

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THINKING, SCRIPTING, AND
PERFORMING: CONSTRUCTING AND
PLAYING THE RACIAL SYNECDOCHE IN
THE ANTEBELLUM NORTH.

Douglas A. Jones, Jr., MA, 2007

Directed By: Professor Heather S. Nathans, Department of
Theatre, University of Maryland, College Park

In my thesis, I argue that between the years of 1830-1842, free African Americans scripted and performed what I term the racial synecdoche. This “character” was a black performative identity that people of color should play on the public stage. The performance team—or those who scripted and performed this new black identity—believed that the performance of the synecdoche would grant free people of color eligibility to perform full civic participation in America’s nascent democracy. In this study, I consider the national black conventions of the 1830s as ritualistic sites and as the primary loci where that self-scripting process took place. I characterize this thesis as an intellectual history and hope that it contributes to the vital and ever-growing bodies of African American history and African American theatre and performance history, as well as add contour and complexity to the well-charted Jacksonian period.

THINKING, SCRIPTING, AND PERFORMING: CONSTRUCTING AND
PLAYING THE RACIAL SYNECDOCHE IN THE ANTEBELLUM NORTH

By

Douglas A. Jones, Jr.

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
2007

Advisory Committee:
Professor Heather S. Nathans, Chair
Professor Elsa Barkley Brown
Professor Faedra Chatard Carpenter

© Copyright by
Douglas A. Jones, Jr.
2007

Acknowledgements

This project would never have been completed without the guidance, wisdom, wit, intelligence, and support of my advisor, Professor Heather S. Nathans. Professor Nathans' indomitable spirit and enduring encouragement not only shaped the direction of this study, but also the course of my career as a researcher, historian, and teacher. Dr. Nathans—I promise I will be able to call you “Heather” one day—thank you!

I also want to acknowledge the other members of my committee, Professor Faedra Carpenter and Professor Elsa Barkley Brown. Professor Carpenter remains one of the most supportive forces in my young career. Professor Elsa Barkley Brown not only allowed me to invade her seminars in the history department, but also provided invaluable, “non-theatre person” insight to this project.

Finally, I am grateful for my family, friends, and officemates and their endless support. I am especially thankful for my mother, Jacqueline L. McMillion, for always listening. Underneath her “Dougie, I don't know what that means!” rests her enduring love.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Introduction	1
Chapter One: “Five Hundred Thousand Free People of Color” and One Voice: The Breaches and Crises of the African American Community in the North, 1776-1829	24
Chapter Two: We Present to the World a General Character!: The Scripting of the Racial Synecdoche	42
Chapter Three: Performance Cancelled: Jacksonianism, Violence, and Playing the Racial Synecdoche	77
Epilogue: “Tragedy of African American Politics” And the Call for New Scripts	97

Introduction

Victor Turner describes social drama as “agonistic” and “rife with problem and conflict.” As social and political contests, social dramas are “competitions for scarce ends—power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity—by particular means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce—goods, territory, money, men and women.”¹ For instance, the post-Revolutionary and antebellum periods, characterized by social and economic insecurity, “interrogated the stability of social identity and the meaning of citizenship for whites as well as people of color”²; simply put, it was a social drama on the grandest of scales. My thesis investigates the ways in which African Americans—as integral characters in that drama—performed in that crucible of freedom, culture, and identity. Specifically, this study addresses the following question: How did African Americans script and perform an identity that challenged white supremacy, while participating in a nascent democracy and burgeoning liberal marketplace? Although legal and social strictures against African Americans increased progressively in the march toward civil war, an examination of the intellectual and cultural material with which African Americans sought to sway “white Americans [to] speedily learn to practice what they so loudly proclaim, that ‘all men are born free and equal’”³ can uncover often overlooked aspects of antebellum African American life. I frame my study as an intellectual history in that it is not a “history of thought, but of men thinking.”⁴

In this work I explore the ways in which African Americans crafted a specific performative identity to meet the demands of the American public sphere. I question how an enslaved and oppressed population imbibed and then re-imagined the

Enlightenment rhetoric of the Revolution—“life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Offered a script from which their role had been excised, how did African Americans reconfigure the national dialogue on citizenship to create a “speaking role” for themselves? Because this identity was consciously constructed—I term that process “self-scripting”—their participation in the public sphere is best understood as a mechanism of performance.

My theoretical framework draws chiefly on the performance theories of Richard Schechner, Joseph Roach, and Erving Goffman. As a mode of “restored behavior”, performance, according to Schechner, is:

...symbolic and reflexive: not empty but loaded behavior multivocally broadcasting significances. These difficult terms express a single principle: The self can act in/as another; the social or transindividual self is a role or set of roles. Symbolic and reflexive behavior is the hardening into theatre of social, religious, aesthetic, medical, and educational process.⁵

Thus, self-scripted behavior “hardens” social and political processes into theatrical phenomena.

Roach’s subsequent re-working of Schechner’s concept of restored behavior allows me to examine the performative nature of African American identity in the antebellum public sphere. Roach argues that, “...the process of trying out various candidates in different situations—the doomed search for originals by continuously auditioning stand-ins—is the most important of the many meanings that users intend when they say the word *performance*.”⁶ As a diasporic community, forcibly deprived of an “original” identity, African American activists continually “auditioned” for their community, striving to establish an “authentic” representation of the population. The “process of trying out various candidates in different situations” characterizes the

performance of African American antebellum actors. For example, activists “auditioned” racial vocabularies for the African American community. When William Whipper helped form the American Moral Reform Society in 1835, he urged African Americans to “abandon the use of the word ‘colored,’ when either speaking or writing concerning themselves; and especially to remove the title African from their institutions, the marbles of churches, etc.”⁷ *Freedom Journal’s* editor Samuel Cornish, on the other hand, believed “colored” was the apposite term with which to label African Americans. Given its “relative novelty” which “saved it from the stigma already imparted to ‘African’ and ‘negro,’”⁸ Cornish believed “colored” was the best moniker for the new identity they were constructing, whereas Whipper thought it should remain color-neutral.

I also invoke Roach’s definition of performance as a process that “offers a substitution for something else that preexists it. Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire to both embody and to replace.”⁹ This study explores what identities—self-imposed or otherwise—African Americans sought to replace. By replacing identities that they believed precluded them from receiving the fruits of the American experiment with ones they thought would give them access to greater opportunities, African Americans were engaging in the process that Roach calls “surrogation.” Surrogation is “how culture reproduces and re-creates itself...[it] does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric.”¹⁰ I suggest that in antebellum African American culture the surrogation process appeared as an attempt to extinguish past characters. As the last of the

emancipation statutes started to take effect, African Americans struggled to replace the previous meaning of blackness (born to serve), with a new one (born to be free).

That process of substitution reveals the ways in which African Americans sought to construct what historian Patrick Rael calls a “racial synecdoche”; that is, an ideal identity with a set of behaviors that all African Americans should exhibit on the public stage. Because “the misdeeds of a few were said to represent the moral characters of the entire race,”¹¹ African Americans could ill afford to be represented negatively in a burgeoning public sphere. As Samuel Cornish wrote in the *Colored American*: “If one of the baser sort of our people commit a crime, or is guilty of a misdemeanor, the cry is the niggers! the niggers!! Then the daily press with few honorable exceptions, fall in, magnify the evil, and throw the stigma and disgrace upon the whole body of colored people, utterly regardless of the pious and virtuous among us.”¹² My thesis focuses on the ways African Americans self-scripted a racial synecdoche; it also explores how that identity played before an audience of hostile whites.

Thus far, I have avoided using the terms “African American leaders” when describing the synecdoche’s scripters. Although it was the case that African American leaders had greater access to the apparatuses of the antebellum public sphere, it would be a mistake to assume that other “nameless” free blacks did not have a hand in the construction of the racial synecdoche. For instance, in 1817 leaders like Paul Cuffe, James Forten, and Richard Allen advocated an emigration scheme that would send free blacks to Africa. Although they did not conceive this plan as a panacea for the issue of slavery, they believed it would expand economic

opportunities and alleviate certain social burdens for free African Americans in the North. When they brought it before the non-elite members of their communities, it was rejected with a resounding “no.”¹³ Their communities opposed the notion in part because they no longer conceived of themselves as *African*, but as *American*. By mining the archives for voices other than those of the leaders, I hope to get a broader and more complex picture of African American identity construction.

That task was complicated because throughout the newspaper accounts, pamphlets, memoirs, and narratives, the names, ideas, and rhetoric of the elite are ubiquitous. My challenge became to uncover the voices of those who were not leaders. Without them, I would suggest, one gets a limited picture of antebellum African American life. I had the task of uncovering the “thinking” of everyday folk, too, and devising ways to unearth at least the echo of their voices from the public sphere. I have resisted focusing solely on the scripting of the leaders and assuming that they merely dictated roles to their constituency. As I have found, that constituency *did* in fact play a large role in the self-scripting process and that their sense of empowerment derived from the unique social and economic structure of the nation’s free black community. As Patrick Rael argues in his book *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, economic life for free African Americans in the North was fairly uniform, compared to their black counterparts in the South and their white counterparts throughout the nation. He writes, “Economic forces...helped compress African American social structure in the North, so that relative to other places in the African Diaspora, the range of experience available to free black northerners was simply not that broad.”¹⁴ Black Southerner Joseph Wilson wrote an

1841 account of Philadelphia's black elite concluding "that the difficulty of establishing, successfully, a distinguishing line of separation is very great," and testifying that "the great body of the [white] public have been accustomed to consider [blacks] so closely allied to each other, as to render it very improbable, if not impossible, that any social differences could be held in recognition among them."¹⁵

While whites may have viewed African Americans as socially homogenous, they overlooked the complex social, economic, and familial networks on which those communities were founded. Many white Northerners assumed that African Americans tended to act as a collective because they could not distinguish nuances in the community. However, I would argue that the collective action of the African American antebellum community on issues related to slavery, colonization, disenfranchisement, etc., were actually the product of a deliberate choice on the part of the group to present a unified "performance" to their white audience.

That collectivist tendency resulted in the formation of institutions that provided material and psychological aid to northern African Americans. As historian James Oliver Horton notes, "The churches and the fraternal and mutual-aid societies formed the core of black communities. These institutions served as the staging ground for reform and protest organizations and were the foundation of the social and economic structure of the society. They were central to an African American sense of identity."¹⁶ Horton points out the formative role these organizations played in the shaping of an African American identity; but his suggestion that "because there were few opportunities for black people in the wider society, [they] found outlets in the institutions of the black community,"¹⁷ illustrates what Robert L. Harris calls "the

reactive model,” making the implicit assumption that blacks secretly aspired to membership in white organizations. This model “impedes our appreciation of early black benevolent societies as voluntary associations and as the underpinning of black institutional life.”¹⁸

Eschewing the “reactive model,” and attempting to assess African Americans’ institutions on their own terms, I agree with historian Craig Steven Wilder who situates African American institutions “as a West African legacy,” built on a “plausible African ‘heritage’.”¹⁹ That heritage was “the social and intellectual material” that fostered a world-view centered on the importance of the public good, rather than the private. Although white Americans crafted the new nation around the Enlightenment philosophy of “*pro bono publico*,” the expanding marketplace in the antebellum period caused most whites to focus more on individual achievement. As they were denied many of these opportunities, free African Americans were more likely to maintain the collectivist ethos. That ethos was reflected in the membership log of one the most influential voluntary associations for African Americans in the North, the New York African Society for Mutual Relief (NYASMR). The NYASMR boasted a membership of those born free and those born into slavery, the highly educated and the illiterate, men born in the North and men born in the South, those who claimed religious affiliations and those who did not, and members of the highly skilled professional class (like doctors) and the working class (like cartmen).²⁰

I argue that the egalitarian politics practiced in African American voluntary associations, for example, translated to the arenas where African Americans constructed the racial synecdoche. For instance, both leaders and non-leaders

attended the National Conventions. Although leaders organized the conventions and made keynote addresses, the presence of the *demos* was palpable. Their presence was felt in more subtle ways than their wealthier counterparts, such as shaping the direction of the debates as well as in their voting on resolutions.²¹ Leaders realized that the success of the performances depended on their ability to establish not only a credible individual African American identity, but also to collaborate with their community in a seamless collective performance of African American-ness. Thus, I suggest the self-scripting of the racial synecdoche was a collectivist effort, shaped by African Americans *en masse*.

Finally, my work examines the ways in which antebellum African American intellectual processes materialized, through embodiment, before a hostile, white audience. By reading this period as a social drama, my thesis analyzes antebellum African American “thinking” through the lens of performance. If “by the 1820s the discourse of slavery had been transformed into the discourse of ‘race’,”²² as historian Joanne Pope Melish has asserted, this thesis situates its subjects among contemporary race theorists who suggest that race is a social or performative construction. Although many antebellum whites grounded race and therefore racism in biology, African American “thinking” understood race as what Stuart Hall would later characterize as a “discursive” and “floating signifier.”

Chapter Structure:

Chapter One

In Chapter One, I situate my subject within the frame of Turner’s social drama, with particular emphasis on the breach and crisis phases. Although the thrust

of my study deals with the period between 1830 and 1843, this chapter characterizes the post-Revolutionary period (up to 1830) as one of continuous breach. If breach occurs “when one or more social norms regarded as binding and as sustaining key relationships between persons in a more or less bounded community are broken,”²³ then this period is indeed one full of them in the North. What was “broken?” I argue it was the very meaning of blackness. As African Americans in the North were, state by state, receiving their freedom and some were being born free, the pre-Revolutionary paradigm of black-means-slave was being ruptured. From roughly 1780 to 1827 (when slavery was categorically abolished in New York) northern America had to add a new stratum to its typology of citizens—free blacks. How would America handle this new category in light of its expanding urban centers and burgeoning liberal economy? What role would these once human chattels play in a new nation? How would they be defined? Moreover, how would they define themselves? Since the Revolutionary period was steeped in the Enlightenment rhetoric of “all men are created equal,” in what ways could the dominant community reconcile the seemingly unconquerable contradiction between their promulgated ideals contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and their desire to repress black autonomy and black participation in the American experiment?²⁴

Chapter One also sketches the crisis phase of this social drama. Turner notes, “in this phase, people take sides, supporting either the rule-breaker or the target of his action. Factions, coalitions, and cabals are formed, heated language is exchanged, and actual violence may occur. Former allies may be opposed, former foes united.”²⁵

Historians have thoroughly documented the various factions that formed during this period; my work, however, looks at the formation of these factions through the lens of what sociologist Erving Goffman calls “performance teams.” Goffman uses the phrase performance team “to refer to any set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine.”²⁶ By “routine,” Goffman means the preparation and performance of a self.²⁷ In terms of my thesis, that “single routine” was the construction and performance of the racial synecdoche.

Chapter 2

This chapter investigates the redress phase of Turner’s formulation of the social drama. In redress, the team “move[s] to counteract the contagion of continuing breach, and endeavor first to contain, then dispel the crisis.” I suggest that starting in 1830, African Americans of all classes throughout the North came together and started a “self-scripting” process as part of an attempt to “counteract contagion” and “contain” and “dispel the crisis” of racism, violence, and slavery. Using events such as the National Conventions in Philadelphia and New York (1830-1835) and African American newspapers, pamphlets, and jeremiads that dictated prescriptive behavior, this chapter focuses on the ways in which African Americans sought to counter the burgeoning field of scientific racism. With the racist “science” of skull-related phrenology circulating within both the scientific and popular communities, self-scripting African Americans combated those conclusions with a racial synecdoche. Furthermore, by self-scripting a racial synecdoche, African Americans shaped the discourse on race. As co-fabricators of a social knowledge, their discourse was, following Foucault, “made up of the totality of all effective statements (whether

written or spoken), in their dispersion as events and the occurrence that is proper to them.”²⁸ Thus, African American “thinking” and self-scripting were not intellectual exercises for a liminoid intelligentsia, but rather earnest efforts to alter the collective consciousness of an antagonistic dominant culture.

Chapter Two also discusses the sources from which African Americans drew for their self-scripting. While much of the early historiography concerning antebellum African American life in the North suggests that blacks copied white forms and institutions, recent scholarship has revealed the autonomous nature of African American life and culture.²⁹ While this study does not suggest that the racial synecdoche was simply white psychology and white behavior in black skin, neither does it place it within a pantheon of African archetypes. Instead, my thesis argues that African Americans imagined the characteristics of the 1830-1843 racial synecdoche as freshly, distinctly, and colorlessly *American*. Just as whites were busy developing what they thought to be the ideal character to perform on a “national stage,” with an expanding liberal marketplace and disdain for the British, so too were African Americans. I also argue in this chapter that African Americans were co-architects of an American consciousness.

Chapter 3:

While Chapter Two looks at the self-scripting phase, Chapter Three discusses the performance of the racial synecdoche in the public arena. I look specifically at Philadelphia and the 1838 riots that commenced with the burning of Pennsylvania Hall. 1838 Philadelphia provides an excellent case study because the city was the site of most of the National Conventions in the 1830s as well as many of the major riots

in the North during this period. I explore reasons why whites of all classes rioted against free people of color. In this chapter I also attempt to contribute to the historiography on Jacksonian mobs and understand the reasons why mobs attacked relatively powerless black people and their property. Using the assault on Pennsylvania Hall and its aftermath as a case study, this chapter questions why African Americans became increasingly distrustful of the power of the performed synecdoche. Despite the performance of the synecdoche, unmoved whites continued to justify Northern racism, racist science, and, even more broadly, Southern slavery. As post-structuralist scholars have argued, author's intent is negligible in relation to an audience member's subjective response; such was the case for African Americans' scripting and performance of the racial synecdoche.

Epilogue:

The epilogue situates the 1843 bookend to my study. After that period, African Americans became increasingly skeptical of the power of the symbolic (i.e. non-violent performance) and started to concentrate on material action. By the 1840s, abolitionism grew even more radical, as Richard Newman points out in *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. African Americans became less confident in the power of the racial synecdoche. Unlike the 1830s, which was marked by a vehement and consistent “no” regarding the idea of emigration, the mid-1840s and 1850s saw a return of the notion as a viable alternative to white American's refusal to take definite steps to extend rights to free blacks, curb violence against them, and end slavery. Many African Americans realized that America—at least the settled eastern seaboard—would never welcome

them. The rebuff of the African American community's efforts to perform citizenship—evinced by an exponential rise in mob activity and violence against African Americans, as well as more curtailment of black rights enacted by state houses and Congress—inspired an increase in African American hostility towards America as their home. The early 1840s also marks the transition point between a first-generation of free blacks—many of them ex-slaves—concerned with survival and a second-generation more concerned with economic and social mobility.

Notes for Introduction

-
- ¹ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 71-76.
- ² Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 1.
- ³ *Freedom's Journal*, 20 July 1827.
- ⁴ Joseph Levenson, quoted in Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Freedom to Slavery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), ix.
- ⁵ Richard Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 36.
- ⁶ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.
- ⁷ William Whipper quoted in Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 108.
- ⁸ Rael, 112.
- ⁹ Roach, 3.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.
- ¹¹ Rael, 179.
- ¹² *Colored American*, 29 April 1837.
- ¹³ Julie Winch details this episode in chapter two of her book *Philadelphia's Black Elite* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).
- ¹⁴ Rael, 25.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 153.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Robert L. Harris, Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830," *Massachusetts Review* (Fall 1979), 603.
- ¹⁹ Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 12.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 131-133.
- ²¹ Rael, 27-45.
- ²² Melish, 2.
- ²³ Turner, 107.
- ²⁴ It should be noted that white Americans did not realize this liberty amongst themselves.
- ²⁵ Turner, 108.
- ²⁶ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 79.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 5
- ²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1972), 27.
- ²⁹ For a sample of this historiography, see Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men* (2001).

Chapter One:

“Five Hundred Thousand Free People of Color” and One Voice: The Breaches and Crises of the African American Community in the North, 1776-1829

In the midst of the Revolutionary War, in September of 1780, British Colonel Tye led his brigade in an attack against the headquarters of Joshua Huddy, a Patriot and captain in the Monmouth County militia of New Jersey. Huddy, although outnumbered and cornered in his own home, fearlessly fought Tye and his brigade until he was smoked out of his house and seized. During the fighting, Colonel Tye was shot in the wrist. The wound led to lockjaw and ultimately to his death. Ironically, Huddy escaped capture by plunging from the boat that was taking him to prison in New York.¹

Although many “domestic” battles like this one took place during America’s war for independence, this small clash is remarkable because Colonel Tye, or Titus as he was once known, was no ordinary colonel in the British Army—he was black and a former slave. His title, too, was somewhat peculiar, as he did not make his way up through the ranks of the British Army. Historian Simon Schama explains, “...[colonel was] the rank given as an honorific by the British as they often did to soldiers not formerly attached to the provincial corps, but who, as in Tye’s case, merited some recognition.”² Tye garnered special recognition from the British by leading his “Black Brigade” into many victorious battles against the rebels. By the time he and his brigade battled Huddy, Tye had been fighting for George III for almost four years.³

Colonel Tye's military career offers scholars of African American history and performance significant insights into the construction of race during the Revolutionary and early national period. As the colonists struggled to shape their own performance as "Americans" in opposition to their British foes, they were confronted with alternate performances of patriotism from the nation's free and enslaved black populations that would challenge the ideological foundations on which they proposed to build their new nation. In this chapter I first offer an overview of the constructions of black identity that emerged in American culture from 1774-1827. I then examine the ways in which the coming of Northern emancipation, the launch of the black newspaper *Freedom's Journal*, and the publication of David Walker's *Appeal*, fundamentally transformed the nature of African American performative identity throughout the Jacksonian and antebellum periods. I situate these performances of identity within what anthropologist Victor Turner has described as "social drama," arguing that throughout this crucial period of African American history, scholars may discern a series of what Turner terms "breaches" and "crises" that ultimately shaped how later black abolitionists would stage their resistance to slavery.

"Free" and "Of Color": Disembodiment, Danger, and Disorder

Tye's military career had been launched by Dunmore's famous proclamation made on November 7, 1775, on board the *William*, in which the governor of the Virginia Colony declared "all indented [sic] servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels) free that are able and willing to bear Arms." Tye and many other runaway slaves throughout the colonies made way to join Dunmore's Ethiopian

Regiment.⁴ Although the vast majority of the regiment engaged in tedious and menial labor such as digging ditches, Tye raised and led a band of black men who would come to be known as the Black Brigade and who would wreak havoc on Patriot targets in New Jersey and southern New York. Because the Black Brigade was so successful at guerrilla warfare, the unit remained intact and sanctioned by the British Army after Tye's death. Tye had proclaimed himself a loyal subject to the Crown, and after his death, his former comrades remained unswerving in their loyalty to England's king.

However, as historian Sylvia R. Frey explains, Dunmore's proclamation was not aimed at relieving the misery of the colonies' thousands of slaves, nor at winning subjects for the Crown. Rather, as Frey notes:

...the proclamation was design[ed] to encourage the defection of useful blacks without provoking a general rebellion and to disrupt the psychological security of whites without unleashing the full military potential of blacks. Practical rather than moral, it was rooted in expediency rather than humanitarian zeal. That is not, however, how it was conceived in the South.⁵

No matter what Dunmore's intentions were, the proclamation had an unexpected side effect. It allowed blacks to question the very premise of slavery: that Africans were somehow "predestined" to serve and thus inherently disqualified from the rights and privileges of white citizenship. Dunmore's proclamation implied that blacks had the capacity to earn their liberty and to demonstrate their ability to participate as free and equal members of white Atlantic culture. By eschewing the deterministic rhetoric of slaveholders, Dunmore's proclamation underscored the very fluidity of blackness that more and more African Americans at the turn of the nineteenth century were starting to embrace.

Dunmore's proclamation allowed African Americans to imagine their blackness as a potential asset, rather than a liability—and certainly not as an *a priori* marker of servility. The proclamation also meant that white Americans would have to navigate a new and complex racial landscape that included an ever-expanding social, political, and economic network of free blacks. This caused a great deal of anxiety and fear, not only during the Revolution, but also even after the British loss. What role would the free man of color play in the aftermath of the war? Patriots quickly discovered the futility of trying to coax former slaves back into servitude. Though they themselves had ostensibly shed the patriarchal confines of British rule, many slaveholding Americans still envisioned themselves in that role in relation to the nation's black population. Even those who questioned the institution of chattel slavery could not envision a governmental structure that would successfully incorporate free blacks into the new republic. As historian Joanne Pope Melish puts it: "More ominous...was the developing perception by whites of this new amalgam, 'free' and 'of color,' as a problem, a dangerous embodiment of disorder and disruption that represented a threat to the stability of the republic. The emerging status of people of color as 'free' people appeared as both a symptom and catalyst of disorder."⁶

Slavery presented phenomenal legal and ideological issues after the Revolution. From impeding the ratification of the Constitution to spurring violent debates regarding how to treat people of color within the matrix of Revolutionary natural rights and antislavery rhetoric at the state and national levels, slavery in this post-war context offered whites the seemingly irreconcilable task of fusing man's

“inalienable rights” with the existence of black bondmen. As a result, whites cultivated what Melish calls an “informal structure of expectation and practice” that “defined people of color as dependent, disorderly, and soon to disappear from the republic.”⁷ For African Americans, however, this new era signified “an unambiguous state of freedom identical to that of persons who had never been enslaved. Slaves anticipated that once they were emancipated, they would be *free*, not merely, ‘freed.’”⁸ Thus, from the time of the Revolution to the late 1790s, whites and African Americans were at an ideological crossroad regarding the role newly emancipated people of color would play in the new republic.

This question was only a piece of the complex puzzles the new nation had to solve. Still engaged in hostilities with the British and in a seemingly deteriorating relationship with the French during the Adams administration at the turn of the nineteenth century, America did not “need” this “threat to [its] stability.” Since “black” was no longer a virtual synonym for “slave,” at least in some parts of the North, Americans throughout the new republic had to negotiate a new (i.e. *American* rather than *British*), blurring definition of blackness. As the Revolution ruptured the fixed social and ideological hierarchies that were attached to the British monarchy, it did the same, in many ways, regarding the questions of blackness, freedom, and slavery. The debates surrounding blackness and its role in the new nation posed an interesting question: How does one perform citizenship and who is eligible to participate in that performance? Free people of color (and their advocates) believed they were entitled to full civic participation. Thus, they ruptured previous meanings

of blackness thereby creating a “breach” in the collective consciousness of the new nation.

In his formulation of what he terms social drama, Victor Turner classifies the “breach” as the first of its four phases. He says:

...[it] occurs when one or more social norms regarded as binding and as sustaining key relationships between persons or sub-groups in a more or less bounded community are broken or all too obviously disregarded. Often there is a symbolic act drawing public attention.⁹

The “social norm” that was breached during the Revolutionary and post-war period was the black-equals-slave paradigm. From the 1780 Abolition Act of Pennsylvania (the first in America,) to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in 1807, to the end of all forms of legal slavery in New York in 1827, this breach was temporal in its enactment and its consequences. It disrupted black and white relationships and started to re-define social and cultural paradigms. It also produced a series of public performances of African and American identity on the national stage. Blacks celebrated their freedom with public parades that mirrored white liberty celebrations, even as they simultaneously incorporated elements of African culture. They also developed a series of codified behaviors, best exemplified in the conduct manuals, speeches, and sermons aimed at a rising generation of newly freed black citizens. One might argue that these ritualized codes of conduct were designed to help repair the “breaches” in the white community that black emancipation produced.

Although the period from 1774-1827 was critical for the development of black performative identities in the early republic, I would suggest that the performances retained much of the fluid quality of the Revolutionary years, as notions of race remained in flux throughout the new nation. Ironically, it was the final realization of

legal emancipation in New York that seems to have re-codified notions of racial identity for many Americans (both white and black). This restructuring precipitated a new and increasingly momentous series of breaches in the social drama.

The establishment of the first African American newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, underscored the breach that New York's 1827 emancipation decree had effected. Editors and proprietors Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russworm published the first edition on March 16, 1827. In that first issue, Cornish and Russworm wrote:

As education is what renders civilized man superior to the savage; as the dissemination of knowledge is continually progressing among all other classes in the community; we deem it expedient to establish a paper, and bring into operation all the means with which our benevolent CREATOR has endowed us, for the moral, religious, civil and literary improvement of our injured race. Experience teaches us that the Press is the most economical and convenient method by which this object is to be obtained.¹⁰

In the same article, they urge their "brethren to use their right to the elective franchise as free citizens." They also claimed no party or religious affiliation. Moreover, the editors told their subscribers that those "who are not prepared to pay," could do so as soon as they were able. Disregarding the financial burden that this type of policy would foster, Cornish and Russworm believed what was most important was "the diffusion of knowledge" and that would raise the condition of their people.¹¹

There are two other dimensions of Cornish and Russworm's inaugural article that are important to highlight. The first addresses a particular world-view, or *mentalité*, that marked a turning point in black political and social activism. Cornish and Russworm wrote: "For often has injustice been heaped upon us, when our only defense was an appeal to the ALMIGHTY, but we believe that the time has now

arrived, when the calumnies of our enemies should be refuted by forcible argument.”¹² Coupled with their call to use the franchise, Cornish and Russworm’s plea to free blacks to avoid an “appeal to the Almighty” as their sole recourse reflects a burgeoning political consciousness that was fixed in the physical world. It also reflects a growing sense of empowerment, since one would not urge a powerless people or a people without a sense of their role within a larger social network to exercise their right to vote. As free people—indeed, characters in the social drama of the antebellum period—African Americans started to travel the same political avenues that whites did.

The establishment of *Freedom’s Journal* as well as the cultivation of a collective political consciousness on a national scale suggests that more and more free blacks—and slaves—had become increasingly reliant upon temporal institutions, such as the Constitution, the courts, and the franchise, and turned away from God as their only mode of redress. “In the discussion of political subjects,” Cornish and Russworm declared, “we shall ever regard the constitution [sic] of the United States as our polar star.”¹³ Their rhetoric marks a symbolic appropriation of the document that had come to embody white democratic culture. Interestingly, Cornish and Russworm’s argument also suggests that African American emancipation was “prefigured” by the Constitution. By claiming this piece of “American scripture,” as historian Pauline Maier might call it, free blacks re-cast themselves in the nation’s social drama, re-inscribing both their past and their future. By hearkening back to the founding of the United States, Cornish and Russworm situated African Americans

within the drama of the nation's founding. By claiming the Constitution as their "polar star," they suggested their central role in the shaping of the country's future.

Interestingly, Cornish and Russworm's 1827 rhetoric appeared in sharp contrast to the language used by black writers and activists of the early national period, a language that would remain the most popular until the 1820s. For example, Jupiter Hammon's 1784 "An Address to the Negroes of the State of New York" argues that faithful service would bring spiritual and earthly benefits. He also insisted that slaves and free persons of color be honest and diligent and not lie or steal from their masters or employers. Many historians have understood this lecture as weak, apologetic, and visionless.¹⁴ But I would argue that before the ratification of the Constitution, Hammon's speech reflects a millennialist or apocalyptic world-view that many African Americans maintained, and one that can be linked to the ways in which African Americans had been encouraged to imagine themselves in the social drama of the immediate post-war period. Britain's defeat at the end of the Revolution meant the temporary end to black hopes for freedom in the colonies. The subsequent struggle of white Americans to re-assert patriarchal systems of government within each state meant that many African Americans found themselves plunged back into the oppressive, racialized roles they had occupied before the war. Given those circumstances, the millennialist doctrine Hammon espoused hardly seems an unreasonable compromise as part of an effort of psychological self-preservation. That millennialist world-view, as biblical scholar Obery J. Hendricks explains, "redirected the believer's gaze from the pain and injustice of the present reality to the expectation of deliverance into a just and pain-free new world that God would send

down from heaven.”¹⁵ Hammon’s audience, composed of both slaves and free blacks, would have understood his rhetoric and exhortations as part and parcel of an early African-Christian discourse that merged the secular realm with the sacred one.¹⁶ For them, it was not their “opium,” or evidence of “accommodationist” behavior, as Eugene Genovese might characterize it;¹⁷ but rather it was “a perfectly human expression of social strife: the vessel of human sorrow.”¹⁸

While Hammon’s language might have been appropriate in the given set of circumstances following the Revolution, the shifting social, political, and economic conditions of the 1820s persuaded many African Americans that patient endurance was no longer an effective strategy. The Haitian uprising, the development of the black church and black voluntary associations as cohering forces within the black community, and the advent of the American Colonization society in 1816 helped to persuade many free people of color that time had come for decisive action. Thus, they turned to politics, which, as historian Craig Steven Wilder argues, “were the means of channeling that sorrow into action.”¹⁹

Just as Cornish and Russworm embraced the language of the Constitution, they also embraced the Revolutionary rhetoric of collective action. They wrote: “Daily slandered, we think that there ought to be some channel of communication between us and the public through which a single voice may be heard, in defense of FIVE HUNDRED THOUSAND FREE PEOPLE OF COLOUR.”²⁰ This was another act that pointed to the breach of the black-means-slave paradigm and it drew public attention: for African Americans were organizing and opposing their oppressors the same way the colonists did the British only fifty years before. Using some of the

same vehicles as their white counterparts did vis-à-vis the British—public protest, economic campaigns, and the press—free blacks engaged in similar performances of democracy.

One aspect of African American collectivity that they did *not* share with the colonists was leadership. Unlike the white leaders of the early national period who, by and large, ruled paternalistically, African American leaders in the mid- to late-1820s did less dictating and more listening. As historian Patrick Rael notes:

In the 1820s, the notion of an independent black leadership may have struck blacks as welcome and whites as threatening; but it struck everyone as novel; it represented the first sustained effort by black leaders to speak for their people. It must be remembered that the middle-class black leaders who arose after the northern emancipation offered an alternative to less egalitarian forms of leadership—the black “kings” and “governors” of master-sanctioned slaves’ festivals like Election Day or Pinkster—and to paternalistic white benefactors in the gradual antislavery movement, who posed obvious limitations as defenders of black interests.²¹

As Rael points out, this type of leadership was new and independent. It disrupted several key relationships: what role would whites play in African American life if blacks had their own leaders expressing their interests? Moreover, would those demands, coming from free people of color, disrupt the political, economic, and social order that whites were trying to cultivate?

In addition to the 1827 enactment of New York’s final emancipation statutes and the establishment of *Freedom’s Journal*, I would suggest there was one other act that, for African Americans aided in the final rupture of the social norm of black-means-slave: the 1829 publication and circulation of David Walker’s *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly, to those of The United States of America*. The appearance of Walker’s biting treatise on the

hypocrisies of white America and the suffering of his black brethren was a watershed moment in the formation of free black political consciousness.

Much has been and continues to be written about Walker's *Appeal*. For my purposes, however, I am most interested in three of its aspects: Walker's (re)construction of blackness, his critique of American foundational documents, and the dissemination of the *Appeal*. Each of these aspects, I suggest, calls attention to the ways in which Walker fundamentally undermined the social construction of blackness as synonymous with servile. Instead, Walker constructed/imagined blackness as a divine vehicle through which God would save the world. Walker scholar Peter P. Hinks suggests:

Walker hoped that this holy activism would regenerate the nation and that African Americans who in 1829 seemed so outside American, who were defined by whites as so threatening to America and its mission, could yet be peaceably incorporated into it and share in its responsibilities and benefits fully with whites. Indeed, he believed that God would use African Americans, not white Americans, as the spearhead of the Christianization of the world.²²

In Hinks' summation, Walker re-inscribed a new meaning onto the black body—blacks would become the embodied medium of world salvation.

Further, Hinks makes clear that Walker was interested in sharing in the fruits of the new nation *with* white Americans, not separate from them. Article IV of the *Appeal* is titled "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Colonizing Plan." In it, Walker writes, "[this] colonizing trick...is not for the glory of God, but on the contrary to the perpetuation of slavery in this country, which will ruin [the colonizers] and the country forever, unless something is done."²³ Walker believed that African Americans were integral characters in the American experiment, characters who were

here since the nation's inception and before, and were fully worthy of reaping its rewards. As his title says, this *Appeal* was in "particular" and "very expressly" directed to the colored "*citizens*" of the United States of America.

But Walker did not stop with his insistence that people of color be fully included in the constitutional and institutional rights America boasted. Indeed, Walker attacked and critiqued several of the nation's foundational documents. Most specifically, he took to task the Declaration of Independence and *Notes on the State of Virginia* (as well as their author, Thomas Jefferson). I argue that this is the second aspect of Walker's undertaking that served to break completely the social norm that mapped servility onto blackness.

At the end of his *Appeal*, Walker recounts several of the key passages in the Declaration of Independence. Then he asks his white readers, "Do you understand your own language? Hear the language you declare to the world July 4th, 1776."²⁴ By highlighting the inconsistencies between white language and white actions, Walker emphasizes white America's broken contract with itself, and also with the deity. If "all men are created equal" and "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights," then surely America was breaking the rules it followed in its own quest for freedom. Walker's invocation of the Declaration was not a new one in black protest literature, but it emerged at an historical moment when the dialogue on race was coalescing around an emerging doctrine of "scientific racism" as a rationale for the continuance of slavery. I posit that the novelty of Walker's *Appeal* lay in its ability to fuse early national rhetoric of "natural rights" with the Jacksonian language

of self-actualization—a vocabulary that would become crucial for black abolitionists in the 1830s-50s.

What is perhaps most remarkable about this section of the *Appeal* is that while Walker was textually addressing white America, his intended audience was those colored citizens of the United States. Thus, when he exclaims, “Now Americans! I ask you candidly, was your sufferings under Great Britain, one hundredth part as cruel and tyrannical as you have rendered ours under yours? ...Do the whites say, I being a black man, ought they not be humble, readily as I?,”²⁵ he is actually reminding his brethren that their proposition for freedom is more justified than the white colonists’ was. By including this section in the *Appeal*, Walker is alerting his black audience that they will be the genuine, embodied agents of Western Enlightenment thought concerning the rights of man and that the American war with Britain was just a “rehearsal” for the real revolution to come. For Walker, blacks, not whites, will come to define the ultimate in political and social freedom.

Also in the *Appeal*, Walker turned to what was perhaps the most influential tract written on blackness during the early national period, Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia*. In the *Notes*, Jefferson writes about the various talents that Roman slaves had. After cataloguing several, he concludes: “They excelled too, in science, insomuch as to be usually employed as tutors to their master’s children; Epictetus, Terence and Phaedrus, were slaves—but they were of the race of whites. It is not [blacks’] condition then, but nature, which has produced the distinction.”²⁶ Walker refuted the notion that simply because Romans were “white” slaves they could still possess extraordinary intellectual gifts whereas black slaves, because of

their “natural” (i.e. black) inherent intellectual limitations, could not. He also argued that Roman slaves were never under the same strictures as Africans in America were.

He writes:

Everybody who has read history, knows, that as soon as a slave among the Romans obtained his freedom, he could rise to the greatest prominence in the State, and there was no law instituted to hinder a slave from buying his freedom. Have not the Americans instituted laws to hinder us from obtaining our freedom...Further: have not the Americans instituted laws to prohibit a man of color from obtaining and holding any office whatever, under the government of the United States of America?²⁷

In this portion of the *Appeal*, Walker not only shows Jefferson’s logic and “scientific” conclusions to be specious, but also he demonstrates further the ways in which free African Americans attempted to show whites, as well as to each other, that status was not the result of race-based nature, but rather of environmental conditions.

The third aspect of Walker’s *Appeal* that marked the final break in the conditioned belief that blackness was synonymous with servility was the very way in which the treatise circulated among its African American readership. Indeed, I would argue that it was probably the very circulation of the *Appeal* that represented the most important rupture in the breach phase. There has been much speculation as to the ways the *Appeal* was distributed. Walker provided copies to sailors in the North so that they could distribute them in the South among local African Americans there—the vast majority of whom were slaves. Although black sailors were able to reach hundreds of slaves and freemen all along the coast, the circulation of the treatise did not spark a general uprising among the slaves, as many whites had feared. It did, however, cause great anxieties among white populations and prompted local legislatures to tighten laws regarding black sailors. In Wilmington and Savannah, for

example, a law was passed that would require free black mariners from the North who entered their ports to be confined to jails during the time their ships were docked.²⁸ Despite these precautions, however, the document received a nationwide circulation unprecedented for a black publication in this period.²⁹

Walker's tract was read aloud in church services, taverns, and secret meetings. The *Appeal* brought together diverse groups of African Americans to discuss and protest their common conditions and the failures of America to fulfill its democratic mission. It provided intellectual and psychological sustenance for men and women, old and young, wealthy and poor, free and enslaved. Hinks argues: "Walker's influence reverberated throughout antebellum American and beyond."³⁰ Moreover, as literary scholar and historian Carla Peterson notes, the *Appeal* was "the first expression of black nationalism" in the United States of America.³¹ On a national stage, free and enslaved African Americans would no longer accept the role of second-class citizens. Although Walker was assassinated in 1829 and slavery endured in the South, the *Appeal* accomplished more than a rhetorical and ideological resolution. Its reverberation underscored, and arguably provided, the ultimate impetus for African Americans to come together on a *national* scale to protest their place in America.

Walker's *Appeal* also supplied African Americans with an oratorical model with which to perform on the American public stage. As his text brought African Americans together on a national level, it also gave them a powerful and passionate means of participating in national debates on race and slavery. Religious studies scholar Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. persuasively argues, though, that Walker was not

employing or advocating an oratory of “emotionalism” that, as Glaude suggests, “lends itself perhaps too easily to the idea that Walker’s *Appeal* was unreasonably emotive.”³² But rather the highly charged style of Walker and those who might follow his example was based on explicit confrontation and, as the Quakers have famously said, speaking truth to power. As Glaude notes:

[Walker] empowered African Americans to draw on their experience when engaging in public deliberation. The simultaneous doings and suffering of black folk, for Walker, out to determine the manner in which they deliberate about their common ills. In other words, the pain and suffering of their experience ought to mark their point of entry in public conversation about manners of race and its consequences. Walker believed that any discussion about race required that the interlocutors confront the true terror the subject called forth, not only the physical pain but also the psychic violence of slavery and racial discrimination, both of which, in his view, necessitated conjoint action among black individuals. Walker’s *Appeal*, then, belligerently gave voice to a range of emotions and impulses, habits and discoveries that characterized a people experiencing the brutality of slavery and white proscription.³³

The “truth-in-experience” paradigm Walker championed not only shaped the way he imagined the direction of black protest politics, but also it was an example of a potent oratorical style that was popular around the time of the Revolution. Indeed, the similarities between Walker’s *Appeal* and Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, for example, shed light on the reasons why whites found Walker’s work so dangerous—findings that would lead to his murder.

Akin to Paine’s *Common Sense*, Walker’s *Appeal* was meant to be performed: that is, read out loud and quoted. In many ways, Walker’s text is constructed like a piece of drama or a musical score. He “directed” the performers of his text with repetition, punctuation, and italics. For instance, commenting on what he believed was white Christians’ hypocrisy, Walker scripted: “It is a notorious fact, that the

major part of the white Americans, have, ever since we been among them, tried to keep us ignorant, and make us believe that God made us and our children to be slaves to them and theirs. *Oh! my god, have mercy on Christian Americans!!!*”³⁴ Walker’s script was not only an appeal *to* African Americans to take decisive action, but also was an appeal *for* them to perform in the American public sphere. This was a script to combat slavery and white supremacist ideology

Walker’s *Appeal* was also similar to Paine’s *Common Sense* in that it was a crafted in a rhetorical style that literary scholar Jay Fliegelman has identified as “true oratory.” Fliegelman writes:

True oratory represented and reiterated shared beliefs in an effort to maintain a shared cultural world, one that provided a circumscribed scene for human action and created consensus by calling forth the universal nature of man, whose moral dictates would then ensure that sociability would rule individual behavior. Before that nature (and it is this universal sensibility that Paine identified as “common sense”...), all differences of interest and condition would at least momentarily disappear.... ‘The simple voice of nature and reason’ will oracularly say ‘it is right’ or it is wrong, Paine declared in *Common Sense*. That simple voice was implicitly antiaristocratic.³⁵

Like Paine did during the time of the Revolution, Walker was appealing to that “simple voice of nature and reason” within all people that said physical and psychic domination was anathema to what it meant to be human. Walker’s “antiaristocratic” voice shouted that people of color were meant to be free and participate equally in the American experiment.

But many whites found Walker’s style threatening not only to the preservation of the slave system, but also, and more importantly, to their lives. Why? I would argue whites feared Walker’s *Appeal* not simply because they were afraid it would spur a black consciousness centered on revolution, although that was surely part of it.

But at an even more profound level, they worried that African Americans harbored in their very souls the desire to rise violently. Simply put, Walker was not responsible of putting the idea of revolution in blacks' heads, but instead was bringing them to the surface, whites worried. In early America, oratory not only functioned to disseminate ideas but also was believed to reveal man's inner feelings. As Fliegelman argues:

[With the Revolution came a] revolution in the conceptualization of language, a revolution that sought to replace artificial language with natural language...[thus,] public speaking became reconceptualized in the mid eighteenth century as an occasion for the public revelation of a private self. Such a private self would then be judged by private rather than public virtues: prudence, temperance, self-control, honesty, and most problematically, sincerity.³⁶

Those whites who were frightened of Walker's rhetoric found him most sincere in his speech and, in order to silence him and any that might follow in his example, assassinated him. Those Africans Americans that would immediately follow Walker and script an oratorical or performative identity for free people of color to perform rejected his inflammatory and marshal tactics for fear of fatal retaliation. Instead, as I will argue more fully in the next chapter, they scripted an identity that would work within the system, eschew revolution, and remain steadfastly non-violent. Although African American scripters did not follow in Walker's substantive footsteps, they did benefit from witnessing, his ability to bring together people of color on a national stage.

A Single Routine, A Single Self

The coming together of African Americans on a national scale took place more than fifty years after the start of Revolution. Although regional attempts to redress black bondage and exploitation dates back to the early part of seventeenth

century,³⁷ I argue that it took the three breaches—the abolition of legal slavery throughout the North, the establishment of *Freedom's Journal* in 1827, and the circumstances surrounding David Walker's *Appeal*—to cultivate a collective consciousness among African Americans that spurred national movement.³⁸ This movement is part of the second phase of Turner's formulation of social drama and is what he terms "crisis." In the crisis stage, "people take sides, supporting either the rule-breaker or the target of his action. Factions, coalitions, and cabals are formed, heated language is exchanged, and actual violence may occur. Former allies may be opposed, former foes united."³⁹ "Taking sides" in this social drama and following Walker's call for collective action, Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church organized in Philadelphia the first meeting of the National Negro Convention Movement (1830). Historian Howard Holman Bell, who published the first comprehensive study of the movement in 1968, writes:

Thirty years before the Civil War a small group of free Negroes, old and young, met at Philadelphia...[These conventioners] were successful not only in taking action on the subject at hand, but also in establishing the precedent of national assemblies that were to be called, sometimes annually, sometimes at irregular intervals during the three decades before the end of the Civil War.⁴⁰

Free African Americans in the North were coming together in factions or cabals "to break the rules" (to use Turner's words). In his inaugural address to the delegates, convention President Richard Allen said: "Viewing these [rights guaranteed to all men in the Declaration of Independence] as incontrovertible facts, we have been led to the following conclusions; that 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 of standing men."⁴¹ This sentiment recalls

Cornish and Russworm's call for collective political action in the inaugural edition of *Freedom's Journal* as well as Walker's critique of the Declaration. Remarkably, it also acknowledges Hammon's earlier language of suffering and patience, as it tacitly recognizes that the majority of African Americans *had* been patient in bondage. Allen's address synthesizes several strains of African American emancipation/liberation rhetoric, and marks the creation of a new "script" for the performance of black identity in the antebellum period.

Historians, including Bell, Glaude, and Julie Winch, have done important work culling convention records for the numerous proposals, ideas, and solutions that the conventioners proposed in attempts to alleviate the living conditions of free and enslaved African Americans. These proposals ranged from delegates' attempts to raise money to buy land in a province in Canada, to efforts to create schools for black children, to assist in abolitionism, and to oppose the emigration schemes of the American Colonization Society (ACS); my primary interest, however, is in the ways in which these delegates self-scripted a racial synecdoche that they would then perform in the public sphere.

Because this racial synecdoche was fundamentally performative, the process of scripting and performing is best understood as what sociologist Erving Goffman has defined as "routine." By routine, Goffman means the preparation and performance of a "self."⁴² This self, I argue, was the character the delegates wanted free people of color to perform in the North and throughout the country. Further, because this self or synecdoche was scripted, the performance was meant to be repeated, or, as Richard Schechner terms it, "twice-behaved behavior." This

performance had an intended efficacy: specifically, the scripting delegates sought to supplant all previous meanings of blackness that they thought precluded them from the rewards of American democracy. In this way, they were engaged in what Joseph Roach calls the process of “surrogation.” For Roach, surrogation is “how culture reproduces and re-creates itself...[it] does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric.”⁴³ The delegates saw the early 1830s as the moment to fill the “vacancies” of what it meant to be black with a synecdoche that might grant them full participation in the political, social, and economic landscapes of antebellum America. Thus, they were performing, as performance “offers a substitution for something else that preexists it. Performance, in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire to both embody and to replace.”⁴⁴

Since they were scripting and performing, the delegates are best understood as “performance teams” because they make up a “set of individuals who co-operate in staging a single routine.”⁴⁵ What would make this routine of scripting and performing a “single” one is that, although there were a few African American participants involved in the conventions who were wealthier and more prominent than others, there was, for the most part, parity among the delegates in terms of economic, social, cultural experiences because they were Northerners. As one editorial in *The Colored American* noted in 1839, “The free people of color of the slave states have more facilities to accumulate wealth than the same class at the North.”⁴⁶ Therefore, in part because they shared a common experience, this single routine was constructed to be performed by all free persons of color; moreover, if, as the delegates thought, all

African Americans performed the same single routine, hostile whites would be compelled to recognize free people of color's humanity, see them as a force, and include them fully in the American project.

Of course, African American leaders often steered the direction of the community's scripting; it should be noted, however, that in the antebellum African American community in the North, economics was not the *ne plus ultra* that might qualify one as a leader. There were occupational markers as well as social ones. Preachers, orators, community and lay leaders often were the most visible and best recorded during the conventions. These leaders *did* champion broad participation and tirelessly recalled the egalitarianism of the American Revolution.⁴⁷ As Rael writes, "Rather than suggesting the hegemony of a small class of black elites, then, the convention movement illustrated themes of conflict and contention." Rael emphasizes the vital role of open political debate in developing African American political consciousness: "While cadres of prominent national figures dominated the movement, they hardly suppressed debate." Yet he is rightly careful to note that despite their appearance of spontaneity in the conventions, the leaders of the movement still adhered to carefully scripted roles that were in keeping with their own notion of what constituted appropriate or effective social drama: "Movement stalwarts exerted what authority they had in less direct ways, largely through their steadfast presence, and through control of the movement's larger agenda, which their ubiquity conferred."⁴⁸

However, although the minutes and proceedings are sometimes dominated by more familiar names, it would be wrong to assume that the general public's will was

not being expressed. Not only did most delegates share a similar range of experience, but, as Craig Steven Wilder has argued, free African Americans in the antebellum period were able to form a collective which largely avoided the obstacles of classism because they were equipped with a world-view that had a “behavioral and rhetorical tendency to privilege the group over the individual.”⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

During and immediately following the Revolution, both whites and blacks were charged with the task of scripting new roles for free people of color in the new nation. Most whites saw this new amalgam of “free” and “of color” as disruptive and threatening to the republic’s stability. Free African Americans, on the other hand, seized upon the Revolutionary rhetoric and fought for full civic participation. Thus, within the recent *American* context of dislocated social identity, certain free people of color constructed a black identity with a new dimension, that of citizen. In legal and extralegal ways, whites fought to prevent this from taking shape. Some African Americans, too, were engaged in processes such as emigration schemes that would excise blacks from the American social drama. But, as 1827 approached, the vast majority of free blacks believed that America was their rightful home, and, as a result of such events as the Haitian uprisings, the development of African American philanthropic and political institutions, and the advent of The American Colonization Society, a collective consciousness was cultivated that determined political action was their best mode of recourse.

Moreover, as I have argued in this chapter, the realization of full Northern emancipation, the establishment of *Freedom’s Journal*, and the publication and

circulation of David Walker's *Appeal* transformed the ways in which black performative identity would be constructed: it would be created and played upon a national stage. As these breaches in black identity disrupted the burgeoning white scientific racism—which concluded that people of color were, by their very nature, unruly, disruptive, and servile—free people of color in the North convened in order to script a racial synecdoche that would be performed on the national stage. Starting in 1830, these performance teams scripted a character that they believed all free people of color should play. I argue that this collective and national action was the result of those three major breaches from 1827-1829. Without them, African Americans could only seek to redress their plight on regional stages. Now, as black identity was becoming more codified or “national” among whites, African Americans took it upon themselves to script a singular identity to play in the American social drama.

Notes for Chapter One

¹ Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves, and the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 111-116. For a more detailed account of Tye's career see Graham Russell Hodges, "Black Revolt in New York City and the Neutral Zone, 1773-1783" in Paul A. Gilje and William Penack (eds.), *New York in the Age of the Constitution, 1775-1800*, (Cranberry, New Jersey, 1992), 26-43. For detail of African American involvement during the Revolution in the South, see Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

² Schama, 114.

³ Schama, 111.

⁴ "Lord Dunmore's Proclamation," quoted in Schama, 76.

⁵ Frey, 63.

⁶ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 119.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁹ Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 91.

¹⁰ *Freedom's Journal*, March 16, 1827.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York, New York University Press, 2001) 64-72. In this section, Wilder lays out several historians' critiques of Hammon's address and charges them with understanding the "Address" ahistorically. My reading of the "Address" is very much in line with Wilder's.

¹⁵ Obery M. Hendricks, Jr. *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovery the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How they have been Corrupted* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 83.

¹⁶ See Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977). In it, he talks about the ways in which slaves did not view the world and time as past, present, or future. Instead, their worldview was "created by transcending the narrow confines of the one in which they were forced to live. They [the slaves] extended the boundaries of their restrictive universe backward until it fused with the world of the Old Testament, and upward until it became one with the world beyond." Levine, 32-33.

¹⁷ See Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). In it, Genovese calls the relationship between slaves and masters as accommodationist. He argues that among slaves there existed an ethos of "simultaneous accommodation and resistance to slavery." (597) It would easy to regard Hammon's "Address" as slaves' giving in and waiting for the next world; I would argue, however, that it was evidence of the African dimension of their Christianity as slaves' prepared this world for the millennialist moment.

¹⁸ Wilder, 64

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Freedom Journal*, March 16, 1827.

²¹ Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 43.

²² Peter P. Hinks, ed. *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), xxxiv.

²³ Walker in *Ibid.*, 70-71.

²⁴ Walker, 78.

²⁵ Walker, 79.

²⁶ Thomas Jefferson quoted in *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁷ Walker, 18.

-
- ²⁸ Hinks, xl.
- ²⁹ See Hicks, xxxviii-xl.
- ³⁰ Hinks, xli.
- ³¹ Carla L. Peterson in *Slavery and the Making of America, Part 1*, prods. Brian Brunius and David McCarthy, 120 mins. PBS, 2004.
- ³² Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 38.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Walker, 36.
- ³⁵ Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 45.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 24.
- ³⁷ Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 22-23.
- ³⁸ It should be noted, however, that “national” conventions and meetings during this period, while having northern and western representation, often lacked southern participation because of the various strictures regarding free people of color in those states. In the 1830s in states such as South Carolina, if a free African American left the state he was not permitted back in. Sometimes, however, there was southern representation. At the 1843 national convention, for instance, slave-holding southern states such as Virginia, North Carolina, and Illinois sent delegates. See *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens: For the Purpose of Considering their Moral and Political Condition as American Citizens* (New York, 1843), 10.
- ³⁹ Turner, 91.
- ⁴⁰ Howard Holman Bell, ed. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), front-piece to the *1830 Minutes*. The above citing of the 1843 convention as well as all subsequent references to the conventions are contained in this collection.
- ⁴¹ Richard Allen, *Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Color and the Proceedings of the Convention* (Philadelphia, 1831), 9.
- ⁴² Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 5.
- ⁴³ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 2
- ⁴⁴ Roach, 3.
- ⁴⁵ Goffman, 5.
- ⁴⁶ *Colored American*, June 22, 1839.
- ⁴⁷ Rael, 35.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid.
- ⁴⁹ Wilder, 3.

Chapter 2:
We Present to the World a General Character! :
The Scripting of the Racial Synecdoche

In his keynote speech to the delegates at the first national black convention in 1830, convention president Richard Allen made the following statements:

Before we close, we would just remark, that it has been a subject of deep regret to this convention, that we as a people, have not availingly appreciated every opportunity placed within our power by the benevolent efforts of the friends of humanity, in elevating our condition to the rank of freemen.... We would earnestly request our brethren throughout the United States, to cooperate with us, by forming societies *auxiliary* to the Parent Institution, about being established in the city of Philadelphia, under the patronage of the General Convention.... And, if disposed, to appoint one delegate to represent them in the next Convention...it being fully understood that organized societies be at liberty to send any number of delegates not exceeding *five*.¹

In his parting remarks, Allen made the call for free people of color to assemble annually and perform some of the very same democratic functions that the colonists had during their struggle with Britain—debate, argument, coalition building, and resolution. Allen and other organizers believed free people of color would be best served if they played these democratic roles on the broadest possible stage. Although he did not live to participate in the 1831 convention, his efforts were not futile: African Americans, every year for the next thirty years, would convene at both the national and the local levels.²

1830 was a particularly propitious year for the inception of a far-reaching convention movement because, prior to then, free people of color were engaged in more localized battles. Although certain episodes caused greater numbers of African American to take decisive political action,³ it took the events of the latter part of the 1820s to produce the environment in which they could imagined convening on a wide-ranging, national scale. As I argued in the previous chapter, these events or

breaches of the 1820s transformed the context and nature of African American identity. As these breaches broke ideological and social hierarchies between blacks and whites, it did the same among people of color in the North. Now they shared a common condition of “free,” a common newspaper with which to imagine themselves as a community, and a common “foundational” document (Walker’s) to attack the mendacity of America’s championing of white supremacy.

In 1830, free people of color assembled and decided to meet yearly to address their needs vis-à-vis white hostility and violence. These yearly conventions served as the sites where African Americans produced much of the ideological and political epistemologies that shaped their activism leading up to the Civil War. As religion scholar and historian Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. notes, “The conventions [were], to some extent, the national forum for civic activity among northern free black in the United States.... For on the floors of these conventions, ordinary, and some extraordinary, men (and this was a decidedly male endeavor) debated the future of black America, and that conversation became the principle agency for black activism from 1830 up to the Civil War.”⁴

In this chapter, I am most concerned with one aspect of that activism, what I have recognized as the construction of a racial synecdoche. In the period from 1830 to 1842, African Americans scripted and performed a specific character for the free person of color to play on the national stage. After first providing a theoretical framework with which to understand the conventions, I then go on in this chapter to describe the specific characteristics the delegates assigned to the synecdoche. Not only did these scripting representatives prescribe overtly performative characteristics

such as sartorial, behavioral, and rhetorical conduct; they also provided the synecdoche with an historical context with which to understand and protest its condition. I will use what I term a “jigsaw methodology” because I first lay out individual pieces of the synecdoche and then try to connect them in order to emerge with a complete picture.

Ritual and “Work” at the National Conventions

In the introduction to *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*, editors Jean and John Comaroff define ritual as:

A site and a means of experimental practice, of subversive poetics, of creative tension and transformative action, that under its authorship and authority, individual and collective aspirations weave a thread of imaginative possibilities from which may emerge, wittingly or not, new signs and means, conventions and interventions.⁵

Thus, rituals are efficacious mechanisms of collective action. This study is primarily interested in the ways in which the black conventions functioned as ritualistic sites and attempted to dislocate the entrenched oppression of free people of color of the antebellum period.

The conventions were rituals not only because they were arenas of collective system building; they were also rituals because they were loci of performance.

According to Victor Turner, ritual and performance are inextricably connected. He writes:

I like to think of ritual essentially as essentially *performance, enactment*, not primarily as rules or rubrics. The rules “frame” the ritual process, but the ritual process transcends its frame. A river needs banks or it will be a dangerous flood, but banks without a river epitomize aridity. The term “performance” is, of course, derived from the Old English, *parfournir*, literally, “to furnish completely or thoroughly.” To perform is thus to bring something about, to consummate something, or to “*carry out*” a play, order, or project.... [It] may even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances.⁶

There are two dimensions of Turner’s formulation that I want to highlight. The first involves the notion of “rules.” The leaders and delegates instituted several sets of rules that framed how they performed at the conventions. In addition to creating a system that dictated what each officer’s job was at the convention, they also instituted a rules of order that each of the delegates was to follow. These rules outlined delegates’ participatory functions as well as their general decorum during debate.

Some were:

.....
4. If two or more members rise to speak at one time, the President shall decide who shall be entitled to the floor.
.....

6. No member shall be permitted to leave the House without the permission of the President.
.....

9. While the President is stating any question, or addressing the House, no member shall walk out, or cross the floor, now when any member is speaking entertain private discourse.

10. No member shall speak more than twice on the same subject without leave of the House.⁷

As these particular rules show, the delegates scripted a set of behaviors they thought would provide the best environment in which to perform. As “river banks,” these rules were meant to curb the “dangerous floods” that often erupted in Congressional sessions, colonization meetings, and abolitionist rallies. Furthermore, as this chapter will later suggest, these rules are reminiscent of similar characteristics scripted for the synecdoche.

The second element in Turner’s definition to emphasize is that ritualized performances “bring something about, generating *new symbols* and *meanings*, which may be incorporated into *subsequent performances*” (emphasis added). As a

performance team, these delegates hoped to use the meetings to create a character that free people of color would play in the subsequent performances of the black conventions *and* of the American social drama. The new symbol, the racial synecdoche, was intended to map a new meaning onto the free black body. That new meaning would guarantee that free people of color were eligible and ready to perform the role of full citizen in the United States.

It is that role of *full* citizen in which free African Americans hoped to be cast. In legal and extralegal ways, African Americans were limited in their democratic, economic, and social lives. Although racialized laws curbed quotidian black life most frequently at the state level, the delegates at the conventions embraced the daunting task of redressing these limitations nationally. This was especially arduous because of the nullification crisis during the Jackson administration.

Free people of color existed in the interstices of citizenship. Neither white and free or black and enslaved, African Americans in the North often experienced that which, according to historian Joanne Pope Melish, they most feared, not being “free” but simply “freed.” To them, being free meant complete civic participation in the new nation. Their ritualized conventions not only underscored their “in between” status, but functioned as liminal sites. Expanding on Turner’s work on the liminal, theatre scholar Harry J. Elam, Jr. provides the following definition:

Liminal phenomena are symbolic enactments, activities, events, and forms that occur at natural breaks within, or “spaces in between,” the normal function of the social system... Liminal phenomena, such as rituals, tend to be collective. They stress togetherness and elicit membership and loyalty to the group... Consequently, liminal phenomena are concerned with the functioning of the society and with crises within the social order.⁸

These liminal conventions appeared after the breaches and crises of the late 1820s when free people of color nurtured a collectivist, national ethos in order to remedy the oppressive circumstances of the Jacksonian period. Moreover, as liminal phenomena, the conventions “elicited loyalty and were bound up with one’s membership or desired membership in some highly corporate group,” as Turner explains liminality. He goes on, “One *works* at that liminal.”⁹ It is that work—the routine of constructing and performing the racial synecdoche—which forms the foundation of the rest of this study.

Those African Americans who participated in the conventions attempted to redress the crisis of instability with a new, African American performative identity. The redress mode constitutes the next phase in Turner’s theory of social drama. He writes:

When the community’s integrality is thus threatened, those held responsible for its continuity and for the structural form of its continuity, the polity, in short, move to counteract the contagion of continuing breach, and endeavor first to contain, then dispel the crisis.¹⁰

Those free people of color who constructed the racial synecdoche fought to “counteract the contagion of continuing breach” and “dispel the crisis” by scripting a performative black identity that all Americans would recognize and respect on the national stage: an identity that allowed unrestricted access to the promises contained in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. As a “disinterested” and racialized “science” started to emerge in the 1830s and early 1840s, African Americans scripted a singular identity that they wanted all free people of color to play on the public stage.

The Synecdoche and its History

On July 12, 1859 the abolitionist Frederick Douglass delivered the commencement address before the Literary Societies of Western Reserve College. In that speech, Douglass rebutted one of the major arguments in J.C. Nott and George R. Gliddon's 1854 *Types of Mankind; or, Ethnological Research based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races*.¹¹ That argument stated because they were unable to produce culture of any significance, black people were "closer to the chimpanzee and the orangutan" than to whites.¹² Douglass countered their argument by drawing direct connections from himself and other African Americans to the ancient Egyptians. Because Egypt was the locus of so many of the world's ancient wonders, Douglass believed that if he established a link between ancient Africans and the descendant Africans living in America in 1859, he could show his audience that people of color were afflicted by environment, not nature. He concluded that African Americans could claim a "direct relationship...to that grandest of all nations of antiquity, the builders of the pyramids."¹³

Speaking on the eve of the Civil War, Douglass was by no means one of the first to employ the rhetorical argument historian Patrick Rael calls "The Uses of the Past."¹⁴ Rather, Douglass was using one of the most popular rhetorical strategies that developed during the late 1820s and early 1830s.¹⁵ Like many of the well-known abolitionists and black politicians of 1850s, Douglass was fired in the political kiln of the convention movement. The "uses of the past" trope, which "inverted acceptable historical understandings, placing Africans not at the bottom of the scale of civilization as eternal children, but at its top, as first parents," was of the primary

tactics used by conventioners;¹⁶ it also fostered one of the most important dimensions of the synecdoche's identity.

Although the synecdoche was scripted to be an American, to be injected in the American social drama, it was by no means meant to be a character whose history began in 1776. It has its roots in ancient Egypt, arguably the most influential of all ancient civilizations. Just as whites claimed Greece and Rome as the source of their cultural and intellectual development, the racial synecdoche claimed a civilization just as majestic—one that actually pre-dated and influenced that of their white counterparts. In the closing of 1832 keynote address, the speaker exclaimed: "Live in constant pursuit of that moral and intellectual strength, which will invigorate your understandings, and render you illustrious in the eyes of civilized nations, when they will assert, that all that illustrious worth, which was once possessed by the Egyptians, and slept for ages, has now risen in their descendants, the inhabitants of the new world."¹⁷ Thus, as free people of color played the synecdoche and maintained America as their homeland, they were the embodied agents of a now awakened illustrious civilization that would produce new fruit in a new land.

Moreover, the delegates did not script the synecdoche's past in such a way that overlooked its trajectory from glory to gloom. Instead, the downward spiral that Africans traveled from the cultural heights of ancient Egypt to the doldrums of the Atlantic slave trade signified a teleological journey whereby people of color would return to even nobler heights. A declaration of sentiment approved by the delegates at one of the conventions stated:

We have observed, that in no country under Heaven have the descendants of an *ancestry* once enrolled in the history of fame; whose glittering monuments

stood forth as beacons, disseminating light and knowledge to the uttermost parts of the earth, reduced to such degrading servitude as that under which we labor from the effect of *American slavery* and *American prejudice*.... If success attend this glorious struggle for civil and religious liberty, the downfall [sic] of Africa from her ancient pride and splendor, will have been more than glorious to the establishment of *religion*; every drop of blood spilt by her descendants under the dominion of prejudice and persecution, will have produced peaceful rivers that shall wash from the soil of the human heart, the mountains of vice and corruption, under which this nation has long withered.¹⁸

The synecdoche's fall from Egyptian grace, then, was a necessary point on its path to the apogee of a democratic and Christian existence. In this vein, the delegates' scripting evokes David Walker's rhetoric that suggested blacks, not whites, would be the human vehicles of ultimate political and social freedom.

The activists in the 1830s and early 1840s went further than Walker, however. As phrenologists and anthropologists argued that whites were especially and exclusively entitled to perform the role of citizen because they produced unparalleled culture,¹⁹ African American scripters argued that if free people of color did not warrant full civic participation, then no one did:

If the descendants of the Africans may be righteously trodden in the dust, and be deemed sold - taken and reputed to be chattels personal - brute beasts - under the same tenure with quadrupeds - on the ground of their lineal connection with the race from whom Greece and Rome drew directly, and all modern Europeans and their descendants in directly, the sum total of their literature and civilization - then indeed may we conclude that there is no race of men on the earth who may claim the inalienable rights of man. And surely, on the score of ancestry, the white men of this country, whose forefathers were naked barbarians for centuries after the Greeks and Romans imported literature from Africa, and most of whom were held in feudal bondage until within a few centuries, must be among the last to file in their claim to freedom!²⁰

Thus, the synecdoche was the rightful heir to those "inalienable rights" that Europeans from both sides of the Atlantic promulgated during the time of the

Revolution. If anything, according to this scripter, whites should be at the back of the “rights receiving line.”

Not only did those in charge of scripting the synecdoche endow it with an historical lineage that linked it to the ancient Egyptians. They also furnished it with a celebrated American past. Specifically, the synecdoche was situated as a descendant of those people of color who helped America gain and maintain her independence. Although the synecdoche had a favorable opinion of the British, it remained distinctly American in its loyalties. Those loyalties were fostered, in part, by the roles its forefathers and foremothers played during moments of crisis, particularly with the British. The historical roles the scripters chose to embed in the synecdoche’s psyche were played during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812.

As Chapter one noted, during the Revolution people of color often abandoned their American masters and fought on the British. But slaves and free blacks fought for the colonists, too.²¹ Because they fought for America’s independence, the synecdoche assumed people of color warranted full inclusion in American civil life. In fact, according to the performance team, they participated in some of the most pivotal battles, alongside some America’s most iconic figures. One account relating black involvement during the War very consciously invokes George Washington. Its author “T.V.R.” clearly knew that the image of Washington played an especially critical role in antebellum America’s imagination. Therefore, the mention is not random, but undoubtedly political and strategic. T.V.R. wrote:

Tradition informs us, that during the Revolution, in the vicinity of New York under Gen. Washington, was a Col. Humphries, a native of Connecticut, who chose two or three COLORED companions in preference to any other. The personal appearance of this gentleman, was not surpassed by any one. He was

beautiful, though not so distinguished as an officer, as many others; yet it is notorious, that he accomplished more with those men, than any other officer in the army could, with the same number of white men. Col. H. found in THESE men, the same traits that General Jackson found in the free colored people of Mobile, an enthusiasm which led to the performance of great things.²²

According to this account, not only did Africans American fight for the nation's autonomy, but also they fought more valiantly than whites. It also suggests that blacks were connected to Washington and that, at least implicitly, he sanctioned their participation in America's democracy.²³ Furthermore, the writer suggests that those soldiers' noble and intrepid mettle is characteristic of black involvement in American tests for freedom. In that same vein in which he referenced George Washington, T. V. R. mention of "General Jackson," who by this time had been President Jackson, carries a potent political function. This scripter, like those at the conventions, made certain that the actors who would play the synecdoche as well as the spectators who watched those performances were well aware of black participation in the War of 1812.

What is perhaps most effective about fastening this piece of history to the synecdoche's back-story is that it reveals Jackson's willingness to recruit free people of color as soldiers. For a new nation fighting to maintain its claims to autonomy and land, what more effective role could her citizens play than soldiers? Moreover, the nexus between Jackson and free people of color is a noteworthy one. One of the legacies of Jacksonian democracy was its egregious treatment of free people of color in the North and its sympathies for Southern slavery.²⁴ If the performance team demonstrated that even Jackson once recognized worth in free people of color at this

critical juncture, then surely those Democrats who shared his world-view might do the same.

But the Jackson connection was not scripted simply to change the minds and actions of white Americans who labeled themselves Democrats—some of who often made up the bloodiest anti-black/anti-slave mobs during the antebellum period. It was also there for the performers' benefit. The delegates sought to ease black anxieties regarding Jackson. In fact, reminders of Jackson's call to black soldiers during the War of 1812 are throughout the minutes of the early conventions. In 1832 for instance, John B. Vashon, a delegate from Pittsburgh presented to the convention the proclamations Jackson and his aide-de-camp Thomas Butler made to the free black population in Louisiana. Vashon then moved, seconded by T. D. Coxsin of Gloucester County New Jersey, "that 3000 copies be distributed for gratuitous distribution."²⁵ The motion was delayed due to the lack of a quorum. Vashon then motioned later in that session, this time with a quorum. After extensively debating the motion a second time, it was ultimately withdrawn because of "the hour of adjournment having arrived."²⁶ The roundabout defeat of this measure did not signify the delegates' rigid adherence to the rules concerning time—for the motion was not brought up again at the convention that year. Instead, it shows the delegates' sensitivity to political maneuvering. In between Vashon's motions, the delegates debated and voted on "entering the proclamations upon the minutes.... This motion provoked considerable debate and was eventually negatived [sic]."²⁷ Therefore, knowing that the delegates would not pass his original measure, Vashon "printed

[and] presented the Convention with two hundred copies” of the proclamations the next day.²⁸

Although Jackson’s call was discussed again at the 1833 convention, it was in 1834 that the performance team resolved to “publish, in connexion [sic] with the Minutes, the proclamation of Gen. Jackson and his Aid-de-camp, addressed to the free people of color, in September, 1814.”²⁹ Now, Jackson’s and Butler’s proclamations were much more accessible to those who would play the synecdoche in 1834 and later. In that year, the convention printed 3000 copies of the minutes and gave each delegate 50 copies to disseminate throughout his district.³⁰ In fact, the inclusion of the proclamations in the minutes was somewhat of an anomaly, particularly during the early years; the delegates primarily printed resolutions, reports, declarations of sentiment, and keynote addresses that tackled contemporaneous issues. Therefore, the addition of this historical artifact warrants special attention.

What role did the insertion of these two documents play? Would not it have been enough to summon the memory of those black soldiers who fought during the War of 1812 in speeches, declarations, or resolutions? How does the addition of the physical text impact the performance team’s scripting differently than does the conjuring of those memories? I would argue the printing and dissemination of Jackson’s and Butler’s proclamations was one of the most politically savvy and critical dimensions of the scripting of the racial synecdoche. By inserting them in their entirety, those ideas became important elements of the racial synecdoche. Jackson and Butler were unwitting yet key contributors.

But what did they add to the synecdoche? Butler, on the one hand, begins his “Proclamation to the Free People of Color” with the exclamation of “Soldiers!” He then tells them that, based on their previous performances in an earlier battle at Mobile, “*I expected much from you*” (original emphasis). He calls America their “*native country*” and adds that “[free people of color] had as well as [whites] to defend what man holds most dear—his parents, relations, wife, children, and property.” Butler again proclaims them “Soldiers!” and writes that the President shall hear of their noble deeds and that the “American people will, I doubt not, give you the praise your exploits entitle you to.”³¹ In this announcement, Butler scripts free people of color as natively *American* and sharing values with whites.

Because he was the President, Jackson’s proclamation is in even more integral to the scripting process. In it, he labels free blacks in Louisiana “sons of freedom,” “Americans,” “fathers,” “brothers,” and “noble hearted.” Jackson characterizes them as having “intelligent minds” and a “love of honor.” He then, “in the sincerity of a soldier, and the language of truth,” addresses how black soldiers will be treated alongside their white counterparts. He writes:

To every noble hearted freeman of color, volunteering to serve during the present contest with Great Britain, and no longer, there will be paid the same bounty in money and lands, now received by the white solders of the United States, viz., one hundred and twenty-four dollars in money, and one hundred and sixty acres of land. The non-commissioned officers and privates will also be entitled to the same monthly pay and daily rations and clothes, furnished to any American soldier....

...Due regard will be paid to the feelings of freemen and soldiers. You will not, by being associated with white men in the same corps, be exposed to improper comparisons or unjust sarcasm. As a distinct, independent battalion or regiment, pursuing the path of glory, you will, undivided, receive the applause and gratitude of your countrymen.³²

When the nation is most tested, then, free people of color warrant the same privileges as whites already receive. So, asked the delegates, why are they not entitled to those same rights during peacetime?

Therefore, by means of Jackson's rhetoric, the delegates scripted the synecdoche with an historical worth that conferred upon it the eligibility to perform absolute citizenship. Although there was a twenty-year gap, Jackson's 1814 proclamation seemed to undercut much of the rhetorical and "scientific" conclusions that emerged in the 1830s. In this way, moreover, the delegates were effectively able to use Jackson's own words from the 1810s to subvert the racist Jacksonianism of the 1820s and 1830s. Jackson and Butler became unknowing, though crucial members of the performance team.

The Synecdoche and Its Ideologies

The fact that the delegates appropriated Jackson not only signifies their keen political sense; it also indicates their stance on black-white relations. One characteristic of the performance teams of the 1830s and early 1840s is that they embraced white assistance and thought that aid was indispensable. This is one of the marked differences between African American political strategy in this period and that post-1843.³³ That acceptance of white support also shaped how those performance teams scripted the racial synecdoche.

For those white Americans who expressed their displeasure with free people of color through physical or psychic oppression, the public performance of the synecdoche was designed to change their positions toward African Americans. But what about those white Americans who were sensitive towards and fighting for black

causes? What role, if any, would they play in the scripting of the synecdoche? And, what relationship would the synecdoche have with them?

As an independent class of black leaders emerged during the late 1820s, African Americans did not, *en masse*, run away from white support.³⁴ In fact, white presence was ubiquitous in the early years of the conventions. Whites such as William Lloyd Garrison, S. S. Jocelyn, Benjamin Lundy, and Arthur Tappan all attended the conventions. Their presence was a welcome one as evidenced by an 1831 unanimous resolution that “the afore-mentioned gentlemen have permission to make any inquiries or communications, which they might deem proper.”³⁵ Although the white presence waned throughout the decade, and by 1843 the conventions were a decidedly black affair, the delegates scripted the synecdoche to recognize and work with white allies. I argue that two particular instances in the scripting process signify how the synecdoche was to negotiate its interface with allied whites: the exaltation of William Lloyd Garrison and the establishment of the Trustee Board of a proposed manual labor college for young black men in New Haven.

William Lloyd Garrison appears in the minutes of the 1831, 1832, and 1833 conventions. He attended the conventions in 1831 and 1832; he did not attend the one in 1833 as he was in England acting as agent of the New England Anti-Slavery society “for the purpose of procuring funds to aid in the establishment of a Manual Labor School, for the education of colored youth; and of disseminating in that country, the truth in relation to the objects of the American Colonization Society.”³⁶ The delegates “most heartily” approved of Garrison’s project and expressed their “utmost confidence in his worth and integrity...[to bring it] to the attention and

kindness of the philanthropic inhabitants of Great Britain.”³⁷ However, it was Garrison’s performance at the 1832 convention that established his exalted place in the synecdoche’s psyche.

One of the primary tasks of the early conventions was to combat the rhetoric and influence of the American Colonization Society (ACS). As noted in the 1831

Conventional Address:

The Convention has not been unmindful of the oppression of the American Colonization Society, and it would respectfully suggest to that august body of learning, talent, and worth, that, in our humble opinion...are pursuing the direct road to perpetuate slavery, with all its unchristianlike [sic] concomitants, in this boasted land of freedom; and, as citizens and men whose best blood is sapped to gain popularity for that Institution, we would, in the most feeling manner, beg of them to desist; or, if we must be sacrificed to their philanthropy, we would rather die at home.³⁸

The ACS remained one of the primary targets of the conventions through 1835.

Garrison, too, opposed the ACS. Like the delegates, he believed the ACS was an organization dedicated to ejecting free people of color from the United States all the while perpetuating slavery. In 1832, he expressed those thoughts directly to the delegates at the convention.

In 1832, “The Rev. Mr. Gurley, Secretary of the American Colonization Society” addressed the delegates of the conventions. He attempted to “remove some erroneous impressions in the minds of people of color, in relation to the Colonization Society.”³⁹ Garrison responded “in a most eloquent and convincing speech” and “proved that the operations of that Society militate against the interest of the people of color.”⁴⁰ The following day, a “Rev. Mr. Patterson, an advocate of the Colonization Society,” expressed his commitment to the elevation of free blacks. He was followed by Garrison “who exhibited, by a large number of facts, taken from the

proceedings of the Colonization Society, that the sentiments cherished by [the Society] in relation to [free people of color], as citizens of the United States, are hostile to our interests.”⁴¹ Garrison provided a succinct rebuttal of the ACS. His quantitative refutation, drawn from a “large number of facts,” became the synecdoche’s most powerful weapon against the ACS. In this way, Garrison became an integral member of the performance team. Thus, the synecdoche was scripted to recognize and welcome white support.

Although the synecdoche was to perform brotherhood in regard to allied whites, it was not to submit courteously to their will. The delegates scripted it to march alongside whites, not behind them. Nor was it to defer blindly to the will of whites; it was an autonomous character. Moreover, it could perform leadership roles when working alongside whites. When contemplating the manual labor school for young men of color, the delegates resolved that the “Trustees of the contemplated Institution, shall [have] a majority of colored persons; the number proposed is seven, three white, and four colored; who shall be elected by the subscribers, contributors, or their representatives.”⁴² The school, therefore, would not only reflect the desire of its patrons; but, having a board of trustees with an African American majority would ensure that black interests remained at the forefront.⁴³ This demonstrated to those who would perform the synecdoche that African Americans were not only qualified to serve in leadership roles, but it was their responsibility, not whites, to stand up for the welfare of free people of color. Thus, the synecdoche was endowed with a sense of *racial responsibility* that welcomed whites but did not rely on them.

As I have noted, the performance team charged with the construction of the synecdoche considered itself solely American. In fact, one of the chief concerns of the early conventions centered on the question of emigration. In her seminal study of the black elite of Philadelphia, Julie Winch gives perhaps the most thorough reading of how convention delegates tackled this question. In *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, Winch explores how “the issue of Liberian emigration” and the “attempt to force free blacks to leave America served to provide cohesion to the forces of opposition.”⁴⁴ Winch also illustrates how “emigration [schemes] to Haiti, Canada, and Trinidad...came largely from within the free black community...[moreover,] emigration remained an issue of vital concern throughout the antebellum period.”⁴⁵ The issue of emigration was a pivotal one for the free black community and has, as Winch notes, “understandably received more attention than other issues.”⁴⁶ This study, then, questions how the delegates imagined America and the role it would play in the synecdoche’s scripting, since it was meant to be played on the American stage.

An element of hope characterizes the performance team from 1830 to 1842.⁴⁷ Some of the delegates supported the idea of Canadian emigration in the early conventions reasoning that: “A *part* of our suffering brethren cannot live under compulsory laws and inducements [that] cause them to alienate all their natural attachments to their homes, and accept of the only mode left open, which is to remove to a distant country to receive those rights and privileges of which they have been deprived.”⁴⁸ The language of “home” versus “distant country” suggests that even while the performance team accepted the wish of some African Americans to

emigrate, they saw this *new* emigration as a forced exits from the “true” home—
America.

At the 1831 convention, the Committee of Inquiry recommended that the Declaration of Independence and Constitution be read at the conventions “believing that the truths contained in the former are incontrovertible and that the latter guarantees in letter and spirit to every freeman born in this country, all the rights and immunities of citizenship.”⁴⁹ The “truths” and “rights” contained in these documents underscored the performance team’s entire project. It unknown whether those documents were read at subsequent conventions, but the minutes contain numerous references and allusions.

The Conventional Address in 1832 provides perhaps the most direct response to the ostensible contradiction of calling America home while raising funds for Canadian emigration. Henry Sipkins, delegate from New York and convention president that year, declared:

In contributing to our brethren that aid which will secure them a refuge in a storm, we would not wish to be understood, as to possessing any inclination to remove, nor in the least to impoverish that noble sentiment which we rejoice in exclaiming—

This is *our* own,
Our native land.

All that we have done, humanity dictated it, neither inclination nor alienated feelings to our country prescribed it, but that power which is above all other considerations, viz: The law of necessity.⁵⁰ (original emphasis)

Sipkins suggests that free people of color did not leave America on their own accord, but rather they were forced to do so. The issue of forced black flight was one of the principal concerns the delegates faced at the early conventions. Although the

performance team preferred free people of color to stay in their home states unless they chose to move, the delegates accepted the fact that several free people of color faced such daunting exigencies that some form of emigration was their only recourse. At the 1833 convention the delegates reached a compromise that they thought would ease anxieties over emigration. It also points to the ways in which they contributed to the cultivation of an American consciousness that was partly focused on expansionism.

In 1833, eight delegates from eight different states presented their “Report on African Colonization.” After it was read to the entire delegation, they passed a unanimous resolution that “three thousand copies [of] the Report on African Colonization, be printed in handbills for distribution, by the members of the Convention.”⁵¹ The convention resolved and approved the following:

Resolved, That this Convention discourage, by every means in their power, the colonization of our people, anywhere beyond the limits of this CONTINENT; and those who may be obliged to exchange a cultivated region for a howling wilderness, we would recommend, to retire back into the western wilds, and fell the *native forests of America*, where the *plough-share* of prejudice has as yet been unable to penetrate the soil—and where they can dwell in peaceful retirement, under their own fig tree.⁵²

Those who were obliged to move, then, should stay head west where a life without prejudice awaited them. By living in the “native forests of America,” those free people of color who left the untenably oppressive circumstances they faced in their home states would still escape those terrors all the while remaining Americans in America. This resolution also highlights the ways the delegates adopted and re-shaped the notion of Manifest Destiny. Their articulation of Manifest Destiny did not arise from a politics of terror and dislocation like Jackson’s; but rather, the “howling

wilderness” of the west was a refuge where oppressed peoples could begin their lives anew.

All of these elements—the reading of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution at the conventions, Sipkins’ address, and the resolution urging westward movement—all illustrate the delegates’ argument that America belongs to free people of color (and visa versa). They also underscore the fact that the synecdoche was scripted to be an American character that would change American minds.

Throughout the 1830s and early 1840s, the performance team remained hopeful that America would live up to the principle of “all men are created equal.” In fact, just a year before his influential address at the 1843 convention—the address, I argue, that changed the tenor and complexion of African American politics that, in turn, resulted in the discontinued performance of the synecdoche scripted in the 1830s and early 40s—Henry Highland Garnett said, “No, our country will not be so deaf to the cries of the oppressed; so regardless of the commands of God, and her highest interests. No, the time for a last stern struggle has not yet come (may it never be necessary).”⁵³ Indeed, as religion scholar and historian Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. notes, “There seemed a glimmer of hope that the nation would live up to its stated ideals.”⁵⁴ Faith in America is one of the foundational characteristics of the synecdoche scripted from 1830 to 1842.

Their entire project of scripting and performing this new black identity was essentially a hopeful one. Free people of color who engaged in this endeavor imbibed the American rhetoric of natural rights and, through acts of non-violent civil disobedience, sought to affect social change through performance. Their ambitious

project must not be confused with naivety, however. In a unanimous resolution praising the end of slavery in the West Indies, the delegates said: “This convention do most heartily congratulate the friends of religion, morality and equal rights on the happy termination of slavery in the West India colonies, and do rely with the utmost confidence, that the operation of those principles bring forth the same happy result to our *much favored*, yet GUILTY country”⁵⁵ (original emphasis). As this resolution makes clear, these free people of color were fully conscious of the duplicitous nature in the American polity but wholly believed their country had the capacity and, hopefully, the *will* to change. That will to change was rooted in a conscience and consciousness that fifty years before prompted white colonists to fight for their independence from the British.

The Synecdoche and its Behavior

In their seminal study of African American expression culture through the medium of public presentation of the black body, Shane White and Graham White explore how the bodies of slaves and of free blacks were “contested terrains” where African Americans performed freedom. In their book *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* they argue persuasively that “within the confines of an oppressive social system, African American have been able to develop and give visual expression to cultural preferences that were at variance with those of the dominant racial group.”⁵⁶ Their study examines how black Americans, from slavery to freedom, expressed their political, cultural, and social ideologies in clothing, hairstyle, make-up, and even gait. Placed against a backdrop of an often-hostile white America, these performances were offered as profound political and aesthetic sites of protest.

In the 1830s, the delegates to the National Conventions scripted the synecdoche with certain behavioral traits that they believed were essential to accomplishing their goal of full civic inclusion. The remainder of this chapter concerns itself with those characteristics. Specifically, I focus on three arenas of the synecdoche's prescribed specific behavior: temperance, public gatherings, and consumerism.

Much has and continues to be written about temperance in early/antebellum America. For good reason: it was one of the most influential movements in American history. It sparked a host of responses. Legislation prohibited drinking from certain times during the week; social movements sparked the formation of hundreds of temperance societies throughout the nation; cultural responses included the production and popularity of the play *The Drunkard* (and countless other temperance dramas). For those concerned with the moral makeup of the new nation drinking was an issue of chief concern. As W. J. Rorabaugh argues in his book, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*, between 1790 and 1830 Americans “drank more alcoholic beverages per capita than ever before or since.”⁵⁷ Therefore, it should be no surprise that the delegates of the black conventions, too, addressed this “moral epidemic.”

At the convention in 1833, the delegates accepted and adopted an extensive report on the issue of temperance. In the report, the committee detailed the formation of numerous temperance societies in the United States and England. They also praised the “one thousand five hundred, who have conscientiously discontinued the manufacturing of [alcohol], and the five thousand who have ceased to sell *the waters*

of death.” These people, along with those who formed and participated in the societies, “arrayed under the banners of Temperance, unitedly [sic] rejoice in the principle of TOTAL ABSTINENCE.”⁵⁸ In that same report, they drew a parallel between alcoholism and slavery. They wrote:

The RUM system, like that of *slavery*, is upheld by ignorance, avarice, and incorrect views of duty. Alike they are exerting a withering influence.... While upon other portions of the community, a flood of light is pouring forth from the press and from the pulpit, there is among us a criminal remissness in the diffusion of correct principles on this subject—To free our brethren from the chains of American oppression, and to clear away the mists of prejudice, which so unjustly attempts to withhold from us our rights, as American citizens, our hope and confidence is in the diffusion of correct moral principle; this alone, is adequate to induce those whom we represent, to feel the obligation of banishing, at once, and for ever [sic], this use of strong drink, and with it the fruitful source of the evils which retard our best interests.⁵⁹

Temperance formed part and parcel of a strategy of performative self-elevation—one was independent of white exigencies. As Patrick Rael writes, “Perhaps blacks could exercise power in the one area where they all possessed it—themselves—to force a change in white attitudes.”⁶⁰

Moreover, as evidenced by its ubiquity in the conventions’ minutes, temperance was the heart of the performance team’s moral strategy. It would change white attitudes *and* build a vibrant black community. “Temperance [is] best calculated to promote the elevation of mankind to a proper rank and standing among men, as they enable him to discharge all those duties enjoined on him by the Creator,” resolved the convention in 1831.⁶¹ The final recommendation of the 1832 Conventional Address stated: “Before taking our leave, we would admonish you, by all that you hold dear, beware of that bewitching evil, that bane of society, that curse of the world, that fell destroyer of the best prospects, and the last hope of civilized

man, INTEMPERANCE.”⁶² A unanimous resolution a few years later carried the same gravity: “As intemperance and slavery are closely allied, this convention recommend to our people the formation of temperance societies, which we believe will facilitate the cause of immediate and universal emancipation.”⁶³ Indeed, their case for temperance was best summed up in an unanimously adopted 1833 resolution:

In dismissing our subject, we would respectfully impress upon each Member of the Convention, that of all the subject that come within the range of our deliberations, few, if any, are of greater importance than that of Temperance; it has a claim upon vigorous support, upon our best feelings and efforts—*If this advances, if this triumphs, every interest we aim to promote, every blessing we seek as men, or as citizens of this our beloved republic, must advance, must triumph.* MORAL WORTH IS POWERFUL, AND WILL PREVAIL.⁶⁴

For the delegates, temperance symbolized *the* crucial front in their war for America’s moral soul. The sober synecdoche, therefore, embodied the high moral worth of the free black community.

The performance team also scripted the circumscription of large black public gatherings, often the sites of violence against free people of color and their interests.⁶⁵ At the 1831 convention, the delegates recommended to the “People of Color throughout the United States, the discontinuance of public processions on any day, considering it as highly injurious to our interests as a people.”⁶⁶ The next year they passed a similar resolution, calling public processions “highly prejudicial to our interests as a people.”⁶⁷ In 1834, as free people of color increasingly became targets of white mobs in Jacksonian America, the delegates specified the type of gatherings free people of color should avoid. They resolved: “That it be recommended to the colored people in the United States, that they avoid any uncalled for interference or participation in the public discussions or public meetings of Colonization or Anti-

Slavery societies.”⁶⁸ At those meetings, thought the delegates, African Americans were particularly susceptible to white terrorism. In 1835, they made a similar motion in which they “recommended to our people the discountenance and refrain from witnessing the pro-slavery farces and ape-like exhibitions, commonly known as Colonization meetings.”⁶⁹ In short, the synecdoche was scripted to shun public processions and gatherings that might raise the temper of onlookers.

But the delegates did not want African Americans to exist in isolated, individual bubbles. They encouraged free people of color to congregate for somber purposes, such as public prayer or in the convention meetings at the local, state, and national levels. Instead of assembling to celebrate the day of independence with a parade or protest, blacks should “meet together in their respective locations on the fourth day of July, annually, for the purpose of prayer.”⁷⁰ On the “Sabbath most convenient, near the Fourth of July,” free people of color should have “appropriate discourses” on the blessings of Independence.⁷¹ Moreover, it was scripted for African Americans to “hold a monthly concert of prayer on the last Monday of every month” to demonstrate their sobriety and religious earnestness. This type of solemn behavior, along with temperance, made up part of the moral strategy to sway white minds. It reflected the ways in which the racial synecdoche treated fellow African Americans. William Hamilton, president of the 1834 convention, set the tone for the convention that year and told the delegates to impress that tone upon their constituents.⁷² He said:

You, gentleman, can begin here. By managing this conference in a spirit of good will and true politeness; by constantly keeping in view and cultivating a spirit of peace, order and harmony, rather than satire, wit, and eloquence; by putting the best possible construction on each other’s language, rather than

charging each other with improper motives. These dispositions will bespeak our character more or less virtuous and refined, and render our sitting more or less pleasant...my earnest hope is that you may have a peaceful, pleasant sitting.⁷³

The traits of “peace, order, and harmony” were crucial to the black performative identity the delegates were scripting. Faced with the violent terror of Jacksonian mobs, the synecdoche opted not to retaliate but lead by peaceful example. They scripted:

We will raise our *moral* flag, bearing its inscription, “do unto others, as you would have them do unto you;”... We therefore declare to the world, that our object is to extend the principles of *universal peace* and goodwill to all mankind, by promoting *sound morality*, by the influence of education, temperance, economy, and all those virtues that alone can render man acceptable in the eyes of God or the civilized world.⁷⁴ (emphasis added)

The synecdoche, therefore, was a moral instrument that would not only improve the plight of African Americans, but of all men.

If it was “hit,” though, the synecdoche was not scripted to turn the other cheek. The performance team scripted another dimension of civil disobedience for the synecdoche. Along with its performance of moral suasion, the synecdoche was to patronize certain businesses while avoiding others. The performance team told their constituents to “abstain, as much as possible, from goods contaminated with the blood and tears of the slave.”⁷⁵ The following year, they passed a similar resolution saying, “That it is the duty of every *lover of freedom*, to abstain from using the products of slave labor, as far as practicable.” The delegates’ keen strategy demonstrates their political perspicacity—they were aware that slavery was essentially an economic institution and patronizing those establishments only

perpetuated the peculiar institution. Therefore, the synecdoche divested from slave businesses.

Rather than consume slave goods, the synecdoche was to buy “free black.” In 1831, the script called for the synecdoche to “give the preference to the production of freemen wherever it can be had.”⁷⁶ In fact, the delegates unanimously resolved that free people of color in Philadelphia patronize a specific store because it sold goods that were made by freemen. It said, “This convention highly approve of the indefatigable labors of Miss Lydia White, in her establishment of a free labor store, and that the patronage of all who feel an interest in promoting the cause of universal freedom, is cheerfully recommended to her store, *No. 42 North Fourth-Street*, in the city of Philadelphia.”⁷⁷ If there were goods or services free people of color needed, and black freemen did not produce them, then the synecdoche was meant to “patronize those conveyances and establishments only, in which are granted us equal privileges for our money.”⁷⁸ Or, as an 1835 resolution said: “And also, do recommend to our people and the friends of our race, to patronize those lines of stages and steamboats which make little or no distinction among their passengers.”⁷⁹

This resolution appears unique in that the delegates did not often specify the parameters of specific goods or services that their constituents were to patronize. The newspaper, on the other hand, represented a conspicuous exception. The reason is because the performance team believed newspapers carried special sway. As one report read, “It is only through the instrumentality of that most potent reformer of public sentiment the public press, that any certain, speedy, and radical change will be effected in the moral and political relation which we, as a people, hold in this

country.”⁸⁰ Therefore, the performance team scripted which newspapers the synecdoche was to buy and read. In 1831 it was resolved that “the editors of *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, *The Liberator*, and *African Sentinel* are our trusted friends...[and] that the principles emanating from said presses, ought to be proclaimed throughout the world, and read by every friend of the rights of man.”⁸¹ In 1833, the delegates restated their commitment to those presses as well *The Emancipator* and *Genius of Temperance* that had formed since.⁸² Further, in 1835 the delegates made special mention of *The Liberator* saying it was “eminently deserving of the support of every free colored citizen in these United States.”⁸³ They also said that the for “all who subscribe to papers devoted to our cause, to bear in mind, that patronage includes a punctual compliance with the terms of subscription.”⁸⁴ Thus, the synecdoche was scripted to be both intellectually engaged and financially responsible to those who advocated its causes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the performative characteristics of the racial synecdoche that free people of color were to play on the American social stage. Those traits were collectively scripted (and performed) from 1830-1842. My reading of that scripting process fits within historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s idea of a “politics of respectability” which emphasized reform of “individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations.”⁸⁵ By ritualistically scripting that strategy, African Americans were able to reconfigure the dialogue on national citizenship and give themselves a role to play in the social drama of the antebellum period. Free people of color, from the slim few that were wealthy by any metric to the poor, all

contributed to the scripting of the racial synecdoche. Moral suasion in this period was not meant to launch blacks citizens to an economic or cultural “middle class,” but rather to extend to all people the ability to perform citizenship. As one delegate remarked in 1834: “Let me therefore recommend earnestly that you press upon our people the necessity and advantage of moral reformation. It may not produce an excess of riches, but it will produce a higher state of happiness, and render our circumstances easier.”⁸⁶

Finally, I have argued that the performative traits of the racial synecdoche are best understood in three senses: the historical, the ideological, and the behavioral. The synecdoche was furnished with a history that highlighted its glorious Egyptian past as well as a noble performance in America’s fights for independence. Ideologically, the synecdoche claimed America as its native, proper, and only home; moreover, despite the physical and hegemonic oppression of white supremacy, it embraced its white brethren and remained fundamentally hopeful in its ability to change hostile, white minds. In terms of its behavior, it cultivated a performative politics of respectability centered on moral suasion. By practicing absolute temperance, eschewing public processions and gatherings except for religious and sober practices like prayer, as well as patronizing certain business while avoiding others the racial synecdoche demonstrated African Americans’ ability to perform citizenship and showed them as the exemplar of what it means to be American. An 1832 proclamation best demonstrates delegates’ awareness of their performative project:

We yet anticipate in the moral strength of this nation, a final redemption from those evils that have been illegitimately entailed on us as a people. We yet

expect by due exertions on our part, together with the aid of the benevolent philanthropists of our country, to acquire a moral and intellectual strength, that will unshaft the calumnious darts of our adversaries, and present to the world a general character, that they will feel bound to respect and admire.⁸⁷

But how successful was their project? Would that “general character” (i.e. the racial synecdoche) force their enemies to shelve those “calumnious darts?” In what ways did whites respond to the synecdoche’s “moral and intellectual strength?” And how did those responses shape the ways in which black performative identity was scripted after 1842? I take up those questions in the next chapter.

Notes for Chapter Two

¹ Richard Allen, *Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Color and the Proceedings of the Convention* (Philadelphia, 1831), 11-12.

² There was break in the national convention movement from 1836-1842. There were nationally attended and organized conventions such as those by the American Moral Reform Society, however, but none of that had the same charter as those that took place from 1830-1835. For this study, I am most interested in the scripting at the 1830-1835 conventions.

³ Those events, as I have argued in chapter one, were the advent of the ACS in 1816, the development of African American philanthropic and political institutions, and the end of slavery throughout the North.

⁴ Glaude, 113-114.

⁵ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, eds. *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993), xxix.

⁶ Turner, 79.

⁷ *1832 Minutes*, 7. It should be noted that, at this time, these rules are not unique to African American conventions. The delegates did, though, go to great lengths to spell out these rules and print them in their minutes. I would suggest that shows their sensitivity to the performative aspect of their project and how it might be effected by their behavior.

⁸ Harry J. Elam, Jr., *Taking it to the Streets: The Social Protest Theatre of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 15.

⁹ Turner, 55.

¹⁰ Turner, 108.

¹¹ This book was one of the most popular “scientific” books of the nineteenth century. The first printing of the book sold out and by the end of the nineteenth century, it had gone through at least nine editions. See William Stanton, *The Leopard Spots: Scientific Attitudes Towards Race in America 1815-1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 162-163.

¹² J.C. Nott and George Gliddon, *Types of Mankind; or, Ethnological Research based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races*, (Philadelphia, 1854), 402-405.

¹³ Frederick Douglass, “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered,” *The life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (New York: International Press, 1950), 300.

¹⁴ Patrick Rael, “A Common Nature, A United Destiny: African American Responses to Racial Science from the Revolution to the Civil War” in *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolition*, eds. Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer (New York: The New Press, 2006), 190-191.

¹⁵ Rael, 191.

¹⁶ Rael, 191

¹⁷ *1832 Minutes*, 36.

¹⁸ *1834 Minutes*, 27-29.

¹⁹ White Americans in this period often argued that they were the descendants from Ancient Greece and Rome. This claim used by scientists who claimed whites possessed inherent intellectual superiority over other races. See Samuel Morton’s *Cranium Americanus* (1839) and Gliddon and Nott’s *Types of Mankind* (1854).

²⁰ *Colored American*, July y, 1838.

²¹ See Schama and Frey.

²² *Colored American*, February 27, 1841.

²³ Of course Washington was not a champion of black rights and did not free his slaves during his lifetime or in his will.

²⁴ I want to make clear, though, that groups such as African Americans and abolitionists often appropriated and reshaped the tenets of Jacksonianism to their political benefits. See Jonathon H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

²⁵ *1832 Minutes*, 12.

²⁶ Ibid.

-
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 13.
- ²⁹ *1834 Minutes*, 21.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 17.
- ³¹ Ibid., 22-23.
- ³² Ibid., 22.
- ³³ In the 1840s, more and more African American leaders believed that white assistance was futile and only blacks could improve their lot. In the late 1840s and 1850s Frederick Douglass, who embraced white support, and Martin Delaney, who shunned it, were the two most prominent spokesmen for the respective camps. See Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delaney, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) for perhaps the most complex and sophisticated reading of the differences between Douglass and Delaney.
- ³⁴ Rael, 44.
- ³⁵ *1831 Minutes*, 5.
- ³⁶ *1833 Minutes*, 9.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ *1831 Minutes*, 15.
- ³⁹ *1833 Minutes*, 9.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., 11.
- ⁴² *1831 Minutes*, 7.
- ⁴³ I would argue that they wanted to avoid many of the shortcomings and problems that characterized the black schools that white philanthropists built in the New York City in the 1810s. See Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 134-170.
- ⁴⁴ Winch, 69.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ See Glaude, 143-160, in which he explores the reasons why, as he argues, certain African Americans became less hopeful after 1843.
- ⁴⁸ *1832 Minutes*, 18.
- ⁴⁹ *1831 Minutes*, 4-5.
- ⁵⁰ *1832 Minutes*, 33-34.
- ⁵¹ *1833 Minutes*, 26-28.
- ⁵² Ibid., 28.
- ⁵³ *The Emancipator*, March 3, 1842.
- ⁵⁴ Glaude, 146.
- ⁵⁵ *1835 Minutes*, 17.
- ⁵⁶ Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 2-4.
- ⁵⁷ W. J. Rorabaugh, *Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), ix.
- ⁵⁸ *1833 Minutes*, 16.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 17.
- ⁶⁰ Rael, 185.
- ⁶¹ *1831 Minutes*, 5.
- ⁶² *1832 Minutes*, 36.
- ⁶³ *1835 Minutes*, 8.
- ⁶⁴ *1833 Minutes*, 19.
- ⁶⁵ See David Grimsted, *History of American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Leonard L. Richards, "Gentleman of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study in Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975).
- ⁶⁶ *1831 Minutes*, 11.

⁶⁷ *1832 Minutes*, 27.

⁶⁸ *1834 Minutes*, 27.

⁶⁹ *1835 Minutes*, 17.

⁷⁰ *1834 Minutes*, 18.

⁷¹ *1832 Minutes*, 29.

⁷² The 1834 convention was especially tense because it was held in New York City that year and the powerful Philadelphian delegation (and their allies) thought it should take place in New York. The tension surrounding the 1834 convention reflects the friction that took place between the New York City delegation and the Philadelphia one throughout the 1830s. See Chapters five and six in Winch's *Philadelphia's Black Elite*.

⁷³ *1834 Minutes*, 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁶ *1831 Minutes*, 15.

⁷⁷ *1833 Minutes*, 30.

⁷⁸ *1834 Minutes*, 15.

⁷⁹ *1835 Minutes*, 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸¹ *1831 Minutes*, 11.

⁸² *1833 Minutes*, 29.

⁸³ *1835 Minutes*, 13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 34.

⁸⁶ *1834 Minutes*, 7.

⁸⁷ *1832 Minutes*, 34.

Chapter 3:
Performance Cancelled:
Jacksonianism, Violence, and Playing the Racial Synecdoche

Historians often refer to the Jacksonian period as the “Age of the Common Man,” yet as recent scholars of American history have noted, the period presents a striking contrast between the rhetoric of democracy espoused by Jackson and his cronies, and the impact of those policies on the general American population. The Jacksonian rhetoric of “self-government” offered many Americans an implicit license to violence. By making politics the concern of every man (rather than an elite few), and by empowering the average citizen to participate in the nation’s governance, the Jackson administration unwittingly engendered a sharp rise in mob violence that would last throughout the years of Jackson’s presidency (and beyond), as men engaged in “street politics” that often degenerated into mob demonstrations. As a spokesman for an Indiana vigilante movement in 1858:

We are believers in the doctrine of popular sovereignty; that the people of this country are the real sovereigns, and that whenever the laws, made by those to whom they have delegated their authority, are found inadequate to their protection, it is their right to take the protection of their property into their own hands, and to deal with these villains according to their just desserts.¹

According to this citizen (and others like him) violence was merely part and parcel of the means by which the people protect their political interests and material goods. Moreover, it served as an extralegal check on the three branches of government by those who endowed the government with the charge to enact their demands.

But the Jacksonian rioters did not only use violence as a way to protest the government’s action or inaction regarding a certain issue. It became a primary tactic through which white Americans in the 1830s and 1840s opposed the interests of

people of color. In this chapter I will first explore how white rioters used violence as part of a politicized campaign against African Americans in the North, such as in Philadelphia. The politicization of violence is particularly significant, since it links white mob violence to the theatricalized political protests of the American Revolution (such as the Boston Tea Party and the guerilla warfare of the Sons of Liberty), but also because it implicitly shifts the debate from one over *black* rights in American culture to *white* rights in American culture. This shift reflects white Americans' refusal to cede "center stage" to their black counterparts. The performative aspects of white violence against African Americans begs the question how the racial synecdoche threatened both elite and working class whites in cities like Philadelphia, where blacks and whites co-existed since before the Revolution. Using the 1838 attack on Pennsylvania Hall and its aftermath as a case study, I will argue that the black performative identity scripted during the 1830s conventions signified to white rioters black encroachment on and black appropriation of the democratic and behavioral ideals articulated in America's charters. Those articulations, according to the rioters, were guaranteed to white Americans and were never intended for people of color.

Performance and the Franchise Debates of 1837-1838

As I suggested in chapter 2, the delegates at the black national conventions tried to change white minds and earn full civic participation for people of color. Their performative politics of respectability was characterized by their insistence on non-violence and cross-racial brotherhood. Throughout the 1830s, non-violence remained one of the fundamental features of black activism. The murder of David Walker in 1830 as well as the legal and extralegal reactions to Nat Turner's 1831

slave uprising in Virginia only strengthened the performance team's belief in peaceful protest and revealed to those scripters the dangers of black rhetorical violence, as in the case of Walker, and black physical violence, as in the case of Turner. Therefore, in order to avoid attacks from white opponents, those who scripted the racial synecdoche wanted their constituencies to disavow the use of violence.

Although the threat of white violence against blacks would become increasingly urgent throughout the 1830s, for many African Americans, the threat of legal restrictions on their physical and psychological freedom appeared as a much more pressing issue. Indeed, white American had a history of using its legal system to control (or "script") black behavior from the Revolutionary period forward. Black American found themselves at the mercy of constantly shifting statutes governing their liberties. In Pennsylvania, for instance, black rights remained ambiguous after the Abolition Act of 1780 (instituted by the state's radical wartime regime), but the right to vote was conferred upon and exercised by some African American men. When Pennsylvania wrote a new state constitution in 1837 (and ratified it in 1838) it included a clause that would bar all African Americans from voting. In response, a committee of memorialists led by Philadelphian Robert Purvis composed *Appeal to Forty Thousand*. In this remonstrance, the committee appealed to white Pennsylvanians and argued that the right to vote had been guaranteed by the Abolition Act of 1780. As Julie Winch remarks, the approach of the *Appeal* was to focus white attention on the behavior of the black community.² The *Appeal* asked: "Have we oppressed the whites? Have we used our right to the injury of any class? Have we disgraced it by receiving bribes?"³ Their memorial highlights the

performative dimension of their project. They argue that in addition to their claim to inalienable rights, their performance of respectability should make clear that certain free people of color should not be disqualified from the franchise. They add: “We would have the right to suffrage only as the reward of industry and worth. We care not how high the qualification be placed. All we ask is, that no man shall be excluded on account of his *color*, that the same rule shall be applied to all.”⁴

Although Purvis and his committee were not interested in extending the vote to all African Americans and their concern was primarily an “elite” one, as Winch notes, it does highlight to the primary way in which free people of color in the 1830s voiced disapproval with the American government and its citizens—through a peaceful and performative politics of respectability. Purvis and William Whipper believed that African Americans should “reform themselves in order to win the respect of whites. In that way they would secure the rights they sought.”⁵ Purvis, Whipper, and other members of the American Moral Reform Society also refused to subscribe to racial labels on the grounds that it would alienate their white brethren.⁶ For example, when a delegation of black citizens convened in Pittsburgh in order to campaign for the franchise, the Philadelphians did not participate. As Winch explains, “The moral reformers would not participate because the convention was ‘complexional’—only blacks had been invited.”⁷ This convention was not like those of the early 1830s that hosted white speakers. This “blacks only” gathering undercut the interracial and egalitarian dimensions of the Philadelphians’ political project.

The fact that the Philadelphians did not want to alienate white Americans does not signify capitulation but rather their belief that they should be equal participants in

the American experiment. Of course the 1838 judicial ruling that dealt with voting and African Americans stated clearly that the courts believed free people of color were never meant to obtain full civic participation. In a decision that clarified many of the ambiguities that emerged from the vague language in both the Abolition Act of 1780 and the constitution of 1790 (issues such as whether free blacks were guaranteed the right to vote or run for office) Judge John Fox said the Abolition Act had been meant to only “relieve the negro from the oppression of certain severe laws.” He also said that African Americans were not citizens under the state constitution. Citizens were “the people, and their successors of the same caste, who established it.”⁸ The great irony of the constitution and franchise debate of 1837-1838 is that Jacksonians in Pennsylvania fought for a new constitution in order to lower the economic requirements so that all white men could vote. In many ways, disenfranchising the state’s black population seemed a by-product, rather than a goal of the legislation.

Yet if governmental structures such as state administrations, state delegations, and the courtroom empowered previously disenfranchised white men, and further constricted those freedoms open to the nation’s black inhabitants, why would those same men turn to violence to curb black liberty? I would argue that white Jacksonians turned to extralegal means because free people of color engaged in a form of protest that could not be regulated by law. Free blacks played the racial synecdoche and performed a mode of protest that whites could not control with the courts or the legislatures. As Shane White and Graham White note, “To a considerable extent, the struggle of what freedom meant centered on the bodies of

African Americans, that is to say, on the appearance of individual black and on the ways in which they collectively presented themselves in public.”⁹ It was those public presentations that befuddled, troubled, and ultimately provoked certain Jacksonians to retaliate with violence. Because the courts and the legislatures were limited in the ways in which they could restrain certain forms of black behavior, the “fourth branch of government,” or the Jacksonian “folk,” took it into their hands. As the laws governing African Americans were deemed “inadequate,” as the Indiana vigilante might say, the “real sovereigns” dealt with free people of color and served them their “just desserts.” Those “desserts” were destructive, bloody, and often fatal. They also point to the sharp fear that free people color instilled in many white Americans.

Closing Night for the Synecdoche: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall and The First African Presbyterian Church

In his work on Jacksonian violence, historian Michael Feldberg argues: “In the Jacksonian context, collective violence was one means by which various groups attempted to control competition among themselves, or by which they responded to changes in their relative status, power, wealth, or political influence.”¹⁰ Violent responses by Jacksonian “common men” increased as their political and economic statuses improved. In 1838 Philadelphia, for instance, more white men gained the right to vote as all people of color were categorically denied theirs. But that did not stop them from terrorizing black communities in subsequent years. As I have suggested above, violence was the primary way certain Jacksonians dealt with African American the performative and expressive culture that could not be contained legally. But what did those rioters find so dangerous about the new black identity that performance team had scripted?

Feldberg's theories, which are rooted in psychoanalysis, suggest a possible explanation to this question. He argues:

There is another variant of the frustration-aggression theory that *might* apply to some instances of Jacksonian violence. The "status anxiety" theory argues that a relatively powerful group will attack, or "scapegoat," a relatively weaker group if the stronger group believes that the other threatens its status or prestige. Violence against weaker rivals relieves the dominant's group's anxieties and, at the same time, demonstrates its continued social, political, or economic superiority.¹¹ (original emphasis)

In terms of the anti-black riots in cities such as Philadelphia in the late 1830s and early 1840s, I would argue the "status anxiety" theory is the key to understanding why whites attacked relatively powerless African Americans. I would posit that those mobs (composed of both wealthy and non-wealthy whites) terrorized free people of color because they thought it would reinforce the extant power structure. Further, Jacksonian "common men" feared African Americans who performed what they recognized as middle-class behavior. These white rioters worried that African Americans would supplant them and take their civic and economic roles in the American social drama. The case of the Pennsylvania Hall and its violent aftermath underscores these contentions.

Construction of Pennsylvania Hall began in the summer in 1837 and was completed in the spring of 1838. Situated on the southwest corner of Sixth and Haines streets, it was only a few blocks away from Independence Hall. On the first floor there were two large committee rooms. A large auditorium and three galleries dominated the second floor. The hall could seat as many as three thousand people and cost approximately \$40,000 to erect. The Pennsylvania Hall Association, which was its governing board, raised the money by selling shares at twenty dollars each.

Those who were interested but could not afford the twenty-dollar price tag donated materials and labor and received shares in advance. Over the speaker's platform the motto "Virtue, Liberty, and Independence" was engraved in gold letters. The primary purpose of the Hall was to provide office space, committee rooms, and large halls for abolitionist groups. But, as its Board of Managers made clear, it was open to rental to any group "for *any purpose not of an immoral character.*"¹²

On May 14, 1838 the Hall opened with prominent Philadelphia lawyer David Paul Brown giving the keynote address. He railed against the evils of slavery as well as the oppressive conditions of free people of color in the North. He castigated the proceedings of the constitutional convention and its members who were debating stripping blacks of the franchise. Calling himself the "priest of this day's sacrifice," he "dedicate[d] this temple to liberty."¹³ Over the next two days, many of the most recognized abolitionists in the country spoke at the Hall. On the third day, the leaders of the National Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women spoke. Female abolitionists such as Angelina Grimké, Abby Kelly, and Lucretia Mott addressed the overflowing crowd. Although it defied the moral codes of the day, these influential women addressed the racially mixed audience.¹⁴

It was on this day, May 16, 1838, that an anti-abolition, anti-black mob first attacked Pennsylvania Hall. Historian Ira V. Brown describes the events of the rioters in his article "Racism and Sexism: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall." In his 1970 article, which is one of the most complete accounts of the attack on Pennsylvania Hall, Brown writes:

While the ladies were speaking, a mob assembled in the streets outside and began raising a tumult and throwing rocks at the windows. The shutters

inside the windows protected the hall's occupants from injury, and ventilators in the ceiling brought in fresh air...

On Thursday the 17th the hall was occupied by a Recruited Labor Convention, which adopted resolutions calling for a boycott of the products of slave labor, and by official session of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. A hostile crowd again assembled in the streets...The mayor addressed the crowd, pleading for peace and order...

The mob did not disperse. Soon after the mayor and his party left, a number of individuals forced open the doors of the hall and began wrecking the interior and setting fires. It was reported that shipwrights from the Delaware River docks began the work of destruction with axes and crowbars for breaking down the doors and windows and kindling, shavings, tar, and turpentine for starting fires.¹⁵

Historians have noted two primary reasons for the attack on Pennsylvania

Hall: anti-abolitionism and anxieties regarding race mixing. An officer in the Pennsylvania state militia wrote about the "inflammatory proceedings of the abolitionists" and remarked on "the disgusting habits, of indiscriminate intercourse, between blacks and whites, so repugnant to all the prejudices of our education, which they have not only recommended, but are in the habit of practicing in this very Abolition Hall..."¹⁶ This officer prophesized that the events of the Hall "will result in some terrible outbreak of popular indignation" and, once it did, he observed and wrote about the "pummeling" of African Americans as they left the Hall.¹⁷

Another noteworthy dimension of the attack on Pennsylvania Hall is that was perpetrated by "gentlemen of property and standing" as well as the non-gentry. Why? Because both groups disapproved of radical abolitionism, its call to boycott products produced by slave labor, and the "promiscuous" mix of blacks and whites.¹⁸ In his landmark and indispensable study of antebellum mobbing, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861*, historian David Grimsted concludes: "Pennsylvania Hall was the most expensive structure to fall victim to an anti-abolition mob." Grimsted also points out

that in Philadelphia “‘anti-amalgamation’ was the rallying *bête noire* of the mob: one observer claimed that the rioters outside Pennsylvania Hall were quiet ‘until they saw a huge negro darken the door arm-in-arm with a fair Quaker girl.’”¹⁹ The propertied and non-propertied imagined that the issues of Pennsylvania Hall—abolitionism and perceived amalgamation—threatened their way of life and the existing social structure.

When Philadelphia mayor John Swift addressed the mob, he surely would have noticed its propertied-class members. After he pleaded for peace and bade them good evening, the crowd responded with “Three cheers for the mayor.”²⁰ Feldberg’s argument that the mayor was acting *pro forma* and that he passively sanctioned the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall seems accurate because the mayor did not do everything in his power to break up the violent throng. In fact, while on the scene Swift reminded his constituents that Philadelphia “had a tradition of not calling troops to handle its popular disturbances.”²¹ Swift’s cursory response reflects his condemnation of the Hall’s activities as well as his deference to Philadelphia’s white elite and their violent actions.

It was the dealings of that Hall that Swift and the white elite rejected. Thus, on the following night, when a lower-class mob attacked and set fire to the Friends Shelter for Colored Orphans, Swift dispatched the Good Will Fire Company who extinguished the blaze and beat back the mob.²² It was also reported that some of those very gentleman who were part of the assault on Pennsylvania Hall helped repulse the mob when it attacked the Orphans Shelter. Moreover, on that same night, another lower-class mob attacked the First African Presbyterian Church.²³ Again,

Mayor Swift used his power to disperse the mob and restore calm. Julie Winch explains:

If most blacks escaped unharmed on the first night of rioting, they became the main targets of the mob as the violence continued...Attempts were also made to wreck black-owned residential property. Mayor Swift made a number of arrests and the rioting died down. The mayor's activities on the second and third nights of the disturbances seems to have been motivated by the involvement of a very different class of rioters from those who burned Pennsylvania Hall. Whereas the hall was destroyed by, or with active complicity of, the "gentleman of property and standing," the rioting of May 18 and 19 was the work of poor laborers and the unemployed.²⁴

The events of May 16-19, 1838 beg several questions: How was the cross-class attack on Pennsylvania Hall received throughout the country? What was it about the Colored Orphans Society, the First African Presbyterian Church, and the domestic properties that incensed and provoked poorer and unemployed whites to continue to riot? What did these targets signify for those lower-class rioters that they did not for propertied whites? And might these attacks reflect a white response to the racial synecdoche?

The conflagration that destroyed Pennsylvania Hall is arguably one of the clearest symbols of anti-abolition sentiment in 1830s America. It reflected not only the antipathy of many members of Philadelphia's white community; it also resonated with anti-black and/or proslavery persons throughout the country. The New York *Commercial Advertiser* those women who participated in the interracial activities of Pennsylvania Hall and broke proper social codes should be sent to an asylum.²⁵ A paper in St. Louis said that the hall should have been dedicated as a "Temple of Amalgamation" and not a "Temple of Liberty."²⁶ The attack on Pennsylvania Hall was celebrated throughout the South. A letter to a newspaper in Georgia read: "To

witness those beautiful spires of flames gave undoubted assurances to the heart of the Southron [sic], that in his brethren in the North *he has friends who appreciate him.*”²⁷ Another letter to a Louisiana paper rejoiced that “the Union and the South are safe in the hands of the good old Keystone State of Pennsylvania.”²⁸ Given these reactions and others like them, the cross-class mob, and Mayor Swift’s *laissez-faire* approach, the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall suggests a nationwide antagonism towards abolitionism and amalgamation in the late 1830s.

I would argue, however, that the attack was an inciting incident and that an examination of the violent events that followed offers the historian and performance scholar the opportunity to understand the ways in which the black performative identity that African Americans scripted during the conventions of the early 1830s intimidated members of the white community—particularly the working class and unemployed. Those white mob members who attacked the Colored Orphan Society, the First African Presbyterian Church, and black homes did so because those sites housed and symbolized the politics of respectability that free people of color in Philadelphia were performing. Although the attack on the Orphan’s Asylum was dramatic, for the purposes of my investigation into how lower class whites targeted symbols of African American unity I will focus on the assault on the First African Presbyterian Church.

The First African Presbyterian Church was opened for worship in 1811 under the leadership of John Gloucester, a former slave who had been educated for ministry by his master the Presbyterian Reverend Gideon Blackburn. After Blackburn freed him in 1809, Gloucester was hired by the Presbyterians to preach to African

Americans. Whites raised money to erect a Presbyterian church for blacks and Gloucester was installed as its minister. Although his house of worship was under the auspices of the white Presbyterian leadership, Gloucester was able to maintain a great deal of autonomy. The interracial cooperation among Philadelphia Presbyterians was unparalleled in the nation's religious communities. As Winch notes, "Rather than being ousted from the white church, black Presbyterians could look back on years of active cooperation with their coreligionists. The white Presbyterian hierarchy displayed a greater sensitivity to the wishes of the black congregation than did the Methodist."²⁹ Thus, the ethos of First African Presbyterian Church was one of interracial collaboration and remained that way throughout the 1830s.

Interracial cooperation was one of the fundamental ideological traits of the racial synecdoche. Yet as I argued in Chapter Two, collaboration was not envisioned as dependence. The performance team of the 1830s did not want the white patriarchal leadership of the 1810s and 1820s. Instead, as the African American community groomed its own leaders, cultivated a collectivist ethos, accumulated more wealth they took it upon themselves to improve their material and psychological well-being. When improvement had to be made First African Presbyterian Church in 1837, for instance, its members and pastor did not turn to whites but instead did it themselves. In *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*, Gary Nash writes about this in relation to black occupational composition. In that seminal study, Nash notes:

Black artisans also decreased proportionately because more and more white craftsmen refused to accept black apprentices and tried to crowd journeymen out of the trades. Despite these obstacles, however, many black artisans continued to practice their skills, retaining a clientele not only among some

whites but, more important, among the several black families who their services. It was a sign of their determination of the black community to preserve its craft skills that in the rebuilding of the African Presbyterian Church in 1837, only black constructions workers were employed.³⁰

I would add to Nash's astute observation and suggest that it was also a sign of free people of color playing the racial synecdoche. In their scripting of the synecdoche, the performance team not only wanted the synecdoche to have nothing to do with slave-produced products, but also, when possible to buy "free black." As I noted in Chapter Two, the script called for the synecdoche to "give the preference to the production of freemen wherever it can be had."³¹ Although the church was originally constructed under the sponsorship of whites, black hands under black supervision performed the repairs that were done in 1837. Not only does this signify their determination to continue black artisanship, but also their desire to demonstrate to America their industry and worth, and therefore their eligibility to perform as full citizens.

But to some whites the care and diligence that went into the First African Presbyterian Church was troubling. For those who attacked it 1838, the church symbolized a threatening element of free black culture in Philadelphia in the late 1830s. The fact that free people of color constructed this edifice with their own hands and with a majority of their own money convinced those in the mob that blacks were an autonomous group and an inevitable menace. If the promises of Jacksonian Democracy put power back into the hands of the people—at least rhetorically—African Americans were not intended to be a people with "powerful hands." "Age of the Common Man" meant age of the *white* common man. There was no role in that egalitarian contract for people of color and women. Since the laws did not stop free

people of color from building the church and, more broadly, printing their stamp on Philadelphia's architectural and cultural landscape, the mob elected to take matters into its own hands.

Another noteworthy dimension of the attack on the First African Presbyterian Church is that, on the surface, it seemed an oddly chosen target; that is to say, it did not cause the greatest amount of damage to the greatest amount of people. If widespread destruction and general terror were the goals, why would the mob attack the First Presbyterian Church? Why not Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), which not only housed the first African American denomination in Philadelphia and the country, but also had the greatest number of congregants? If Bethel was not a feasible target, why not another black Methodist church since black Methodism "alone boasted almost three-quarters of all church members."³² Specifically, of the 4,145 registrants in black churches, the Methodist denomination counted 2,860 members among eight churches. The Presbyterian Church, on the other hand, numbered only 325 members with two churches.³³ Why hit the relatively undersized congregation? Was it the most vulnerable of the black churches, making it the easiest target?

The rioters attack on First Presbyterian was not a random assault; nor was it done because it was most expedient.³⁴ I would suggest that the mob hit First Presbyterian because it symbolized those characteristics of the racial synecdoche that they most feared. The synecdoche threatened rioters because they worried it would sway ambivalent white minds. By performing a politics of respectability on their bodies and in their institutions, people of color were able to avoid much of the

legislative and judicial regulation regarding their activism. Such was the routine at the church Gloucester built. Although the membership of First African Presbyterian Church was fewer than 160 members,³⁵ and, as Winch puts it, “could never match the popular appeal of the AME church,”³⁶ it was the place of worship for most of “the respectable and intellectual portion” of black Philadelphia.³⁷ Thus, the attempt to wreck First Presbyterian was a strategic strike in order to destroy an architectural signpost of the racial synecdoche as well as discourage those who would perform it.

Conclusion

In the late 1820s and early 1830s cartoonist Edward Clay published his *Life in Philadelphia* series which lampooned the emerging black middle class of Philadelphia. Many historians such as Shane White and Graham White, Phillip Lapsanky, and Patrick Rael have written about the emergence, function, and popularity of these cartoons. Although Clay did not publish another lithograph in the *Life in Philadelphia* series after 1830, the cartoons, and others like it, remained in circulation throughout the antebellum period. Gary Nash gives a succinct reading of the cartoons. He writes:

Clay’s caricatures showed black Philadelphians as stupidly pretentious, always reaching beyond their abilities, and incurably given to malapropisms...Clay’s sneering depiction of black middle-class life, etched from 1828-1830, were part of a nationwide movement to create a comic black character type for the amusement of white Americans...Consistent with popular politics in the Jacksonian democracy, vernacular art contributed to the ideology of white supremacy.³⁸

By the time of the assault on Pennsylvania Hall and the First African Presbyterian Church, many Jacksonian democrats practiced another “art form” with which to solidify white supremacy: the art of violence. For some, cartoons, satire, and

lamponing were not enough. As free African Americans became even more resilient as a result of an increasingly oppressive Jacksonianism, mobs knew that cartoons were not effectively curbing blacks' behavior through ridicule. Since legal enactments such as the disenfranchisement clause in the 1838 Pennsylvania constitution and psychological attacks such as Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* series did not discourage free people of color from pursuing the fruits of America, rioters believed violence would.

In the 1830s African Americans assembled nationally to seek redress for their harsh circumstances by scripting a new black performative identity that, unlike David Walker's example, was based on a peaceful politics of respectability. I have argued that while those politics may have been perceived as indicative of an economic middle class, it was actually constructed by free people of color of all economic levels. As they remained loyal to America and its promises in spite of the fact that the few rights they had were being stripped away by the legislatures and the courts in the 1830s, African Americans became even more determined to change the minds of whites through moral suasion and performance. It proved to be a powerful tool and those Jacksonians who believed this country was not for blacks tried to "cancel" those performances with violence. Although the performance team of the 1830s believed moral suasion and performance could transform white minds, they did not anticipate the level of violence and disorder that took place in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Therefore, when they convened for a national convention in 1843, they realized their performative strategy was in many ways ineffective, particularly within the context of Jacksonian "popular sovereignty." Indeed, the national convention of 1843 marks a

turning point in the political strategy of African Americans and the end of the racial synecdoche of the 1830s and early 40s. It was at this convention that talk of emigration as well as violent reprisals re-emerged.

Notes for Chapter Three

¹ Unknown, quoted in Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 95.

² Winch, 141.

³ Robert Purvis, *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, To the People of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-15.

⁵ Winch, 142.

⁶ See the Introduction to this study, 2-3, where I discuss the debate on racial labels and vocabularies.

⁷ Winch, 142.

⁸ *Opinion of the Hon. John Fox, President Judge of the Judicial District Composed of the Counties of Bucks and Montgomery, Against the Exercise of Negro Suffrage in Pennsylvania Hall* (Harrisburg: Parker, Barrett, and Parke, 1838), 9.

⁹ White and White, 124.

¹⁰ Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹² *History of Pennsylvania Hall, which was Destroyed by a Mob on the 17th of May* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838), 1-3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ Ira V. Brown, "Racism and Sexism: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall" in *Phylon* 37, No. 2 (Summer, 1976), 128.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130-131

¹⁶ Colonel Augustus Pendleton quoted in *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Leonard L. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing:" *Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 112,156; Feldberg 98.

¹⁹ David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 36.

²⁰ Winch, 147.

²¹ Feldberg, 98.

²² *Public Ledger*, May 19, 1838.

²³ *Public Ledger*, July 18, 1838.

²⁴ Winch, 148.

²⁵ Quoted in *Liberator*, May 25, 1838.

²⁶ Brown, 136.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Winch, 14-15.

³⁰ Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 251.

³¹ *1831 Minutes*, 15.

³² Nash, 260.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ I have not found any account that counters my claim. Expediency may have played some part, but if it did, it was a minor concern, I argue.

³⁵ Although this number is not specified in the record, I have arrived at this number using my own speculation. The two black Presbyterian churches, First African and Second African, totaled 325 members. Second Presbyterian was the more popular of the two in 1838. Therefore, I imagine that fewer than half of the black Presbyterian membership in Philadelphia attended First African.

³⁶ Winch, 15.

³⁷ William W. Catto, *A Semi-Centenary Discourse Delivered in the First African Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, on the Fourth Sabbath of May, 1857* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1857), 93.

³⁸ Nash, 255-259.

Epilogue:
“The Tragedy of African American Politics” and the Call for New Scripts

In 1843, a group of African Americans convened in Buffalo, New York and held the first “National Convention of Colored Citizens” since 1835¹. Although it was similar to those meetings of the early 1830s in that was “for the purpose of considering their moral and political condition as American citizens,” this convention was also markedly different.² Historian Howard Holman Bell explains the difference: “The black man during the 1840s remained interested in temperance, peace, education, moral reform, and in all the other areas of concern to the conventions of the 1830s, but he was no longer willing to turn the other cheek. Now force should be met by force... Militancy, mental and physical, was on the upswing.”³ Indeed, as the turn from the 1830s to the 1840s saw more African Americans become the frequent targets of racial violence, delegates to the 1843 convention turned away from many of the approaches of the performance teams of the early 1830s. One tactic they rejected was the performance of the black identity I have identified as the racial synecdoche.

There were two dimensions of the 1830s synecdoche that delegates to the 1843 conventions shunned: the insistence on non-violence and the free people of color’s incontrovertible relationship to America. Although there were other aspects of the 1830s performative project that the 1843 delegates rejected, these two were the primary ones. Henry Highland Garnet’s passionate “Address to the Slaves of the United States of America” and the reemergence of the debate on emigration at the 1843 convention underscore these arguments.

Garnet’s “Address” headlined the 1843 convention. In a variety of ways, Garnet’s plea was a return to the rhetorical and political style of David Walker.

Similar to Walker, Garnet appealed to America's moral and religious sense as means to compel whites to end the institution of slavery. But incidents such as the 1842 *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* Supreme Court decision that upheld the 1793 fugitive slave law—a law that said the government had the constitutional right to maintain slavery—pushed Garnet to the conclusion that physical uprisings might be the only way to end slavery. He exclaimed:

You had far better all die—die immediately, than live slave, and entail your wretchedness upon your posterity. If you would be free in this generation here is your only hope. However much you and all of may desire it, there is not much hope of redemption without the shedding of blood. If you must bleed, let it all come at once, rather die freemen, than live to be the slaves.⁴

I imagine this type of rhetoric and approach would never have been promulgated at the conventions of the 1830s. Although his explicitly named audience was the slave class, he was speaking to an assembly of free people of color, imagining them as slaves in the metaphorical sense. Therefore, I would argue, he was urging them to hit back, too, when necessary. Garnet proclaimed: “Let your motto be resistance! resistance! RESISTANCE! No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance.”⁵

The resistance Garnet called for, at least in terms of free people of color, did not always have to be a physical one and reflects the ways in which the emigration debate was reignited at the 1843 convention. Garnet highlighted the increasingly popular belief among some free people of color that America was *not* for them and was never going to be. This belief was anathema to the synecdoche of the 1830s and signaled the nationalistic and “complexional” route that shaped certain black political thought post-1843. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. writes:

Garnet's address presented the convention movement a direct frontal assault on the policies of the nation-state. He speech called for radical political action by people of color. As such, [Garnet and the delegates] confronted, with a violent posture, the domain of the state. Out of the dimension of the convention movement that spoke to cultural identity he attempted to articulate a national politics that violently challenged the nation-state. In other words, he interpreted the call for an immanent conversation as a call for general slave insurrection in the South and mass "black" political action in the North.⁶

Garnet's emphasis on a black politics, constructed and performed on its own terms without worrying about white sanction or alienation, subverts the 1830s emphasis on interracial harmony and anticipates the period historian Wilson Moses identifies as the "golden age of black nationalism" (1850-1925).⁷

When Garnet's explicit resolution for a slave insurrection and "black political action" (i.e. emigration) came to a vote, it was defeated by vote of 19 to 18. A young Frederick Douglass led the oppositional cause. With one vote, the delegates decided "to stay" in America. As Glaude notes, "The black nation would remain essentially in the cultural domain. They embraced a race-based politics but rejected any call for violence."⁸ Although the conventioners for the next two decades would focus on moral suasion and a performative/cultural politics, a trait they shared with the performance team of the 1830s, they did not script a text for free people of color that stressed the importance of staying within America's developed borders and changing white minds. In the 1830s, the performance team espoused emigration to Canada and the west only when African Americans were "forced." In 1843, the delegates had a different idea. They resolved: "That this Convention recommend to our people, especially those in our large cities and seaport towns, to emigrate into the agricultural districts of the country, and invest their money in the purchase of the soil, and become farmers, as a positive road to wealth, influence, and usefulness."⁹ In 1843,

Garnet and many of the delegates at the convention in Buffalo gave voice to a mindset that was growing among free people of color: that is, black people could only flourish separated from whites. They would not be “Americans” as whites were or as the performance team of the 1830s imagined themselves to be; instead, they would have to be Africans *in America*.

The 1840s and 1850s debates about black identity in relation to America anticipated and reflected what philosopher W. E. B. DuBois would later call black “double consciousness.” It also points to what Glaude calls the “tragedy of African American politics.” He writes:

With this view in mind, I read Henry Highland Garnet’s address as exposing the tragic sense of life at the heart of African American politics: the fact that we are constantly having to choose either to identify ourselves with this fragile democracy, struggling for its soul, or to define ourselves over and against it—and live with the consequences of such choices without yielding to despair. Pharaoh or some such evil is indeed on both sides of the blood-red waters.

...My aim has been to give another kind of support, one often associated with black nationalism, to that soul-craft politics which assumes that ‘by the irony implicit American democracy, [we] symbolize its most stringent testing and the possibility of its greatest freedom.’ Garnet’s challenge to this view lost by one vote, and we have been making and remaking that choice ever since.¹⁰

Glaude’s astute and blues-filled observation brings to light the triumphs and tribulations of what it meant to be a free people of color performing in the social drama of the 1830s, 1840s, and in many ways, today.

I think it also stresses the liminality that African Americans experienced as they attempted to redress their circumstances in the period between 1830 and 1843. According to Victor Turner, the stage of the social drama that follows redress is “reintegration or recognition of schism.” He says, “The final phase consists in the

reintegration of the disturbed social group...or the social recognition of irreparable breach between the contesting parties, sometimes leading to their spatial separation.”¹¹ Since free blacks were not reintegrated and would not return to their former roles as slaves, the delegates at the convention of 1843 recognized the schism. Garnet and others identified an irreparable breach between black bodies and American “democracy,” and fought for spatial separation. They believed that physical division was the only solution to the problems of people of color and thought they would never be “free” until such a time. Their talk of a black nation within a nation prefigured radical twentieth-century thinkers such as Marcus Garvey, Elijah Mohammed, and Malcolm X. Those delegates who made up the performance team of the 1830s, on the other hand, crafted a politics of inclusion and considered the promises of the Constitution as color-blind. When they scripted the racial synecdoche and played its politics of respectability, they were performing a mode of protest that can be characterized as what transcendentalist philosopher Henry David Thoreau would later term “Civil Disobedience.” Their non-violent, inclusionist, and performative retaliation prefigured twentieth-century leaders such as A. Phillip Randolph, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Shirley Chisholm. Indeed, the performative politics of the 1830s and 1840s, although different in approach, laid the foundation for black activism that would follow. The construction and performance of the racial synecdoche in the 1830s and 1840s was perhaps the first iteration of a collective and national African American politics that rooted itself in the ideals, precepts, and hopes of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution.

Notes for Epilogue

¹ To my knowledge, whites did not attend this convention. If they did, they did not speak at them and are not accounted for in the records.

² *1843 Minutes*, front-piece

³ Bell, Introduction to *1840s Minutes*.

⁴ Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States," in *Black Nationalism in America*, ed. John Bracey et al. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 73.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶ Glaude, 158.

⁷ See Wilson Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁹ *1843 Minutes*, 3.

¹⁰ Glaude, 167.

¹¹ Turner, 108-109.

Bibliography

Newspapers

- African Repository* (Washington, D.C.), 1825-48
Colored American (New York), 1837-41
Emancipator (Boston and New York), 1833-48
Freedom's Journal (New York), 1827-29
Genius of Universal Emancipation (Mount Pleasant, Ohio; Greeneville, Tennessee; Baltimore; Washington, D.C.; Philadelphia), 1824-35
Hazard's Register of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia), 1827-35
Liberator (Boston), 1831-48
National Anti-Slavery Standard (New York) 1840-48
National Enquirer and Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty (Philadelphia), 1836-38
National Reformer (Philadelphia), 1838-39
Pennsylvania Freeman (Philadelphia) 1838-48
Public Ledger (Philadelphia) 1836-1942
United States Gazette (Philadelphia) 1830-1843

Primary Sources

- American Moral Reform Society. *The Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society, Held at Philadelphia from the 14th to the 19th of August, 1837*. Library of Congress; Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1837. Text-fiche.
- American Society for the Colonization of Free People of Color. *Annual Report, 1818- 1846*. Washington, D.C.: For the Society, 1818-1846.
- Bell, Howard H., ed. *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Catto, William W. *A Semi-Centenary Discourse Delivered in the First African Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, on the Fourth Sabbath of May, 1857*. Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1857.
- Fox, John. *Opinion of the Hon. John Fox, President Judge of the Judicial District Composed of the Counties of Bucks and Montgomery, Against the Exercise of Negro Suffrage in Pennsylvania Hall*. Harrisburg: Parker, Barrett, and Park, 1838.
- Garnet, Henry Highland. *Walker's Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life*. New York: 1848.
- _____. "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America." New York: 1843.

- History of Pennsylvania Hall, Which Was Destroyed by a Mob on the 17th of May, 1838.* University of Maryland, College Park Libraries, College Park, MD; Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838.
- Jones, Absalom and Richard Allen. *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793.* University of Maryland, College Park Libraries, College Park, MD; Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1794. Text-fiche.
- Nott, J.C. and George Gliddon. *Types of Mankind; or, Ethnological Research based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races.* Philadelphia: 1854.
- Pennsylvania, Commonwealth. *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.* Harrisburg, 1829-1850.
- _____. *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.* Harrisburg, 1829-1850.
- Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention, Assembled at Philadelphia, December 4, 5, and 6, 1833.* Library of Congress; New York: Dorr and Butterfield, 1833.
- Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Convention, Assembled to Organize a State Anti-Slavery Society, at Harrisburg, on the 31st of January and 1st, 2d, and 3d of February 1837.* Library of Congress; Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1837.
- Purvis, Robert. *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania.* Library of Congress; Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838.
- Scharf, Thomas and Thompson Westcott. *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884.* 3 vols. Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1884.
- Wilson, Joseph W. *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia by a Southerner.* Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1841.
- Records of the Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society. Library of Congress; Philadelphia, 1774-1916.
- Walker, David. *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to those of the United States of America.* Boston: 1829. Reprint, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000.

Secondary Sources

- Adeleke, Tunde. "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830s." *Journal of Negro History* 83 (Summer 1998): 127-142.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1993.
- Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962.
- Bacon, Jacqueline. "Rhetoric and Identity in Absalom Jones and Richard Allen's 'Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, during the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia.'" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 125 (January 2001): 61-90.
- Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Bell, Howard H. *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830-1861*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Bracey, John H., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick, eds. *Black Nationalism in America*. Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970.
- _____. *Free Blacks in America, 1800-1860*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1971.
- Brown, Ira V. "Racism and Sexism: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall." *Phylon* 37 (Summer 1976): 126-136.
- Brown, Richard Maxwell. *Strains of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Crane, Sarah. *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War*. Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002.
- Curry, Leonard P. *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Comaroff Jean and John L. Comaroff, eds. *Modernity and its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

- Davis, Susan G. *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- _____. "Strike Parades and Politics of Representing Class in Antebellum Philadelphia." *The Drama Review* 29 (Spring 1985): 106-116.
- Elam, Harry J. *Taking it to the Streets: The Social Protest Theatre of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001.
- Essed, Philomena and David Theo Goldberg, eds. *Race Critical Theories*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
- Fabre, Geneviève and Robert O'Meally, eds. *History and Memory in African American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Feldberg, Michael. *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study in Ethnic Conflict*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975.
- _____. *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Fliegelman, Jay. *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.
- Frederickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Frey, Sylvia R. *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Foner, Phillip S. *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*. New York: International Press, 1950.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock, 1972.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.
- Glaude, Jr., Eddie S. *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth Century Black America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959.

- Grimsted, David. *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Gustafson, Sandra M. *Eloquence is Power: Oratory & Performance in Early America*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Harris, Leslie. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Hendricks, Obery M. *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus' Teachings and How they have been Corrupted*. New York: Doubleday, 2006.
- Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Hinks, Peter ed. *David Walker's Appeal to Coloured Citizens of the World*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000.
- Horton, Jean E. "From Class to Race in Early America: Northern-Post Emancipation Racial Reconstruction." *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (Winter 1999): 629-649.
- Horton, James O. *Free People of Color: Inside the African American Community*. Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993.
- Horton, James O. and Lois Horton. *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Levine, Lawrence. *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Litwack, Leon F. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Litwack Leon, and August Meier, eds. *Black Leaders of the Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988.
- McCarthy, Timothy Patrick and John Stauffer, eds. *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*. New York: The New Press, 2006.

- Melish, Joanne Pope. "The 'Condition' Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North." *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (Winter 1999): 651-672.
- _____. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780- 1860*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Moses, Wilson. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850- 1925*. Reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Nash, Gary B. "African Americans in the Early Republic." *Magazine of History* 14 (Spring 2000): 12-16.
- _____. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Newman, Richard S. *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Patrick-Stamp, Leslie. "Numbers that are Not New: African Americans in the Country's First Prison, 1790-1835." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 119 (January 1995): 95-128.
- Pease, Joan H and William H. Pease. "Negro Conventions and the Problem of Black Leadership." *Journal of Black Studies* 2 (Winter 1971): 29-44.
- _____. *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks Search for Freedom, 1830-1861*. New York: Atheneum, 1974.
- Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity and Protest in the Antebellum North*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Richards, Leonard L. "Gentleman of Property and Standing": *Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Rorabaugh, W. J. *Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- Schama, Simon. *Rough Crossings: Britain, The Slaves, and the American Revolution*. New York: HarperCollins, 2006.
- Schechner, Richard. *Between Theatre and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985.
- _____. *Performance Theory*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1988.

- Schechner, Richard and Mady Schuman, eds. *Ritual, Play, and Performance: Readings in the Social Science/Theatre*. New York: Seabury Press, 1976.
- Stanton, William. *The Leopard Spots: Scientific Attitudes Towards Race in America, 1815-1859*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960.
- Sweet, Leonard I. *Black Images of America, 1784-1870*. New York: Norton, 1976.
- Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985.
- Turner, Victor. *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*. New York: PAJ Publications, 1982.
- White, Shane. “It was a Proud Day”: African Americans, Festivals and Parades in the North, 1741-1834.” *Journal of American History* 81 (Spring 1994) 13-50.
- _____ and Graham Whites. *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginning to the Zoot Suit*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Winch, Julie. *Philadelphia’s Black Elite*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.