁶² Leeman, Jennifer. “Racializing language: A History of Linguistic Ideologies in the US Census.” *Journal of Language & Politics*. 3:3 (2004), 507-534. 507.

available to African Americans. These attributes—“intelligence, industry, economy, and moral worth”—promoted a relationship between social, political and moral aptitude.⁴⁶³ As the 1833 convention would proclaim in a prominent font, “MORAL WORTH IS POWERFUL, AND WILL PREVAIL.”⁴⁶⁴ Moral economies also sought to spread the idea that moral aptitude played a leading role in Black people’s ability to achieve upward mobility through professionalizing labor and organizational pursuits. Considering the prominence of labor and organizational categories in early sociological and census-style reporting at conventions, convention demography helped form a basis for an ethos of convention leadership that could appeal to delegate cohorts and Black publics.

Moral economies not only suggests that political work or activism was a form of labor, it also engenders a form of respectability in the public sphere based on intertwined professional and moral ventures. When the 1833 convention advocated for “a Conventional Temperance Society, to be styled THE COLOURED AMERICAN CONVENTIONAL TEMPERANCE SOCIETY,” they articulated the notion of moral economies:

In all our deliberations, we recognize the idea, that intelligence, industry, economy, and moral worth, in connexion [*sic*] with the

⁴⁶³ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

⁴⁶⁴ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

purifying power of heaven-born truth, am [*sic*] sufficient alone, to prostrate, this iron hearted monster.⁴⁶⁵

The passage places Black people and God as entities within a reciprocal relationship that grants Black leaders moral power. It also aligns heavenly and earthly political agendas to imply that convention uplift strategies represent a means by which to destroy slavery and achieve racial justice. While slavery is presented as an inhumane and formidable entity in the form of a “monster,” the temperance belief system is rendered in the form of practical activism: the act of forming a society and the society itself.⁴⁶⁶ The conflation of real and spiritual entities in convention literature demonstrates convention leaders’ ability to imagine themselves and collective bodies as God-ordained instruments for racial justice. Secondly, it creates opportunities to acknowledge the *work* of social reform, alongside that which socio-political labor produces. Thus, early conventioners conceptualize activism as a professional labor pursuit and represent morality as an attribute given to them by God.

American ideals and moral integrity were key to early delegates’ notions of power and authority and the ways in which they approached the study of Black populations. Beliefs and ideals, or wished-for circumstances that did not always represent the actual state of circumstances, were rendered as real, practical tools for resistance and empowerment. Namely, early delegations sought to present cultural

⁴⁶⁵ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

⁴⁶⁶ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

ideals pertaining to Black people's social attributes as long-debated, accepted and achievable objectives. Mirroring the ways the passage represents God as a "heaven-born truth" that has sanctioned delegations' role as leaders, the 1833 convention combines real and hoped-for social attributes among Black communities as a practical criteria for upward mobility: "intelligence, industry, economy and moral worth."⁴⁶⁷ The "purifying power" that God has engendered among Black leaders, they implicitly argue, rises as a means of strength that cannot be restrained by the earthly institution of slavery.⁴⁶⁸ If the *ideal* of such a criteria is rendered as an achievable "idea," it is a signifier for the intellectual work of imagination.⁴⁶⁹ This passage represents an early, yet resonate Black cultural ideal on the basis of which many Black writers, educators and activists would promote racial uplift in fiction and nonfiction.

Readings of moral economies in this chapter examine the ways convention delegations formed notions of guardianship in relation to their roles as representatives. Part of the role of delegations or groups of delegates was to engage in demography. In turn, the reports that developed out of their study of the condition of Black communities bring attention to shifting power relations between delegates,

⁴⁶⁷ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

⁴⁶⁸ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

⁴⁶⁹ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention." *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

communities and the larger race problem in America. Even as delegations imagined their authority as a God-given right, procedural language in convention minutes also sought to label real contours of convention power. In many instances, when early convention bodies articulated proclamations of duty in the form of recommendations for political action, phrases such as “by every means in their power,” “to give all support in their power,” and “the utmost in our power” recognized the real limitations that constrained the implementation of their political agendas.⁴⁷⁰ Likewise, practical steps towards defining power helped to orchestrate power relations between delegates and communities in relation to, and beyond, religious affiliation. Delegations represented communities by obtaining affirmative votes in local community venues such as churches, benevolent societies and political meetings, though exceptions to this rule occurred regularly.⁴⁷¹ Convention proceedings that reached the public described delegate attendance, debates, votes, resolutions and committee work—formalities that articulated power relations between delegates and the represented. From this perspective, conventions did not assume control of Black communities’ interests. Because convention delegates often lacked the power to enact changes on behalf of Black communities, they assumed *creative and intellectual direction* of political agendas that sought to positively impact Black communities’ educational, political, social and economic advancements.

⁴⁷⁰ Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color, Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), “Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention.” *ColoredConventions.org*, coloredconventions.org/items/show/275.

⁴⁷¹ See debate on voting procedure in the 1843 national convention proceedings.

One of the most significant limitations early conventions contended with was that Black convention demography and reporting were perpetually inchoate. It can be said that such an ambitious goalpost was bound to fall short, given that conventions' census-taking initiatives depended upon diverse and often sparse delegations' voluntary compliance with requests for population data, while these delegations held unpaid positions. While convention planners and executive officers regularly made requests, pecuniary support was less frequently provided beyond printing costs, which remained a staple of most antebellum convention budgets apart from demographic data collection. Roles connected to convention demography and sociological reporting reflected a professionalizing and educational strategy for Black activist communities. They reflect an understudied Black activist-intellectual cultural production that necessarily relied on performances of empowerment. Further studies of convention demography can reveal the ways population data impacted conventions' political agendas and honed the development and use of rhetorics of socio-political guardianship.

While antebellum Colored Conventions generally supported convention-sponsored demography, interpretations and uses for Black population data were not monolithic, but diverse in scope and practicality, as James McCune Smith's and David Jenkin's political work demonstrates. Convention proceedings reveal the ways in which educational and professionalizing initiatives undergirded the formation of Black leadership classes within antebellum delegations of Colored Conventions. Well-established, professionally successful and popular delegates, such as Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet and James McCune Smith helped to establish a masculine-centered professional respectability that often formed the core of delegate

expectations. However, as other chapters seek to demonstrate, many Black women writers and education advocates such as Sarah Woodson Early would appropriate notions of moral economies to further encourage professional respectability among vulnerable populations such as Black women, students and everyday people in lower classes. In doing so, women broadened notions of political labor as a professionalizing pursuit. They demonstrated Black women's interest in promoting social criteria for racial and educational uplift that sought to accomplish two goals. One, Black women writers would espouse professional respectability as an activist endeavor open to all African Americans rather than named or elected Colored Convention delegates. Secondly, Black women writers would endorse moral economies or a social criterion for uplift as a means by which Black educators and Black women of all social statuses could achieve a sense of belonging among activist communities in the U.S.

It is clear that while Colored Conventions established procedural practices and ways to assert representation on behalf of Black populations in ways that were similar to better documented U.S. congressional-style debates and styles of representation, the disenfranchisement that Black people faced imparted nuance to conversations and action items developed within, and in connection to, Colored Convention demography. That which Rael terms "spokesmanship" helps to contextualize Black leadership dynamics on the scale of social structures and Black identity formation in the antebellum era. But institutional-level analyses of Black leadership ethos reveal an uncanny sense of the Black imagination that operated within, and apart from, Black religious institutions, state-specific social networks and events carrying the "Colored Conventions" moniker.

By examining notions of socio-political guardianship through the lens of individual Black leaders' delegate participation, beyond the dates of individual convention sessions, it is also clear that individuals and their social environments expanded early notions of community leadership through debate, collective voting and petition exercises in the public sphere. Smith's involvement at New York state Colored Conventions reveals the ways incredibly popular delegates may have represented exceptionalism in their leadership and personal success. But men like him could be humbled by votes with the power to topple more popular representatives' plans for civic engagement within the state convention political order. As an emerging delegate without a palpable national reputation, David Jenkins would occupy several crucial positions at Ohio Colored Conventions that strengthened the longevity and completion of action items. Namely, he was part of the 1849 State Central Committee, arguably holding more power than any other committee given its ability "to call a State Convention whenever they in their judgment may deem it expedient."⁴⁷² In his appointment to the State Central Committee in 1849, Jenkins became a leading point of connectivity and longevity between the 1849 and 1850 state conventions. The activist careers of David Jenkins and James McCune Smith exemplify different approaches to early convention leadership's notions of socio-political guardianship in action. In examining the cultural literature produced in relation to Colored

⁴⁷² This committee had the power to call a "delegated" convention rather than a mass convention. A delegated convention refers to a convention of delegates rather than a convention open to the public or advertised as a public convention. Foner, Phillip Sheldon, ed. *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions: New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio*. Baltimore: Temple University Press, 1979. 230.

Conventions, readers can explore the politics of convention demography and better understand the ways subsequent reports gave rise to notions of professional respectability and moral economies among Black leadership cohorts.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION: BLACK WOMEN WRITERS AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY INTELLECTUAL CULTURES AND IDEALS

The women I selected for this project were connected to important forums that put them in proximity to organizational networks of leaders, yet their literature is not often the subject of discussions about Black political organizational history, newspaper cultures and democratic and moral value systems. The figures I selected also sought to reach a variety of classes of Black people—from “contraband” and Union generals to school administrators and elected public officials to newspaper editors and communities of everyday people. I have drawn from a number of literary genres that demonstrate the ways African American women gained professional respectability. Organizational minutes, newspapers, biographies, cultural essays, serialized teaching reports and novels empowered rising Black author-activist-educators to share their visions for racial justice and to assert their interpretation of moral leadership and its value for reading and listening publics. I also wanted to begin my critical study of Black women’s educational philosophies with a foundation that recognized the formal and discursive traditions that would have been immensely important to how Black women writers represented Black cultural practices, moral leadership and education opportunity. Each of the core writers I discuss throughout this dissertation had genealogical and/or traceable ideological connections to Black-led social reform activities. This project pays especial attention to women writers’ publication histories and educational philosophies as represented in their literary

production. However, I also recognize antebellum and postbellum Colored Conventions as important intellectual forebears to the writers included in this study. Convention cultures reflect a Black protest tradition that centralized educational justice on behalf of Black publics. Educational justice was not only a leading topic of debate and activism; it also helped delegates and connected publics construe a sense of professional respectability and morality. Beginning with antebellum conventions, I have endeavored to trace significant points of development in nineteenth-century Black educational uplift thought through the work of Black women teachers.

This study critically examines the literature of African American political thinkers and actors, especially Black women educator-intellectuals and their Black male forebears and peers, who were either teachers or whose writings were invested in Black educational uplift. Knowing that Black communities needed an educational agenda to seriously alter African Americans' experiences in American society, Josephine Brown, Cordelia H. Ray, Sarah J. Woodson, Mary Still, Julia C. Collins and Charlotte Forten produced literature that reflects multi-faceted perspectives on the social and political outlook of African Americans before and after the U.S. government recognized Black Americans as full citizens. Throughout this project, I have sought to connect leading and lesser-known speakers, institutions, organizations and events that offer insight into expressions of African American educational advocacy in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth centuries. I examine the literary and historical contributions of Black women teachers and educational uplift advocates with the understanding that Black women's literary production constituted a form of political resistance against racism, sexism and professional exclusionary practices. I have written with an acknowledgement that their literature explores perspectives that

have been historically ignored and undervalued. As such, I recognize this dissertation as a recovery project as well.

Both white and Black women struggled to meet unrealistic gender ideals. Historically heralded notions and characteristics associated with “respectable women” often included piety, submission to male authority, access to domesticity and moral and physical purity. If notions of ideal womanhood connected to True Womanhood and the Cult of Domesticity were difficult for middle- and upper-class white women to embody, then it was even more so for Black women. Black men also struggled to meet unrealistic gender ideals of manhood. I have addressed a variety of ways Black women and men political thinkers formulated and espoused their own codes of respectable practices (re: respectability) in their roles in social life and Black reform cultures. Black women educators obtained respectability among their peers—white and Black, women and men—in public life through tapping into familiar intellectual traditions. Using Black protest language and appealing to democratic ideals for equal access to American possibilities, their publication histories, as well as their rhetorical strategies, built on the ways that activism and identity—subjects and authors, leaders and the represented, fathers and daughters, and teacher to teacher—were often all bound up together, to borrow from Martha Jones.⁴⁷³ Furthermore, religious and secular frameworks for collaborative activism, and the gender battles that sometimes ensued, provided value systems out of which Black women intellectuals honed

⁴⁷³ Jones, Martha. *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

women-centered professional voices, while being aware of the instrumentality of both sexes to Black educational uplift.

In my approach to Black women's political writing, I have sought to emphasize the ways in which forums dominated by Black men also provided a genesis of Black political thought that Black women built upon. For example, through leadership platforms such as Colored Conventions Black men represented modes of professional respectability through activist-labor-intellectual pursuits. According to Jacqueline Bacon in *Freedom's Journal*, Black men and women subverted restrictions to economic, political and social success by defining and engaging in Black commerce wherein Black men supported "female leadership and participation in community affairs."⁴⁷⁴ I have sought to demonstrate that measures of economic disenfranchisement and, conversely, economic *enfranchisement* are not limited to pecuniary tallies. My concept of moral economies attempts to capture often shifting, yet strikingly similar approaches that Black political thinkers and representative bodies—men and women, individuals and collectives—launched to assert their philosophies of Black educational uplift between 1830 and 1910. Industry, moral decorum, educational attainment and active engagement in social reform, on behalf of the betterment of African Americans, regularly appear as tenets for Black intellectual and moral improvement in Black literary production across genres of writing. Black writers often discussed the social and monetary currencies associated with morality in ways that align with core democratic values articulated in the U.S. Constitution. They

⁴⁷⁴ Bacon, Jacqueline. *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007. 131.

called attention to the conflicts between Black experiences and America's statements of moral integrity that appeared in the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. My selection of authors and my historical analyses and literary criticisms seek to highlight the ways long-standing lines of rhetorical appeals were circulated in a variety of ways and in a variety of textual forms across speakers, regions and time.

Often, widely-attended Colored Conventions attracted ambitious political thinkers and Black communities who wanted to bring about educational, civil, legal, social and economic justice for Black people in the U.S. Convention congregants configured paths for educational uplift through printed minutes, personal correspondence, newspaper campaigns and promotional activities. They collaborated to espouse visions for uplift with real and imagined communities of readers and convention followers in mind. As chapter one demonstrates, by the 1860s, Colored Education Conventions centralized education as an entry point through which facets of Black learning and Black life were discussed. These meetings nurtured Black intellectual cultures in ways that sought to prepare teaching professionals, students and parents for their own development. The forums anticipated the complete emancipation of slaves in America. So, they worked to unite Black teachers and communities with strategies for educational uplift that everyday Black people could connect to and grow from. I specifically examine the teaching careers and speaking engagements connected to teacher-activists, Sarah J. Woodson (Early) and John Mercer Langston, who participated in Ohio and Kentucky Colored Education Conventions in 1862 and 1869. From their own perspectives as highly educated occupational idealists, Woodson and

Langston presented cases for why intellectual decorum and morality were key to Black educational uplift.

In chapter two, I argue that Black women educators Josephine Brown, H. Cordelia and Florence Ray and Serena Washington employed biographical writing and collaborative forms of editing and authorship to construe meanings of Black activist identities that were grown out of antebellum Colored Conventions and that were in conversation with transnational cultures of biographical writing that focused on Black reformers. I argue that cultures of biographical writing among Black women intellectuals are apparent in British sketchbooks and AME Church publications such as the *A.M.E. Church Review*. Having fathers who were intensely connected to Black political forums and the ideals of democratic leadership constructed therein, Brown, Ray and Washington provided insight into the ways activist classes of Black leadership and the ethos that undergirded them were advanced from a daughter's perspective. Their biographies appropriate and build upon nineteenth-century political and popular cultural lexicons of Black political leadership connected to notions of representation, the self-made man and the public man as a social reformer and educational advocate. The biographies also map ways by which future generations of Black activists in America and Europe could learn from, and expand on, past leadership models. The biographies and the sketchbooks attend to, and depart from, popular rhetorical maneuvers apparent in slave narratives published in the nineteenth century. Most importantly, they clarify the ways Black women intellectuals had observed and critiqued Black activist networks over time, endeavoring to be instrumental voices for social reform as authors and editors, alongside the Black men who appear as subjects in their literature.

Chapter three attends to the massive influence that Black and white American periodicals such as *The Christian Recorder* and *The Atlantic Monthly* wielded in nineteenth-century American culture. Publishing in mainstay religious and secular-progressive newspapers such as *The Christian Recorder* and *The Atlantic Monthly* furthered Black women writers' intellectual reach. It expanded their professionalization as educator-activists and as moral economists. The churchwoman Mary Still, novelist Julia Collins and Port Royal Experiment teacher Charlotte Forten published fiction and nonfiction as independently circulating political pamphlets and in religious and secular receptacles of political thought during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Eric Gardner in *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature and Periodical Culture* poses an important question that has value in quoting at length:

... what happens when we leave one of the most expected starting places for a narrative of the Civil War era, the Lincoln White House, and leave as well the towering figure of Lincoln to focus instead on the thousands of African Americans during and after the war who subscribed to, read, supported, wrote for, and/or worked with Black periodicals—African American preachers and teachers, soldiers and domestics, laundresses and barbers, activists and poets. What happens when we conceive of those African Americas—some freeborn, some self-emancipated 'fugitives,' some 'contraband,' and some freed only after the war—as agents fighting for rights rather than receiving 'gifts'?⁴⁷⁵

I add, what happens when we also study the ways Black women like Charlotte Forten engaged white-run periodicals such as *The Atlantic Monthly* to bring to reading

⁴⁷⁵ Gardner, Eric. *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature and Periodical Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 3.

communities diverse renderings of Black “contraband” communities? Why study Black intra-communal intellectual acumen apart from, and in addition to, the larger vision for national unity and abolition that the Lincoln White House has historically become known for? This chapter, “Ladies Should Read the Newspapers” poses approaches by which to study professional respectability. Chapter three also explores approaches to studying Black women writers’ embodiment of professional respectability through joint teaching and activist endeavors. This chapter seeks to provide critical insight into the ways in Black women’s war-era literature illuminates moral economies as a set of beliefs for Black educational uplift and the real monies associated with moral messages for Black uplift.

This chapter also seeks to embed Black women writers in important historical and literary discussions about print cultures, morality and Black intellectuals connected to Black and white periodicals during the Civil War era. Mary Still challenged Black male AME Church leaders and content creators connected to the emerging *Christian Recorder* to view women as intellectual peers and activist counterparts in the production of public print. Still campaigned for both sexes to be involved in struggles for Black equality and Black artistic expression. Political interventions in print written by Black men that held community stature and reputational value, among religious and activist social networks on par with Mary Still, have often been treated with much more weight in larger conversations about Black publishing and cultivations of political ideology in press outlets. Still has largely been understudied in relation to *The Christian Recorder’s* early value system and willingness to include Black women writers such as Julia C. Collins in a variety of roles connected to content production, and to include literature like *The Curse of Caste*

that Black women produce. Additionally, this project attends to the ways Charlotte Forten's serialized teaching narrative *Life on the Sea Islands* represents Black contraband communities in nuanced and complex ways. Her teaching role in the Port Royal Experiment and the subsequent publication of *Life on the Sea Islands* in *The Atlantic Monthly* reflect the reach of her professional respectability. Moreover, her combined teaching and literary production are counterparts to conversations about cultures of benevolence giving in contemporaneous newspapers.

Chapter four examines northern Black activist-training platforms that discussed and launched social justice efforts through Black political forums and events carrying the moniker "Colored Convention" in the antebellum era. Early Colored Conventions provided Black activists with an expansive material and intellectual view of race relations in America. From convention proceedings, newspapers reviews, speeches printed on broadside to handbills, petitions and an array of other political ephemera, the literary byproducts of antebellum and postbellum Colored Conventions demonstrate Black leaders and communities' strikingly consistent investment in suggesting strategies for political organizing, providing civic education and practicing democratic ideals. These groups pursued full citizenship rights according to the ideals and promises stated in the U.S. Constitution. However, even though Black leaders connected Black advocacy forums attempted to consolidate efforts among disparate Black activists, early conventions regularly impeded Black women's political reach as individuals and collective bodies.

In this chapter, the review of politics surrounding demography suggests a radically nontraditional approach to Black educational philosophy. The chapter draws attention to tensions and paradoxes connected to six conventions' demography efforts

and subsequent presentation of information for public consumption. Viewing population reports as educational materials, as an important example of Black informational enterprises and a reflection of problematic gender-based exclusionary practices allows readers to understand the political potential and political weaknesses connected to antebellum Black demography. Antebellum conventions' ventures in sociological reporting trained cohorts of Black intellectuals and activists for pro-Black rights advocacy work. But, antebellum Colored Convention policies and delegate roles generally excluded Black women from most convention leadership and committee posts. As such, rather than focusing on Black women, this chapter recognizes early Colored Conventions as an important source of nineteenth-century intellectual and organizational ideals. At these forums, Black activists represented their own professional identities and framed racial uplift messages for real and imagined communities' consumption. By focusing on the politics surrounding demography efforts and population reports, I have sought to bring attention to Black conventions' nuanced means of educating delegates, participating communities and reading publics. Black writers who are subjects of study in this dissertation were interested in developing and concretizing traditions of protest through speaking, organizational activism and literary production. In doing so, they sought to (re)define and sustain their place in the American and global spheres of social and political relations.

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The Liberator

The National Anti-Slavery Standard.

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