

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: **BLACK BENEFACTORS AND WHITE
RECIPIENTS: COUNTERNARRATIVES OF
BENEVOLENCE IN NINETEENTH-
CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE**

Marie L. Troppe, Ph.D. 2012

Directed by: Professor Robert S. Levine, English

My study examines four African American-authored narratives written between 1793 and 1901 (Richard Allen and Absalom Jones' *Narratives of the Proceedings of the Black People*, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*, and Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*) that depict acts of benevolence by African Americans to white recipients. This work focuses on the power relations represented by acts of benevolence, social perceptions regarding the roles of benefactor and recipient, and authorial choices in the depiction of these acts. The study highlights how these four narratives complicate representations of benevolence, both in terms of race and of the historical contexts in which they were written.

Previous scholars have documented the emergence of what they identify as a genre of benevolence texts within nineteenth-century American literature and even identified several subgenres among these texts (including poorhouse stories,

seamstress novels, panic fiction, settlement house narratives, and maternal literacy management narratives). My work contributes to this critical literature by identifying what I call counternarratives of benevolence depicting interactions between black benefactors and white recipients, thereby expanding the scholarly discourse surrounding benevolence and challenging the dominant American narrative about it.

I call the texts under consideration here *counternarratives* because they challenge the dominant narrative of black inferiority in benevolent encounters. Unlike benevolence texts previously studied, which usually portray white benefactors and white recipients, white benefactors and black recipients, and even occasionally black benefactors and black recipients—portrayals that often reinforce social hierarchies—the texts I discuss work to disrupt social hierarchies by both uncovering and challenging cultural hegemony. In doing so, they facilitate the expression of black agency and declare African American readiness for full citizenship.

Drawing on the methods of social history, cultural anthropology, moral and political philosophy and literary studies, my analysis examines issues of agency, performativity, gift theory, and the psychology of gratitude. My study interprets two canonical and two non-canonical texts to show how benevolence is used as a narrative device to question race and power, to demonstrate a connection between narrative and ideology, and ultimately to destabilize ideologies of race and nation. My study also contributes to current debate about benevolence. By recovering the African American intellectual foundations of today's community-based learning movement within higher education, I raise questions about using traditionally understood nineteenth-century benevolence as a means for teaching students to challenge

constructs of race and power in social activist movements in the twenty-first century. The writers I discuss offer a new and important model for community-based learning today.

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by

Marie L. Troppe

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Robert S. Levine, Chair
Professor Martha Nell Smith
Professor Peter Mallios
Professor Edlie Wong
Professor Deborah Rosenfelt

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Dedication

In memory of my mother who frequently asked the question, “When is ‘help’ actually help?”

In memory of my father who taught in the then predominantly African American Edison Senior High School in Miami during the 1970s.

To my extended family who cheered me on.

To my children, Clayton and Elijah, who appreciate a complicated story.

To my spouse, Steve, for believing in me and giving me his total support during this lengthy endeavor.

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Introduction:

The Altruistic Benefactor and the Grateful Recipient:

The Problem of Racialized Benevolence

The initial inspiration for this study of four nineteenth-century African American narratives of benevolence was my nearly two decades of work in the burgeoning late twentieth-century community-based learning (CBL) movement within higher education, which has engaged me in ongoing discussions about what it means to do good for others and what effects helping others can have on the involved parties. My CBL work took place in and around the racially mixed environment of Washington, DC. Because I worked primarily with majority-white institutions of higher education, I was often in the position of sending white students out to “serve” black communities. I soon began to appreciate the problematic nature of such an arrangement. The common but naïve view of benevolent action is that it consists of the more privileged giving to the less privileged, with all the benefit flowing from the presumably altruistic giver to the presumably grateful recipient. Yet the CBL movement has turned a critical eye to the inevitable power dynamics among givers and recipients. Some researchers in the field have even documented harm that such “good works” have done to communities being served. Others have argued that benevolence can actually solidify the inherent social inequality between benefactor and recipient and often serves only as a marker of difference, whether social, racial, or economic.

This deep interest in questions of power in benevolent relationships led me to a then-new area within literary criticism that was interrogating these issues within mostly nineteenth-century sentimental literature. I soon realized, however, that all of those critical works had studied primarily texts written by white authors, almost all of them women, that depicted the benevolence of white, mostly middle-class benefactors—again, almost all of them female—toward those in need. Given the social and historical realities of that period, African Americans constituted a major class of those on the receiving end of these acts of benevolence.

This recognition eventually led me to wonder about how the power relationships implicit in benevolence might operate when the subject positions were reversed—when the benefactor was black and the recipient was white.¹ Thus began my reading of more than sixty narratives written by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century U. S. authors. (See Appendix for a list of these works). Perhaps not surprisingly, given the subservient and precarious financial position of most African Americans as they were just beginning to emerge from bondage, few such depictions appeared in written narrative, whether because they were rare in fact or beyond the imagination of most Americans writing at the time. Even when I narrowed my search to texts written by African Americans, I could find only four such narratives that depict black benevolence toward white recipients. These four narratives, though tiny in number, address significant issues and suggest a larger world of black persons acting with benevolence toward white persons. The first of these texts, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones's *Narratives of the Proceedings of the Black People*, is an historical account of the 1792-93 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia written by

two leaders of that city's free black community.² The next two texts, written in the mid-nineteenth century, are memoirs that depict the authors' journey from slavery to freedom: Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*.³ The fourth text, Charles Chesnut's 1901 *The Marrow of Tradition*, is a novel based on the post-Reconstruction Wilmington, North Carolina race riot of 1898.⁴ In a fortuitous happenstance, the chronology of these four works, which roughly spans the nineteenth century, covers three major events or crises in the history of African Americans as citizens: the debate over the status of African Americans surrounding the adoption of the American Constitution, the turbulent national debate accompanying the Fugitive Slave Act and Emancipation, and the imposition of Jim Crow laws following Reconstruction.

While I consider that my four focus texts share in the characteristics of benevolence texts, they include a chronicle, two memoirs, and a novel, and thus make use of different genres to insert the story of black benevolence to whites into a larger American narrative. Since writing changes with the social context in which it is produced, my four focus texts share similar thematic concerns but by no means constitute a monolithic black perspective on benevolence. Genre essentially involves the negotiation of expectations, a broad purpose shared by the authors of the four texts, who, within their chosen genre, represent and negotiate particular expectations for their writings. A commonality in each of these texts is the pronounced linkage of genre and authorial identity. Through their religious identity, Jones and Allen hoped to secure for the black nurses a claim to be instruments of God during an actual historical event, chronicling their role in a social crisis. Jacobs used memoir to

emphasize her identity as an enslaved woman and a mother who freed herself from her sexually predatory master and freed herself and her children from slavery. Having also chosen the genre of memoir, Keckley played off her identity as an entrepreneur, a confidante to an elite white woman, and a philanthropist to the freedmen to document the capability of the African American to become a fully contributing member of society. Finally, as one who identified himself as an author, educator and middle-class black professional, Chesnut turned to fiction to warn the nation that the fates of black and white Americans are intertwined.

While this study makes no claim that these four texts are necessarily representative of either the work of African American writers or the views and experiences of African Americans as a group in this period, they do serve as examples of several major genres of writing engaged in by nineteenth-century American authors, white and black alike. And as we shall see, all four authors consciously took on the burden of representativeness, a consciousness that they were writing as African Americans and that their work would be received as a reflection of the views, intelligence, and worthiness of their race. These works also share in common that they all respond to and challenge the dominant literary and political narratives and discourses of their time, thereby also functioning as counter-narratives to previously studied nineteenth-century American benevolence texts. As I will argue, these four texts, individually and collectively, destabilize the status quo, display black agency, declare African American readiness for full citizenship, and press us to reshape the dominant American narrative regarding benevolence.

Key to my study is the contested term of “citizenship.” I do not define citizenship in terms of formal mechanisms of the state such as voting. Rather, I use “citizenship” to mean a spectrum of the everyday practices of people expressing their sense of belonging to a particular geopolitical space, whether literal or metaphorical. “Cultural citizenship,” as defined by scholars such as Lauren Berlant, Renato Rosaldo, Aihwa Ong, Shirley S. Tang, and N. Stevenson, begins to capture a fuller sense of citizenship than that which is conjured up by images of voting in the presidential election every four years or singing *The National Anthem* at baseball games.⁵ This fuller sense of citizenship is the kind of citizenship with which I concern myself in this study. Gerard Delanty’s observation that “Citizenship takes place in communicative situations arising out of quite ordinary life experiences . . . an essential dimension of the experience of citizenship is the way in which individual life stories are connected with wider cultural discourses” resonates particularly well for the purposes of this study.⁶

This introduction will first examine how my dissertation builds upon and contributes to several areas of previous critical study, including sentimental fiction, narratives of benevolence, and African American historical narratives. It then discusses several theoretical approaches to the topic of benevolence that have contributed to the methods and insights of the study. Lastly, it presents a more detailed outline of the remaining chapters.

Critical Studies of Narratives of Benevolence

As alluded to above, the topic of this study has been greatly influenced by the work of earlier literary critics on sentimental fiction. Although none of the four works

considered here can be described as sentimental fiction, they nonetheless were composed and read within a literary context in which the depiction of acts of benevolence—the voluntary provision of care or generosity toward someone in need—was a staple of the popular sentimental narratives of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth century that were produced and widely read in both Britain and the United States. These sentimental novels sought to engage readers’ emotions, often by narrating the stories of heroines who lost their family and other customary supports at a young age, suffered at the hands of antagonists who abused their positions of power, struggled for self-mastery, established a network of surrogate kin, and eventually achieved a strong sense of their own worth.⁷ Scenes of both distress and tenderness played a prominent role in such works. Although these sentimental narratives were written by male as well as female authors, those published by women have come to be referred to by critics as domestic or women’s fiction.⁸ Notable examples include such novels as Catharine Sedgwick’s *New-England Tale* (1822), Maria Susanna Cummins’s *The Lamplighter* (1854), and perhaps the most famous of them all, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1850).⁹

Although such sentimental works were once dismissed within critical circles as “un-literary” and superficial, critics such as Nina Baym and Jane Tompkins did important work in the late 1970s and 1980s in arguing for the significance of this form of fiction, Tompkins asserting that sentimental literature seeks to “reorganize culture from the woman’s point of view; that this body of work is remarkable for its intellectual complexity, ambition, and resourcefulness; and that, in certain cases, it offers a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by

better-known critics such as Hawthorne and Melville.”¹⁰ Other scholars such as Susan K. Harris have persuasively demonstrated that many of these sentimental novels in fact represent subversive discourse under formulaic covering.¹¹ That literary sentimentalism had political as well as artistic implications is perhaps most obvious in the way it was employed by reform movements such as abolitionism, women’s suffrage, and temperance to portray the suffering “other” as someone with whom the reader could identify. For example, one of the most influential sentimental novels in all of American literature, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is often credited with accelerating the nation’s movement toward the Civil War by stirring up increasing sympathy for enslaved black persons.

But even as sentimentalism evokes sympathy for the downtrodden and victimized, it also masks power differentials in the social relations of the purveyors and the recipients of benevolence.¹² Furthermore, even when it challenges existing social and political arrangements, sentimentalism fails to challenge prevailing American beliefs regarding independence, capitalism, and economic competition that view dependence as somehow shameful, as a marker of inferiority and incompetence.

The critical attention given to benevolence within this work on nineteenth-century sentimental literature has given birth to a subgenre of criticism that can be termed benevolence studies and to which this study hopes to contribute. As early as 1993, Deborah Carlin identified a tradition she termed a literature of philanthropy.¹³ According to Carlin, such literature, in the form of late-nineteenth-century women’s philanthropic novels, managed to “embody progressivism and conservatism simultaneously” by demonstrating both the limitations placed on middle-class women

by their domestic roles and the ways in which participation in charitable activities rescued them from some of those gender restrictions.¹⁴ Nineteenth-century women, limited mostly to domestic roles, could not generally claim a role in the public sphere without facing negative social consequences. Charitable action enabled them to venture into the public sphere in a way that was still socially acceptable. While they were rescuing the poor, middle-class women gained some reprieve from the constrictions of the gender roles of the time because their charitable actions mirrored domestic acts like caring for the sick, nurturing children, preparing food, and arranging shelter for the greater comfort of their beneficiaries.

Yet the very association of benevolence with “women’s work” also made it easy for some to dismiss it as effeminate or trivial. In the opening scene of Alice Wellington Rollins’s *Uncle Tom’s Tenement* (1888), for instance, Mrs. Selby speaks to her husband Arthur about her trip to the tenements that morning as if it were a pleasant adventure. A few pages later, when Arthur informs her of a business loss, he offers her this solace: “Some women would have to give up their diamonds, and you, I’m afraid, will have to give up your tenements. . . . I shan’t be able to indulge you quite as much as I had hoped in your luxury of doing good.”¹⁵ As we shall see later in this study, the association of benevolence with black person’s labor also caused some to denigrate or naturalize it. Thus one of the questions explored in the following chapters is whether acting as benefactors to white persons could similarly relieve black persons from some of the constriction of racial roles and help them gain a foothold and recognition in the public sphere.

A few years after Carlin's article, a special issue of *American Transcendental Quarterly*, "The Discourse of Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century America," further elaborated upon the power dynamics of benevolence, especially regarding class.¹⁶ For example, Wendy B. Sharer argues that the rhetorical strategies used by author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps and the character of Perley in *The Silent Partner* serve to strengthen the same class boundaries that Perley's philanthropic activities seek to dissolve. Similarly, Monika M. Elbert contends that Nathaniel Hawthorne reconceptualizes the Transcendentalist view of charity as eroding self-reliance in three of his novels, each of which uses philanthropy to both construct and disrupt class boundaries. One of the issues explored in this study is whether benevolence can similarly construct and disrupt racial boundaries.

The first book-length analysis of benevolence and nineteenth-century American literature was Gregory Eiselein's *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era* (1996), which considers selected texts by four writers—Harriet Wilson, Harriet Jacobs, Walt Whitman, and Louisa May Alcott—whom he characterizes as "humanitarian activist-writers."¹⁷ According to Eiselein, these writers practice what he terms eccentric benevolence, which he differentiates from mainstream benevolence that maintains a power differential between benefactors and recipients. Eccentric benevolence, in contrast, "deviates from established forms of benevolence by offering assistance in a way that dismantles the disparity in power separating humanitarian agents from humanitarian patients." For example, Frado, the main character in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), is an abused orphan, a stock character in sentimental fiction. Yet the narrative critiques sentimental

humanitarianism by condemning racism among white abolitionists, revealing sympathy's failure (e.g., others in the household feel sorry for Frado but none can remove her from the situation), portraying the generally admired practice of orphan sheltering as a kind of slavery (e.g., Mrs. Belmont often strikes Frado, whom she has taken in to do housework rather than out of compassion for the orphan), and positing the possibility that benevolent action might be based on reciprocity rather than on dominance by humanitarian agents (e.g., as in Mag and Jim's relationship).¹⁸ By focusing on the agent/patient relationship and "the ideologies that structure othering categories and othered identities," Eiselein challenges the presumption that benevolence is inherently good, instead presenting humanitarianism as a "heterogeneous field of contending discourses, practices, ideologies and actions."¹⁹

Although Julia Stern's 1997 *The Plight of Feeling* does not directly address the dynamics of benevolence, she argues that the sentimental novels of the decade from 1789-1799, the period in which the first narrative in this dissertation was written, represent "a collective mourning over the violence of the Revolution and the preemption of liberty in the wake of the post-Revolutionary settlement," and traces a disconnect between the feeling evoked by such literature and the actual action taken to relieve it.²⁰ The works in my investigation are similar to those studied by Stern in that they also "register the elaborate cost of the Framers' vision" and "suggest that the foundation of the republic is in fact a crypt, that the nations' noncitizens—women, the poor, Native Americans, African Americans, and aliens—lie socially dead and inadequately buried, the casualties of post-Revolutionary political foreclosure."²¹ Yet, as we shall see, the works by the African American authors studied here, as a result of

their social position and rhetorical strategies, are able to explore the dynamics of benevolence without sharing Stern's authors' complicity in the failure of sentiment.

Eiselein's view of humanitarianism as a "field of contending discourses" and Stern's depiction of the failure of sentiment are echoed by Susan Ryan's *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (2003), which examines how literary authors of the antebellum period participated in complex and controversial debates over how benevolence should be expressed and what actions it should prompt, again making the very nature of benevolence a "contested paradigm."²² For example, Ryan characterizes Delano in Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno" (1856) as "the quintessential unwise donor" who follows his benevolent impulses before fully understanding the situation of those in need.²³ Because he can equate blackness only with enslavement, Delano misreads the scene on the vessel *San Dominick*, perceives Cereno as an ineffective benevolent patriarch, and attempts to help by re-imposing a sociopolitical hierarchy. In her analyses of texts by Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Wells Brown, juvenile fiction writers, and the northern black press, among others, Ryan views benevolence through the lens of race and explores the role of charity in the formation of race and nation. In this period, Ryan asserts, "the categories of blackness, Indianness, and Irishness (or, at times, a generic 'foreignness') came to signify, for many whites, need itself."²⁴ This conflation of "neediness" and "otherness" complicates the presumed good intentions of benevolence. Ryan also closely examines what she and other scholars of benevolence literature have identified as a key tension within sentimentalism: "the inevitable incompleteness of [the] sympathetic identification" that holds the promise

of breaking down barriers between individuals.²⁵ The four works I address here are also motivated in large part by the same desire to break down barriers between people, and the following chapters will explore whether reversing the position of the “other” can avoid the incomplete identification identified by Ryan.

The ways in which the breakdown of sympathetic identification ultimately reinforce differences between individuals is also addressed in Sarah Robbins’ *Managing Literacy, Mothering America: Women’s Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (2004).²⁶ Robbins’ book analyzes a gendered literary genre that she terms “domestic literacy management narratives.”²⁷ These narratives depict maternal figures instructing young Americans to read, write, and discuss literature with the goal of social improvement. Her examination of texts by Frances Harper, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lydia Sigourney, and women missionary writers about such benevolent efforts demonstrates how these mostly white middle-class women gained social status for themselves by teaching literacy skills to the next generation within and beyond the home. Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Live and Let Live* (1837) and *The Boy of Mount Rhigi* (1848) are examples of narratives that implicitly invited women of privileged social groups to teach working-class readers, albeit with a confirmed sense of noblesse oblige. Through these overtly benevolent efforts, Robbins argues, the women served as agents of both empowerment and constraint for their students, transmitting not only knowledge but middle-class values to their students from other social classes and groups (e.g., the poor, the working class, new immigrants, domestic servants). The four texts in my analysis similarly

raise the question of how black benevolence toward white persons empowers or constrains its white recipients, in actuality or in perception.

As its title suggests, William M. Morgan's *Questionable Charity: Gender, Humanitarianism, and Complicity in U.S. Literary Realism* (2004) also views sympathy as an ethical problem rather than an unconditional good. In contrast to earlier criticism, Morgan argues that literary realism modernizes sentimentality rather than leaving it behind altogether. He explicates the representations of public men in texts by several late nineteenth-century authors, including William Dean Howells, Booker T. Washington, Edith Wharton, and Stephen Crane, arguing that the realist texts he analyzes attempt to fashion a post-idealist humanitarianism. Crane's *The Monster* (1897), for example, critiques the image of a national, rugged white masculinity associated with Theodore Roosevelt. The muscular firemen fail to pull the son of the white Dr. Trescott out of a fiery building, but the African American character Henry Johnson dashes in and saves the boy.²⁸ Through this act, Johnson becomes severely disfigured, but, despite several other doctors' opinions that Johnson has no chance of survival, Trescott maintains a bedside vigil, refusing to let Johnson die. By caring for the text's "wounded black presence," Trescott demonstrates what others consider an unmanly compassion, resulting in significant social costs, for in the final scene, Trescott is ostracized by the people of the town.²⁹ This dissertation explores the social costs of African American benevolence as it is perceived and denied by its recipients.

In the introduction to their edited volume *Our Sisters' Keepers: Nineteenth-Century Benevolence Literature by American Women* (2005), Jill Bergman and Debra

Bernardi identify what they term benevolence literature, a gendered genre of works that depict benevolent acts.³⁰ More specifically, the collection of essays examines how the women who created these texts thought and wrote about poverty relief and identify a spectrum of subgenres among these works, such as poorhouse stories, tales about the disciplinary and empathetic gazes of charity upon poorhouse residents; seamstress stories, a body of work popular in the 1840s and 1850s that engaged the discourses of poverty, evangelical moral reform, and popular fiction and depicted the decline of a working-class woman; and antebellum women's panic fiction, stories written about the effects of financial failure on the home in response to the panic of 1837. Like Morgan and Robbins, the authors included in Bergman and Bernardi's collection bring the lens of gender, specifically the cult of femininity, to their interpretation of benevolence.³¹ These essays, which examine the work of such predominately white, middle-class women authors as Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Rebecca Harding Davis, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, Mary Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett, Frances Harper, and Jane Addams, uncover what the editors call the "complex negotiation between the responsibilities toward oneself and toward others" and the long-standing "conflicted relationship" that American culture has had with helping the poor.³² That these authors teach many of the middle-class values of the dominant white culture to poorer classes actually reinscribes that culture's dominance and the subordination of the poorer classes.

Yet, as the collection demonstrates, these texts contain contradictory elements, some that are progressive and others that are conservative. For example, Whitney A. Womack identifies the character Lois Yare, who rushes into the burning mill to

rescue the factory owner in Rebecca Harding Davis's *Margret Howth: A Story of To-Day* (1862), as the novel's "unlikely benefactress" because she is an African American working-class woman with a physical disability. According to the scholars included in the volume, these texts re-envision the American individual, define women relationally, and illuminate a path by which women began to move beyond the private sphere. They also contrast the views of the many American male writers who were suspicious of charity (constructing benevolence as a threat to American individualism and self-reliance) with those of their female counterparts who were more sympathetic to the poor and sought to help them through their writing.

My dissertation documents how representations of African Americans as benefactors demonstrate their agency, moral and intellectual equality with whites, and readiness for citizenship. These representations do this in a manner somewhat reflective of Robbins, who demonstrates that charitable work offered an opportunity for women to exercise their agency, influence public life, and shape the nation. Furthermore, I show that African Americans demonstrated a more equal social status by being benevolent to whites, a point that builds on Ryan's and Robbins's arguments that middle-class white women shored up their own social status by being benevolent to the needy. Moving beyond Ryan's explication of how the rhetoric of benevolence in the nineteenth century helped construct American ideologies of race and nation, my study also examines how African American's use of that rhetoric helped destabilize such ideologies. And whereas other scholars such as Robbins and Bergman and Bernardi have demonstrated how groups gain power in society through

taking on a benefactor status, their studies focus on gender and class while mine applies this insight to race.

Some recent scholars have looked more specifically at benevolent relationships between white persons and people of color, thus examining, as I do, benevolence in a U.S. domestic racial context. In her book-length examination of late nineteenth-century women who established missionary rescue homes for women in the American West, history and ethnic studies scholar Peggy Pascoe focuses on two sets of relationships—those between women reformers and their male opponents, and those between women reformers and the various groups of women they sought to shelter.³³ Two of the four specific cases she analyzes involve a racial other, namely Chinese women and American Indian women. Pascoe's examination demonstrates the complexity of relationships that benevolent acts can create. By including the male opponents of women's benevolence efforts, she also examines the larger social construct of such acts, how mutual assistance among women affects society's patriarchal systems. In 2009, a literary scholar, Yu-Fang Cho, addressed similar questions of race and benevolence in short stories set in the West Coast, publishing two articles about sentimental benevolence in nineteenth-century texts by or about Chinese women living in America.³⁴ In one article, Cho reads a short story by Edith Maude Eaton, the first writer of Asian descent published in North America, as a portrayal of a Chinese prostitute who refuses an ostensibly benevolent rescue in relation to the trope of "yellow slavery" often found in late-nineteenth-century San Francisco newspapers. Cho argues that the anti-Chinese rhetoric in these accounts serves to "displace the racial politics of transnational political economy onto gender

politics of national morality” and that the United States’ culture of benevolence “simultaneously promises and limits the agency of racialized groups.”³⁵ In the second article, Cho argues that the portrayals of Chinese immigrant women in stories appearing in late-nineteenth-century California magazines register “the seemingly contradictory yet mutually constitutive relationship between benevolent social reform and violent legal exclusion.”³⁶ Pascoe and Cho thus examine many of the same issues other scholars have explored in relation to white middle-class benefactors and impoverished or working-class recipients and apply these to people of color, often with quite revealing results.

Although, as other scholars have pointed out, narratives of benevolence typically limit the agency of racialized others by portraying them as the recipients in the benevolent relationship, the following chapters examine the work of several African American authors who have portrayed African Americans as benefactors within the dynamic of benevolence and, in so doing, challenged the assumptions of the political, social, and literary discourses of the time in order to assert their own agency and equality. George Boulukos’s work on the trope of the grateful slave identifies an important element of the context in which the works by these four African American authors were written and received. According to Boulukos, this trope, which would become the central literary image of plantation slavery, first appeared in Daniel Defoe’s novel, *Colonel Jack*, in 1722, well before the earliest work in this investigation, and thereafter appeared in numerous British reform novels containing plantation scenes³⁷ before becoming a staple figure in novels, reform and otherwise, written by white authors in the United States. In Boulukos’s interpretation,

the grateful slave trope records a shift away from the recognition of the humanity of blacks to the acceptance of inherent racial difference. My interpretation will not only add Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, Harriet Jacobs, Elizabeth Keckley and Charles Chesnutt to the ranks of Black Atlantic writers such as Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano, and Ottobah Cugoano whom Boulukos identifies as “resisting the racial implications of the grateful slave”³⁸ but examine the dynamics of gratitude within situations in which the position of givers and recipients are racially reversed.

Despite the fact that literacy and authorship were available to many more white persons than blacks at the time, depictions of black benefactors assisting white recipients, as noted earlier, are as sparse among white-authored texts as among black-authored ones. Although a few nineteenth-century texts by white authors also depict black benefactors aiding white recipients, as in *Moby-Dick* or the Crane novel mentioned above, in each case the author resolves the reversal of conventional social arrangements by having the black benefactors become alienated from their communities or die, thus removing them from the normal set of social relationships among the living and presumably exchanging social equality on earth for an intangible reward in an afterlife.³⁹ For various reasons, white authors found it quite difficult to imagine depicting black benefactors aiding white persons without subsequently experiencing social or physical death.

White authors could not seem to construct black benefactors giving to white persons and then outliving the narrative. It is as if white authors assumed that if blacks did not occupy the weaker social position by being a recipient of benevolence, then blacks would be victims of violence or even martyrs for benevolence but could

not be accepted as legitimate agents of benevolence. The four texts by African American authors analyzed here demonstrate that some black late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century authors were able to imagine a place for black benefactors in society that even sympathetic white nineteenth-century authors could not. They could imagine black persons as legitimate agents of benevolence who could remain in their communities and serve as an ongoing reminder of blacks' principled actions.

Studies of African American Historical Narratives

This dissertation views all four of the narratives it examines as literary and historical texts. Though, as we shall see, these works employ many literary devices and strategies, all were written for a social purpose within their particular historical moment rather than for economic rewards or entertainment. These authors were fully aware that their work was going to be received as the work of African Americans and that it would therefore shape, in various ways, the individual and collective identities of African Americans and how they were perceived by white readers. Like the black writers in the 1780s and 1790s who, according to James Sidbury's *Becoming African in America*,⁴⁰ "introduced to black discourse on African identity a commitment to what would later be called 'racial uplift,'" the four authors of the texts studied in this dissertation pay particular attention to the social conditions under which they and other black persons lived.⁴¹ My study shares Sidbury's concern with the relation of discourse to action, especially as the four narratives I focus on were intended to examine and intervene in historical events that can be characterized as hostile to African Americans.

The four narratives under consideration here not only tell histories of black agency through benevolence to whites, they also seek to prod their readers into becoming active and critical readers of benevolence and users of benevolence as a tool for individual and collective agency. In *Liberation Historiography*, John Ernest argues that the work of the early African American historians he analyzes apply a moral and metahistorical lens to the historical events they chronicle, and thus “are as much readings as writings of history” that attempt to “teach their readers to become active readers of history as well.” As such, he claims, the resulting texts are not static writings or even readings of history, but exercises in moral instruction, as these historians view African Americans as sharing “a moral identity constituted under the conditions of violence” and therefore make “corresponding attempts to identify the moral action that must follow the historical understanding.”⁴² As we shall see, the four narratives that I analyze, like the African American historical texts examined by Ernest, also seek to activate agency rather than put to rest their readers’ uneasiness, encouraging readers to question rather than ignore the contradictions that they discover. Like those African American writers who worked to “reenvision” and “rescript” their assigned social roles, the authors of my focus texts reenvision and rescript racialized roles that, in this case, are played out in acts of benevolence. This contention thus builds on Ernest’s argument that African American historical work should be seen as part of a larger struggle. In the words of historian Henry M. Turner, the larger struggle is “a struggle not simply to tell the story of the past but to gather the materials necessary for the moral work of the future.”⁴³ So too, I argue, these four authors write with an awareness that there is more at stake in their work than literary

fame or personal gain. Their work influences nothing less than the destiny and identity of African Americans.

In my examination of the four main texts as historical narratives, I employ several different critical approaches that Michael Drexler and Ed White identify as having been used by scholars to understand the works of early African American authors in their edited volume, *Beyond Douglass: New Perspectives on Early African American Literature*.⁴⁴ These approaches include discursive analysis, identity politics, and social formation. In one of the essays in Drexler and White's collection, Phillip M. Richards points out that in the face of political and social alienation, "black evangelical piety, romantic impulses, and revolutionary rhetoric" combined to promote an ethnically centered nationalism and led to the development of early nineteenth-century black radicalization.⁴⁵ The texts examined in this study depict blacks experiencing political and social alienation even as they serve as benefactors to white persons, and sometimes *because* they serve as benefactors to white persons, even as they attempt to help remedy that alienation.

Christianity, although ostensibly shared by both black and white citizens, served various ideological and rhetorical purposes in Allen and Jones's *Narrative* (the most explicitly religious of the four texts) and in the other works as well. This investigation, inspired by Cedrick May's *Evangelism and Resistance*, probes those ideological and rhetorical purposes. May explores the ways in which Christianity served both a social formation function as a unifying force among African Americans and an ideological function in challenging slavery. In his chapter on Richard Allen, one of the authors discussed in this dissertation, May examines Allen's role in the

formation of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in protest over the treatment and inequality of black congregants in the American Methodist Episcopal Church they had helped to build. Allen also insisted that slavery be recognized as a “sin” in the AME’s founding documents.

I refer to the four principal narratives in this study as counter-narratives that consciously constructed, in the words of Laurie Maffly-Kipp, “a community beyond the self, be it defined by African descent, Christian communion, or, most commonly, both; and a more or less explicit linear chronology that situates the community in a wider history.”⁴⁶ In her book *Setting Down the Sacred Past*, Maffly-Kipp examines several dozen historical narratives written by African Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that she defines as *chronicles*, a type of history writing that dates back to ninth-century Byzantium and that she describes as a “popular form of historical treatment . . . that ran against the grain of official accounts and aroused the imagination.”⁴⁷ Maffly-Kipp makes a compelling argument for the role that such “narratives can play in the formation and articulation of black communities.” Whatever their primary genre, all four of the works discussed in the following chapters will be examined as chronicles in this larger sense, as texts that articulate the collective identities of African Americans and of specific black communities at particular moments of racial crisis in this country’s larger history.

Theoretical Approaches to Benevolence

This interdisciplinary study builds upon the theoretical insights of scholars in a number of fields. Drawing on the methods of social history, cultural anthropology, moral and political philosophy, and literary studies, it examines issues of personal and

collective agency, narrative theory, performativity, gift theory, and gratitude to illuminate the depiction of black-to-white benevolence in the work of four early African American writers. By analyzing social relationships between givers and recipients and the communication processes that underlie gift exchange, it examines how a marginalized group used narratives to claim a place in the body politic. Part of making this claim was the negotiation of performativity and the reversal of social identity to resist dominance. In so doing, it engages many of the moral and political issues related to citizenship discussed by such scholars as Philip Gould and Joanna Brooks. Like Gould's *Barbaric Traffic*, the following chapters consider the texts and the historical events around which they center in terms of the economics of citizenship in times of social crisis. In my chapters I also address the larger moral and political questions such crises and the responses of marginalized citizens raise for the nation, thereby inserting the experiences of the black community into the larger historical picture.⁴⁸ Much like Brooks' *American Lazarus*, the texts and accompanying historical events examined here all speak to the "experiment" of blacks acting without white supervision, the unfairness of blacks being marked as publicly available labor, and the intervention of African Americans into early national formulations of race.⁴⁹ Paying careful attention to language and representation within the four texts, this discussion employs rhetorical analysis and discourse analysis as primary tools. By doing so, it demonstrates that these works, like the texts of the early African American writers studied by Brooks, employ sophisticated rhetorical and literary strategies that have been understudied by earlier scholars.

Chief among the works that have offered theoretical insight into the issue of agency are those of Ira Berlin, a historian of the African American experience of slavery whose work, following in the tradition of Gramsci and Eugene Genovese, brought a greater recognition of the agency of African Americans even within their situation of enslavement. The work of Berlin recovered how the enslaved demonstrated agency even within the inherently unequal master-slave relationship. His histories richly document how the enslaved, despite their subjugation through violence, used other means to assert their humanity and resist oppression. Berlin's work, like that of his direct predecessors, accomplishes four main purposes: it portrays the enslaved as neither passive or violently rebellious, but as engaged in largely individual acts of resistance by which they subtly asserted their agency against their masters; exposes the paternalism at the core of the master-slave relationship; shows both how masters used the ideological rhetoric of paternalism to portray themselves as "benevolent" to blacks who purportedly would otherwise have remained pagan, uncivilized, and economically unable to sustain themselves; and demonstrates how slaves played upon that same ideology as means to leverage better conditions for themselves. Working against the then-prevailing trend of homogenizing African American experience over time and distance, two of Berlin's books, *Many Thousands Gone* and *Generations of Captivity*, demonstrate the significance of time and place as critical factors in the discussion of slavery and freedom.⁵⁰ Following Berlin's example, this dissertation considers the negotiated nature of the benefactor-recipient relationship and how the circumstances of the different time periods and places in which they were written conditioned those

dynamics. I expand upon those insights by examining the actions of black benefactors and the act of writing about such actions as forms of resistance that demonstrate the new kinds of self-efficacy they are claiming and that turn racialized paternalism on its ear.

Building on Berlin's insights, this investigation documents ways in which African Americans exerted power during the time period covered by these texts despite their status as second-class citizens within U.S. society. Although African Americans were formally denied full citizenship as a class, the African American authors included in this study depicted black benefactors giving to and interacting with white recipients, demonstrating their agency and equality as citizens by reversing black positionality within the traditional benefactor-recipient dynamic.

Another area of theoretical work that contributes to the insights in this analysis is the cross-disciplinary field of narrative studies. According to Leslie H. Hossfeld, social scientists interested in the "politics of narrative" have demonstrated that narratives often mask power relations of subjection and coercion.⁵¹ Since narratives of benevolence often mask hidden relations disguised as virtuous or socially acceptable, this particular type of scrutiny can help uncover how the stories narrative writers tell are affected by the social structures of the societies in which they are written. As Hossfeld argues, stories have the power "to frame expectations and paths of future action."⁵² In this sense, the four narratives in my examination attempt to reframe expectations about black-white benefactor-recipient relationships and imagine possible futures that overturn the racialized benevolence dynamics that the authors saw operating in their own social worlds. And because, as Hossfeld points

out, narrative and ideology are inevitably linked, narratives about critical events can reveal how different social groups interpret the same social relations.⁵³ The significant historical events to which these four texts respond provide fertile ground for understanding the social relations surrounding benevolent acts and how they have been interpreted by different social groups.

This study argues that the four texts it examines take a stance that is oppositional to the accepted social norms commonly enacted through benevolence. Thus, the four texts constitute counter-narratives to dominant narratives of benevolence. According to the feminist theorists who first popularized the term, counter-narratives can be most simply defined as narratives that “reveal that the narrators do not think, feel or act as they are ‘supposed to’.”⁵⁴ As these scholars point out, such counter-narratives can offer alternative understandings of social conditions and unmask the claims underlying systems of domination. According to the Personal Narratives Group, the “personal narratives of non-dominant social groups are often particularly effective sources of counter-hegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoint embedded in dominant ideology as particularist rather than universal, and because they reflect the reality of a life that defies or contradicts the rules.”⁵⁵ The black-authored texts studied here provide counter-hegemonic insight within the social and moral arena of benevolence.

The insights of other scholars who, like some of those discussed above, have examined issues of performance and performativity in social relations, have also enriched this dissertation. By their very definition, narratives show people in action, performing their identities and defining the meaning of their roles. The work of

literary critic Judith Butler has productively examined agency in terms of its performance in everyday acts of non-violent resistance.⁵⁶ Butler contends that the performativity of identity iteratively names and produces identities and power relations. This concept of the performativity of identity informs my readings of nineteenth-century discourses of benevolence--discourses that iteratively name and produce identities and power relations among rich and poor, white and black, slaveholder and enslaved, benefactors and recipients. I argue that the authors of the narratives examined in the following chapters created alternative narratives to the prevailing narratives of benevolence, finding spaces of resistance and agency in which to insert their own experiences and subvert the identities of white benefactors and black recipients by reversing their roles. The performativity of the benefactor-recipient relationship, in other words, makes evident the construction of identity and destabilizes received categories of identity. As I will show, these narratives also undermine white hegemony by revealing the inadequacy or instability of white social networks and civic authority.

As made clear in the work of the many scholars discussed above, benevolent acts are not simply moral or virtuous but also socially structured, influencing what individuals within that society choose to do and how those acts might be received. As a result, they can seem virtuous or noble without actually being so. Pierre Bourdieu's notion of soft domination can be applied to certain benevolent practices that assert equality even where it does not exist, masquerading paternalistic practices as egalitarian ones.⁵⁷ The contradiction between a desire for dominance and acting softly implicit in Bourdieu's term also exists in benevolent relationships, which can be

mistaken for instances of social equality and friendship. Because gift giving can serve as such a “gentle, disguised form of domination,”⁵⁸ gift theory can contribute theoretical grounding and insights to this investigation of representations of black benefactors and white recipients. Gift theory examines the exchange of objects within a social circle, especially the meanings and complexities of such exchange. Marcel Mauss, for instance, argues that there is no such thing as a “free” gift, that a gift that does not create bonds between giver and recipient is a contradiction. Along with Mauss, other gift theorists such as Marshall Sahlins, Annette B. Weiner, Maurice Godelier, and Jacques Derrida have explored the ambiguity of the gift, the kinds of reciprocity involved in gift giving, the exchangeability of various gifts, the competing functions of gift giving, the power of the gift, and gift giving as a framework for all social relations.⁵⁹ Although these scholars theorize how gift giving bestows social identity and status and discuss gift giving among social unequals, they do not directly consider gift giving among individuals of different races. While they generally consider gifts as tangible objects, I examine acts of benevolence as having some of the same social functions as tangible gifts. Applied to the texts examined here, however, gift theory raises the question of what happens when nineteenth-century African Americans (formerly considered commodities themselves) enter the gift economy as benefactors rather than recipients. Although several literary scholars have used gift theory to consider isolated literary texts, few have applied it to nineteenth-century American texts or to explain the basis of representations of benevolent relationships, especially not black benefactor-white recipient relationships.

Recent research on the psychology of gratitude, which examines gratitude's role in human social evolution, social causes and effects, and psychological functions also contributes theoretical underpinnings to this study.⁶⁰ This research makes useful distinctions between gratitude and indebtedness, focuses on the communication process underlying gift exchange, offers a dramaturgical framework for discussing the performances of the gift-giving process, and outlines the conditions under which individuals are more likely to experience gratitude. It also examines how the acknowledgement of gratitude differs according to the cost (in effort, time, or resources) of the gift or favor and for whom the favor is done, arguing that gratitude serves as a "benefit detector" and as a motivator and reinforcer of prosocial behavior. The tendency of this body of thought to view benevolent acts as psychological events between individuals rather than as social acts within the context of social groups limits its usefulness to this study. My analysis takes a more literary and social approach to acts of benevolence as opposed to a psychological approach. Nonetheless, some of the findings in this field help explicate the rhetoric of gratitude that often accompanies the discourse of benevolence, a discourse which implicitly or explicitly underlies all four of the examined texts.

Outline of Chapters

The following chapters explore my four focus texts in chronological order, thereby also demonstrating how the issues addressed by all four authors shift in light of evolving social and political contexts. Chapter 1 examines *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia* by Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, written as a response to an attack on the reputation

of Philadelphia's black community by Mathew Carey during a social crisis in the early history of Philadelphia. Jones and Allen founded the Free African Society, one of the first African American benevolent organizations in the United States, and organized the Black community to act as nurses and attendants during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia. Their narrative serves as a counter-narrative not only to Carey's narrative concerning the courageous benevolence of Philadelphia's black citizens during a crisis in which most whites fled the city, but also to the dominant view of the place of African Americans in the still-new nation. Jones and Allen's text counters accusations of black criminality, an attempt by white persons to reconfigure black nurses as thieves preying on vulnerable white households rather than as benefactors to whom they owe a debt of gratitude. As the chapter shows, their narrative demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of rhetorical and literary strategies, which they used to counter partial representations of black people, the commodification of free black people's labor, and the double standard by which black and white behavior are judged. As such, I make a powerful argument in this chapter for the moral and social equality of African Americans and their readiness for full citizenship.

Chapter 2 examines two mid-nineteenth-century autobiographical texts by African American women, one written just prior to and the other directly following the Civil War and Emancipation. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, written after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, highlights the particular trials of being enslaved as a female and as a mother. The chapter explicates several scenes that destabilize the myth of the benevolent master and two scenes in which

Aunt Marthy (the fictional name for Jacobs's free black grandmother) serves as a black benefactor to white persons. In one scene she acts benevolently by loaning money to her mistress and in the other she acts benevolently by inviting a slave catcher and the white sheriff to Christmas dinner in her home. As it will show, the text challenges conceptions of black and white criminality, questioning legislation that views a vulnerable woman as a criminal for seeking to escape the criminal behavior (physically abusive acts and unwelcome sexual advances) of her master. The text also defies partial representations of black people that ignore black agency and equate black people with neediness rather than with the capacity to benefit others. *Incidents* rejects the white commodification of black labor by portraying its heroine as one who commodifies and puts her labor to her own uses and exposes the injustice of holding black behavior to a higher standard than that by which white behavior is judged.

The second text analyzed in chapter two, Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*, portrays Keckley as a defender of and benefactor to a white woman of high social standing (rather than the subsequent view many white readers took toward her as an unruly black servant who "criminally" exposed the private actions of an upper-class white woman to public derision). The chapter focuses on two scenes in which Keckley serves as a benefactor to white people more powerful than herself, the first in which she supports her master's household financially for an extended period of time and the second in which she acts as confidante to Mrs. Lincoln and writes the book to defend her from public criticism. Keckley narrates how she became a professional seamstress who came to live in the White House to design and create garments for

Mary Todd Lincoln, the First Lady, thus elevating her individual agency to a national level and suggesting the potential of African Americans as a class to represent themselves as model citizens in a country that deemed them inadequate for citizenship. Unlike the generic poor seamstress story in which the protagonist faces poverty and undergoes moral decline, Keckley's text follows the opposite trajectory, portraying her journey to becoming economically self-sufficient and exhibiting better moral judgment than the troubled widow she aids. As the chapter shows, Keckley, who began her life as a slave, also chose to commodify her labor for her own purposes rather than those of her white patrons. *Behind the Scenes* conveys a fuller representation of black people than the partial representations painted by many white people in the unreconstructed South. In answer to the question of how black and white behavior is compared and judged, the chapter argues that Elizabeth Keckley's status as confidante to Mrs. Lincoln can be read as a metaphor for African Americans serving as the conscience of the nation.

Chapter 3 turns to Charles Chesnut's *Marrow of Tradition*, a post-Reconstruction novel set in a fictional city representing Wilmington, North Carolina during the massacre of black citizens that took place there in 1898. Appearing at what historians referred to as the nadir of social relations between white and African American citizens in the United States, Chesnut's book focuses on the agency of a highly educated black man and asks whether a black professional is not good enough to be a full citizen. The themes of family and kinship in the novel evoke the words on the most identifiable image of the eighteenth-century abolitionist movement, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" Through the frame of two scenes in which the only son of

a leading white citizen becomes dangerously ill, the chapter uncovers the ways in which Chesnutt unsettles received understandings of a black person's role in a benevolent interaction with white persons so as to complicate the personal, social, and racial relationship between the two. The Miller family represents black progress and the Carteret family represents white resistance. As the chapter demonstrates, among the white leadership in the community of Wellington, any hint of social equality among black and white people, or sign of an emerging black middle class, is equated with black criminality. Meanwhile, the townspeople subject an innocent black man to the prospect of a lynching, but the crime of white degeneracy nearly goes unnoticed. In short, Chesnutt examines the hypocrisy of holding black and white behavior to different standards and provokes serious questions about the partial representation of black people and the commodification of black labor.

These chapters are followed by a conclusion that examines the shared concerns, insights, and arguments of the four works and their implications for our understanding of American and African American literature and history.

Chapter 1

Richard Allen and Absalom Jones's *Narrative*:

Framing Black Benevolence in a Moment

of Crisis in the Early Republic

If a man be gracious and courteous to strangers, it shows he is a citizen of the world, and that his heart is no island cut off from other lands, but a continent that joins to them.

—Francis Bacon

In 1793, a virulent yellow fever outbreak descended on Philadelphia, then the site of the government of the young nation, and lasted several months. The leaders of the capital city were ill-prepared to understand the outbreak, let alone manage it effectively. The resulting deaths of several thousand residents, and the social chaos that ensued, became the subject of a handful of firsthand accounts written by Philadelphians. The account of Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *The Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia*, the first black-authored work to secure a copyright in the United States, was written in response to a published slander against the public-spirited motives and behavior of the black residents of that city during the epidemic.¹ *The Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People* therefore operated as a community-affirming counter-history and has long been recognized by scholars as one of the earliest works of African American protest literature.² Allen and Jones's *Narrative* thus became part of a protest pamphlet tradition that includes such African American voices as Prince Hall, William Hamilton, and John Marrant in the discourse of trans-atlantic

abolitionism.³ The *Narrative*, as Philip Gould has observed, converted a moment of social crisis and racial denigration into an opportunity to make African Americans visible as productive fellow residents,⁴ thereby reversing the dominant white view of blacks as criminal, needy, or disruptive and therefore as unfit for full citizenship.

As Samuel Otter and others have noted, the ongoing political debates around slavery and the competing social visions of republicanism and liberalism that were prompted by the “Late Awful Calamity,” and in which Jones and Allen’s narrative participated, became the foundation of much subsequent scholarly understanding of Philadelphia and the nation.⁵ Scholars such as Joanna Brooks, Cedrick May, and Jacqueline Bacon have also examined Jones and Allen’s *Narrative* as an example of how early African American authors adapted mainline religious discourses to intervene in early national formulations of race and used print culture to establish Black identity and a counter-public to white society.⁶ In joining the tradition of American civic discourse previously dominated by white writers, Jones and Allen, this chapter argues, not only demonstrated their capacity to contribute to public debate and even shift civic discourse to issues important to them as civic and moral leaders in the black community but provided the earliest published American narrative of black benevolence and thus of blacks as worthy and contributing citizens. As I will demonstrate, examining the *Narrative* as a chronicle of African American benevolence at a moment of social crisis reveals how it both counters white mainstream society’s discourse about blacks and creates a civic and discursive space in which blacks can also enact and articulate their agency. Written at a time in U.S. history in which most black Americans were enslaved and even free blacks were

disenfranchised, the *Narrative* provides this study's first example of African American authors using narratives of black benevolence to make a case for full black inclusion in society, of white resistance to blacks' contributions in the public sphere, and of themes related to black benevolence and fitness for citizenship that will resonate across all four chapters of my study.

Philadelphia and the Yellow Fever Epidemic

In early 1793, Philadelphia was the seat of the federal government, the nation's largest and wealthiest city, and center of its economic and cultural life. The city's economic, political, and cultural activity, its proximity to the Mason-Dixon line, its Quaker presence, and its relatively large population of free blacks converged to make Philadelphia a city of hope for its African American as well as its white citizens. The discourse of the time makes clear that not only Philadelphians but the nation at large viewed Philadelphia, with its nearly 2,000 free blacks, as a political experiment in how well emancipated black persons could comport themselves and function as fellow citizens within the larger society.⁷

In September and October of that year, however, a yellow fever epidemic struck Philadelphia, threatening its prospects and even survival, felling many and bringing almost all private enterprise and public activity to a halt. All but one Philadelphia newspaper shut down, most government officials escaped to elsewhere, and for the duration of the epidemic, the port of Philadelphia was quarantined by most of the world. An estimated half of the city's 45,000 citizens fled, leaving behind those without the financial means to escape.⁸ Most of the remaining population, believing that yellow fever was contagious and thus fearing infection, avoided

making contact with others outside their own homes, sometimes even abandoning their own stricken family members.

Although the doctors who remained in the city worked heroically to treat the ill, they did not fully understand the cause and nature of the disease, and those who could be found to nurse the sick were often helpless to alleviate their misery. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a physician affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania medical school and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, thought the disease originated in a pile of rotting coffee beans sitting at the docks of Philadelphia. At the time, many people believed that particles of rotting plant and animal matter spread through the air caused disease—not disease-bearing microorganisms—and therefore that disease was caused by interactions with the environment. Rush attended many patients stricken with the fever, bleeding them aggressively and administering mercury to them. Dr. Jean Deveze, who headed the hospital during the epidemic, did not believe that yellow fever was contagious and disagreed with Rush's methods of treating the ill. Deveze took a less drastic approach to treatment and later became a world authority on yellow fever. Still others blamed the epidemic on refugees who had recently poured into Philadelphia after fleeing a slave rebellion in Santo Domingo.⁹ Common belief held that, both on the group and the individual level, people had certain constitutional susceptibilities to disease.

Within the context of medical history, the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 in Philadelphia occurred at least seventy-five years before the development of modern germ theory and at least fifty years before the development of public sanitation practices in the United States. As the death rate rose, eventually reaching an estimated

5,000, children were orphaned, stricken people left to die alone, complete families decimated, and bodies often left moldering in their homes or the street, with only a few brave volunteers available to transport the dead to burial grounds. As historian Richard Newman points out, the epidemic's implications reached beyond Philadelphia to the rest of the nation and beyond issues of physical health to issues of the very viability of the democracy: "The epidemic challenged the very foundations of American virtue and citizenship. Philadelphia, the nation's leading city and its governmental center, seemed to be falling apart."¹⁰ In this context, as we shall see, city leaders solicited the help of its black residents, most of whom remained in the city.

Epidemics had been a scourge of city life since at least the time of Thucydides, and by the eighteenth century strategies for avoiding and responding to epidemics had become a major topic of scientific, medical, and civic discourse. In that century alone, more than sixty major epidemics had hit major American cities. In the twenty years previous to the 1793 yellow fever outbreak, ten epidemics had already struck Philadelphia alone.¹¹ In the United States, as in Britain, numerous journalistic and quasi-scientific accounts of various epidemics were published and widely read in an attempt to better understand the causes and management of such civic emergencies.¹² The earliest of these American plague narratives had been written by Cotton Mather, the prominent Puritan minister and author, during a smallpox epidemic in Boston in 1721. Perhaps what would become the best known and most widely read work in the Anglophone plague narrative tradition was published just a year later: Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*, a

fictionalized account of the 1655 Great Plague of London that had met with great literary success.¹³ In 1798–1799, Charles Brockden Brown, the first American writer to gain an international reputation, would similarly use Philadelphia’s 1793 yellow fever epidemic as the setting for two of his gothic novels, *Arthur Mervyn* and *Ormond*.¹⁴

Most eighteenth-century authors of such accounts, recent heirs of the Age of Enlightenment, employed scientific observation—the direct experience of phenomena through the senses—in an attempt to uncover the causes of the epidemics, minutely describing the symptoms and course of the illness and the nature and scope of the civic collapse it engendered. Nonetheless, scientific explanations proposed by the time of and immediately following the 1793 epidemic still failed to provide satisfactory answers. For instance, although some Philadelphia residents had observed an unusually large number of mosquitoes that summer, nobody at the time made the connection between the prevalence of mosquitoes and the outbreak of yellow fever, but we now know that infected mosquitoes spread the illness. As Susan Klepp and Philip Gould have observed about other epidemic narratives and explanations of disease, this quasi-scientific approach also largely neglected the broader moral and political questions that the epidemic and the response of Philadelphia’s citizens raised for the city and the nation.¹⁵

Mathew Carey’s Accusations against the Black Nurses

As the epidemic abated in November 1793, Mathew Carey, a leading publisher and important figure in Philadelphia’s literary and political circles, joined in this plague narrative tradition by publishing the first edition of his own work on the

yellow fever epidemic, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia*. Carey had a history of writing texts that others found provocative, once even having to flee his native Ireland because of the angry response to his work before moving to Philadelphia in 1784.¹⁶ Shortly after his arrival, he began to publish the *Pennsylvania Herald*, which covered legislative debates. There he also founded the Hibernian Society for the relief of Irish immigrants and, according to Joseph Finotti, became a “household name” as a “printer, bookseller, a poet, a writer, a publicist, an editor, a philanthropist, and a patriot.”¹⁷

The bulk of Carey’s hastily prepared text on the yellow fever epidemic consisted of excerpts from public records and the observations of others rather than original material derived from Carey’s own observations. In addition to repeating others’ observations and opinions, Carey’s account included reprints of such materials as a list of graveyard burials from church records, meteorological observations, and extracts of letters to newspapers and of proclamations and resolutions by public officials. As Joanna Brooks has noted, Carey in effect “used the technology of copyright to privatize public information about the fever” for his own profit.¹⁸ By early 1794, the quickly assembled and approximately hundred-page pamphlet had appeared in four editions, been reprinted in London, and sold nearly ten thousand copies, seemingly authorizing it, at least locally, as the definitive account of the event.¹⁹

Despite the fact that civic concerns undoubtedly also played a part in Carey’s motivations, as a literary man and successful publisher, he was aware that epidemics made newspaper headlines, engaged the attention of the scientific community, and

told gripping stories, and his *Short Account* appeared to have been consciously written with commercial ambitions within the plague narrative tradition described above.²⁰ Carey's account clearly resembled other works in this tradition, characterizing the epidemic in hyperbolic, even sensationalist terms. He chronicled how the disease's origins and cure dumbfounded physicians of the time, the horrible nature of its symptoms, graphic images of horrors witnessed in the streets, the cessation of ordinary burial observances, and the occurrence of such immoral behavior and criminal offenses as stealing from the dead.²¹ For example, Carey described the symptoms of yellow fever in excruciating detail:

On the febrile symptoms suddenly subsiding, they were immediately succeeded by a yellow tinge in the opaque cornea, or whites of the eyes—an increased oppression at the praecordia—a constant puking of every thing taken into the stomach, with much straining, accompanied with a hoarse, hollow noise.

If these symptoms were not soon relieved, a vomiting of matter, resembling coffee grounds in colour and consistence, commonly called the black vomit, sometimes accompanied with, or succeeded by haemorrhages from the nose, fauces, gums, and other parts of the body—a yellowish purple colour, and putrescent appearance of the whole body, hiccup, agitations, deep and distressed sighing, comatose delirium, and finally, death.²²

Much of Carey's patchwork account had described the praiseworthy actions of white officials and citizens in response to the crisis. Stating that "I'm privileged to be a witness and recorder of magnanimity," he acknowledged that what he had began as an account of the horribleness and panic of the epidemic had also become a narrative of benevolence.²³ He praised specific white citizens for performing "works of mercy, visiting and relieving the sick, comforting the afflicted, and feeding the hungry" during that tumultuous time and recounted the deeds of white citizens who "have distinguished themselves by the kindest offices of disinterested humanity," such as the widow who donated twenty dollars for the relief of the poor or inhabitants of other towns who decided to offer asylum "with genuine hospitality" and "without the smallest apprehension" to those fleeing Philadelphia.²⁴

Although African American church elders Absalom Jones and Richard Allen and the many African American volunteers they organized had also ministered to the ill, Carey had downplayed this fact in this account. After most white citizens who could afford to do so had fled the city, these black nurses had fed their ill patients, calmed them, wiped their feverish brows, cleaned up after them, transported them to the hospital, secured coffins, buried the dead, and comforted the families left behind. Yet in Carey's long account, he had devoted only one paragraph to the benevolent actions of these black nurses during the epidemic. Whereas Carey had urged that "let those who have been absent, acknowledge the exertions of those who maintained their ground" and acknowledged that "the services of Jones, Allen, and Gray, and others of their colour, have been very great, and demand public gratitude," he apparently had been unable to do so without also claiming that the desperate demand

for nurses “afforded an opportunity for imposition, which was eagerly seized upon by some of the vilest of the blacks.”²⁵ In contrast to Benjamin Rush’s view of black nurses’ involvement in the yellow fever epidemic as a “divinely appointed opportunity” for black Philadelphians to show their worth to white citizens,²⁶ Carey’s brief reference to the aid offered by the black citizens of Philadelphia who answered the city’s public call for assistance discounted their bravery by saying it was proffered under the mistaken belief that African Americans were immune to the disease, and he discredited their compassion by accusing some of taking advantage of the ill.²⁷ Carey’s account, which appeared in four editions, thus had not only failed to depict the black nurses’ public service as benevolence but vilified and criminalized their actions.

Absalom Jones and Richard Allen as Activists within the Free Black Community

Despite being specifically excluded from such accusations, Jones and Allen clearly felt that, as civic and religious leaders in Philadelphia’s African American community, they could not let such a public accusation of the black citizens of the city stand unchallenged. Beyond chafing at the simple injustice of Carey’s claims, they were acutely aware that the conduct of Philadelphia’s free black residents, no longer under the daily supervision of white owners, was under constant and minute scrutiny by the white majority, not only in Philadelphia but across the nation.²⁸ Allen and Jones clearly understood the high stakes involved in what Gary Nash has termed this “Philadelphia experiment,” which placed great pressure to appear beyond reproach on free black Philadelphians in general, and particularly on leaders in the black community such as Jones and Allen.²⁹ If the experiment failed, proslavery

arguments would win the day; if it succeeded, proslavery arguments would be weakened and other cities might gradually come to accept or even adopt Philadelphia's more progressive racial attitude.³⁰ Rejecting the myth of black exceptionalism behind Carey's praise of their own actions, Jones and Allen appeared to recognize that letting his depiction of other black persons as "vile" go unchallenged would simply bolster racist beliefs that only a few black persons were capable of demonstrating intelligence and initiative, let alone benevolence.³¹ Jones and Allen therefore felt compelled to confront Carey's defamation of the black nurses, especially in an environment in which whites were deeply concerned about African American morality and feared that, as slaves gained freedom, the social controls imposed by slavery would no longer hold blacks in check.

Jones and Allen were exceptional people by any measure. Despite having been born into slavery, both had, with the help of the city's Quakers, educated themselves and risen to become respected leaders among the city's free black population of 2,000. Jones, born in Delaware, had been brought to Philadelphia by his owner as a young man, where he eventually bought his freedom by working as a clerk and handyman in a store. Not one to shrink from protesting injustice, Jones had co-authored the first petition to Congress from African Americans in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. Richard Allen was born a slave in Philadelphia and worked for the Revolutionary forces as a young man. Having heard an itinerant Methodist minister preach that slavery was a sin, he became a "born-again" Christian in 1777, and then used the occasion to leverage his own freedom, bringing a minister to preach to his master, whom he shamed into manumitting him. After obtaining his

freedom papers, Allen spent several years preaching to black and white audiences in the mid-Atlantic states, working as a sawyer, wagon driver, and shoemaker in between to earn a living. In 1787, Jones and Richard Allen had founded the Free African Society, a black benevolent organization and a mechanism of community oversight, likely the first of its kind in the United States, and would become the first black Americans to be formally ordained by any religious denomination. Beginning as lay preachers in St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, Jones went on to lead the African Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia, the first black Episcopal church in the United States, and Allen in 1794 founded Bethel, the original church of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first independent black denomination.³²

As ministers, Jones and Allen also brought to their composition of the *Narrative* their moral authority in the community and familiarity with Christian language and imagery that they shared with most white Philadelphians. In contrast to Caribbean and other new immigrant blacks who were entering Philadelphia in large numbers at the time, whom many Philadelphians of both races viewed as non-conformist, licentious, non-Christian "others," Jones and Allen were established members of the Philadelphia community who adhered to strict moral standards and avoided socially frowned-upon cultural expressions in which the new immigrant and lower-class blacks often engaged (such as music, gaming, feasting, drinking, and dancing) and urged their congregants to do the same. While they did not directly identify themselves as ministers in the *Narrative*, fellow Philadelphians, black and white, would have known that Jones and Allen were religious leaders in the community.

In Newman's words, Allen (and presumably Jones as well) "believed that print made visible black founders' moral critique of, and political claims on, the American republic" and thereby "created a potential bridge to white leaders and citizens."³³ This claim is supported by other pieces Jones and Allen had written prior to the publication of the *Narrative* in 1794 and that foreshadowed the stance they would also take there. In addition to the above-mentioned petition against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, both Allen and Jones were among a group of black men who met with Rush in the summer of 1791 to write "Articles of Faith" for an African Church in Philadelphia. When Rush wrote to the British abolitionist Granville Sharp in August 1791 asking him to solicit "among the friends of the blacks in London" a contribution toward the building of such a church, Absalom Jones was one of eight "representatives of the African Church" to sign an appendix attached to it.³⁴ Addressed "To the Friends of Liberty and Religion in the City of Philadelphia," this appendix made several bold claims, including the presumption that any friend of "liberty and religion" would be receptive to this particular solicitation from black Philadelphians and referring to the Africans in the existing congregation that sought to build the church as "belonging to the City of Philadelphia," not merely residing in it, a significant claim at a time in which the nation was still debating who should be considered citizens and who should be excluded. While the representatives announced their purpose of "establishing religious worship, and discipline among their brethren" with the intent of producing "more order and happiness among them" (an aforementioned concern of leading free blacks under the sometimes intense moral scrutiny of the white population of Philadelphia), they also asserted that "men are

more influenced in their morals by their equals, than by their superiors” and “are more easily governed by persons chosen by themselves for that purpose,” thereby presenting a rationale for black autonomy. In anticipation of W.E.B. DuBois’s “problem of the color line” and concerns that emerge in the works of the other authors included in this study, the authors clearly recognized “the line drawn by custom” between black and white people and acknowledged with “heart-felt gratitude, the many acts of kindness they have received from the Citizens of Philadelphia.” Yet the authors also appealed to potential benefactors’ self-interest, suggesting that through contributions to the church building fund, their white benefactors would also “convert their numerous favors into substantial and durable blessings” for themselves as well as for the black recipients, including extending their influence by helping to establish an independent African American church that could serve as a model for future such churches in other states and even in Africa.

Despite their desire to build bridges between white and black Philadelphians, Jones and Allen did not shy away from making public statements in response to what they considered unjust actions by whites. Before the building of the new church, Jones, Allen, and as many as forty other black members had attended the white St. George’s Church. After helping to build a new balcony for the church, the black congregants were surprised to find that the white congregants expected them to now sit there rather than in the pews on the main floor, as they always had. In his posthumously published autobiography, Allen recounted how one Sunday he witnessed white leaders in the church approaching “the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him off his knees, and saying, ‘you must get up—you must not kneel here.’”³⁵ Rather

than move to the segregated balcony as instructed, Jones, Allen, and the other black members walked out of St. George's that day and eventually began their own congregation. Nor did they accede to white expectations of deference in other ways. In another incident, members of the whites-only Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) were surprised when Allen did not seek their business advice after requesting and receiving a fifty-dollar loan from them to realize his goal of opening a nail factory in the summer of 1793, but merely accepted the loan and proceeded to accomplish his own dream.³⁶

Given their prior public statements about blacks' rights, it appears almost inevitable that Jones and Allen would feel compelled to respond to Carey's accusations. To challenge Carey's privileging of rumors about the conduct of the black nurses, Jones and Allen took the deliberate action of publishing and copyrighting their own version of events, implicitly reasserting the right to black authorship.³⁷ The authors had not only firsthand knowledge of the behavior of the black nurses and the moral authority inherent in having risked their own lives performing distasteful, sometimes gruesome, and often thankless tasks during the epidemic, they also had honed the rhetorical and literary skills to write a sophisticated twenty-seven-page response to Carey's claims, which they published at their own expense in 1794 as *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the Year 1793: and a Refutation of Some Censures Thrown upon Them in Some Late Publications*. Jones and Allen found a white printer, William Woodward, who had demonstrated a willingness to publish provocative writings, such as black pamphlets of protest, something many other white

printers hesitated to do. And while some white printers who did publish black-authored writings discounted black editorial autonomy by writing explanatory introductions, Woodward let the *Narrative* stand on its own. By publishing their pamphlet, Jones and Allen ensured the distribution, influence, and ultimate survival of this important account of black civic participation and beneficence.

The Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People

The *Narrative* itself is twenty pages in length, including an accounting of cash received by Jones and Allen for their services (and out-of-pocket expenses such as for coffins and hiring additional workers) and a short concluding poem. To this account, the authors append eight additional pages of supporting evidence and related reflections. This appendix includes two letters, one from the authors to the mayor accounting for how they had disposed of the beds of their ill patients and another from the mayor to the authors endorsing the work they and those they had employed during the epidemic. These are followed by three short essays that appear to be either political tracts or sermons—an “Address to Those who Keep Slaves,” another “To the People of Colour,” and “A Short Address to the Friends of Him who hath no Helper”—and a second, this time explicitly religious, poem.³⁸ Beyond its initial readership,³⁹ the *Narrative* was read in national and international reform circles, and it was reprinted among Allen’s other most notable political tracts when his autobiography was published posthumously in 1833—the first published autobiography of a U.S. free black leader.

In its rhetorical strategies as well as its contents, Jones and Allen’s *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People* responded to Carey’s account for what they

recognized it actually was—not merely a story but an argument, and not just about the epidemic but about the civic, social, and moral relations between black and white residents in the nation and the nature of black benevolence. As we shall see, a close reading of the *Narrative* demonstrates a carefully reasoned argument and eloquence that alone would seem to counter the myth of inherent black inferiority, which was supported by the scientific racism of the time and provided a justification for the continued enslavement of African Americans in the South and their marginalization and exploitation in the North. The *Narrative* also reveals a skillful deployment of the language, imagery, and core beliefs of the Christian and American political discourse that would have been shared by Jones and Allen’s audience, black and white alike. As Joanna Brooks argues in *American Lazarus*, fully understanding works by early American black writers requires a willingness to “read in every textual feature the potential and strategy,” an alertness “to structure and repetition; to coded language use, unannotated scripture references, the shadows of earlier texts; to adaptations of or diversions from conventions of genre.”⁴⁰

The authors’ rhetorical sophistication and skill becomes clear from the very first sentence of their account, which, without yet specifically naming it, puts Carey’s *Account* on trial as the occasion precipitating the *Narrative*:

In consequence of a partial representation of the conduct of the people who were employed to nurse the sick, in the late calamitous state of the city of Philadelphia, we are solicited, by a number of those who feel themselves injured thereby, and by the advice of several respectable citizens, to step

forward and declare facts as they really were; seeing that from our situation, on account of the charge we took upon us, we had it more fully and generally in our power, to know and observe the conduct and behavior of those that were so employed.⁴¹

As straightforward as this sentence may appear, it demonstrates how Jones and Allen's calculated and careful diction served to make rhetorical and literary connections to other texts with which their audience would have been familiar. With their opening words, Jones and Allen both echo the title of Carey's opening chapter—"A Few Observations on Some of the Consequences of That Calamity"—and explicitly foreground the "consequence" generated by Carey's "partial representation of the conduct of the people": increased prejudice against the black residents of the city. In this sentence, Jones and Allen also cast their decision to publish their own narrative of events as a moral and civic duty urged upon them by "those who feel themselves injured" and by "several respectable citizens." Although some commentators have used these words as an example of what they describe as a deferential stance on the authors' part,⁴² it should be noted that Jones and Allen present this request less as a justification for their writing than as supporting evidence for their characterization of their *Narrative* as a natural and logical response to what they label as Carey's "partial representation" of the conduct of those African American benefactors who had nursed the sick during the epidemic.

This considered choice of words becomes a central theme throughout the *Narrative*, in which the authors argue that Carey's "representation" is "partial" in two

senses, in being biased and in being incomplete. As to the first of these, Jones and Allen later charge that the “partialness” of Carey’s account can only be explained by a dishonest and unjust double standard:

That there were some few black people guilty of plundering the distressed, we acknowledge; but in that they only are pointed out, and made mention of, we esteem partial and injurious; we know as many whites who were guilty of it; but this is looked over, while the blacks are held up to censure.—Is it a greater for a black to pilfer, than for a white to privateer?⁴³

There appears to be little that is deferential in their then supporting this argument with several specific examples of whites who were caught pilfering personal belongings of the dead, and their later noting that as many whites as blacks were caught stealing from the ill, despite the fact that twenty times as many blacks as whites had attended to them. Jones and Allen also contrast the chronicled misbehavior of the white nurses at the hospital at Bush-hill with the service of the two dependable black female nurses who were the only ones who were retained on staff after the “profligate abandoned set of nurses” was dismissed. “It is rather to be admired,” they add, “that so few instances of pilfering and robbery happened, considering that the great opportunities there were for such things; we do not know of more than five black people, suspected of anything clandestine, out of the great number employed.”⁴⁴ Thus the authors present the black nurses as demonstrating not only the self-discipline and exemplary conduct

that Philadelphians expect from its freed black residents but the civic virtue that a republic requires from all of its citizens.

Jones and Allen's reference to "partial representation" would also have undoubtedly been read by many at the time as a veiled reference to the common view of blacks as only partially human and therefore inferior to whites. By viewing race as a scientific category, the Enlightenment science of the time appeared to naturalize this ideology of black inferiority; as a result, according to historian Bruce Dain, "race itself was a monster if ever Americans conceived one, but a monster hidden in their minds, not, as many of them came to think, in the reality of a nature behind the appearances."⁴⁵ These racist views also underlie the "partial representation" of black Americans in a political sense. While Jones and Allen were free, landowners, and prominent leaders of the free black community, neither could vote.⁴⁶ Furthermore, at the time they wrote the *Narrative*, only six years had passed since the Three-Fifths Compromise of 1787, which ruled that each enslaved person would count as only three-fifths of a person for purposes of representation in congress. Although this applied only in the southern states, the first federal naturalization act of 1790 also declared that only "white" immigrants could claim citizenship in the United States. Jones and Allen's home state of Pennsylvania had been the first state to abolish slavery, but did so only through a gradual abolition law passed in 1780, which forbade further importation of slaves into the state but did not free slaves already held in the state and moreover declared that children born to still-enslaved mothers would be indentured until age twenty-eight. Even free blacks, then, were less than full members of the society.

As emancipated but not enfranchised individuals, free blacks like Jones and Allen served as transitional figures in a changing time, living in the ambiguous position of being quasi-citizens who were at best only partially represented. Despite having no voting power, however, they could take advantage of their right to use their voices and moral authority to protest injustices. In the face of Carey's accusations, Jones and Allen publically declared their right to be aggrieved in language reminiscent of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which had just been ratified in 1791 and explicitly gave all Americans freedom of speech and the right to petition for "a redress of grievances." Behind Jones and Allen's decision to give a fuller representation of the actual events during the yellow fever emergency, we can discern an insistence on inserting the experiences of the black community of Philadelphia into the larger historical picture of the city and the nation. As Gould notes, Jones and Allen's *Narrative* thereby "inserts the African American presence in the sentimental civic culture of the post-Revolutionary United States."⁴⁷

In the opening sentence of the *Narrative*, Jones and Allen also directly address the second sense of the term "partial" as meaning "incomplete," noting that they had been solicited to pen this response to Carey's partial account specifically because they had more "fully and generally" observed the actual "conduct and behavior" of those who had been slandered. Jones and Allen thus present themselves as advocates for the unfairly judged, as protectors of a group that has been wronged, and as witnesses who wish to "declare facts as they really were." Carey had also opened his account (as did most plague narratives) with the claim that his purpose was simply "telling plain facts in plain language" and had "taken every precaution to arrive at the truth": "Most of

the facts mentioned have fallen under my own observation. Those of a different description, I have been assiduous to collect from every person of credibility, possessed of information.”⁴⁸ Carey thus clearly understood the authority of direct observation and, as a leading citizen of the white community and an appointed member of the hastily formed “committee for the relief of the sick and distressed,” would have had some firsthand knowledge of the early public steps to address the epidemic that take up most of his account. Nonetheless, Jones and Allen argue, Carey’s account was partial even by those measures. The authors fairly credit Carey with having been “chosen a member of that band of worthies who have so eminently distinguished themselves by their labours, and for the relief of the sick and helpless,” however, they also point out that Carey had failed to inform his readers that, “quickly after his election,” he had also “left them to struggle with their arduous and hazardous task, by leaving the city.”⁴⁹ Therefore, Carey’s derogatory comments about the blacks who had risked their lives caring for the ill could only have been based on hearsay. He also clearly had not thought it necessary to include Jones and Allen among the “person[s] of credibility” he had consulted as he constructed his account, despite their central role in and direct knowledge of the events that had unfolded while he had absented himself from the stricken city. Thus if a true account of the courage, compassion, and capacity of the black benefactors who gave and risked so much in the service of their fellow Philadelphians were to be told, it would be up to Jones and Allen. In their account of events in their *Narrative*, then, Jones and Allen present a counter-narrative of the conduct of the black community, one based on the observations of parties who were there to witness the nurses’ work firsthand.⁵⁰

But perhaps the most insidious way in which Carey's account was at best partial was in his refusal to acknowledge that the black nurses had acted as benefactors to the ill, most of whom were white, and therefore deserved the gratitude of the community. The primary way in which he tried to define this service as something other than benevolent was by framing it in economic rather than moral terms. In his criticism of the black nurses, Carey had commodified black labor by attempting to place a dollar value on it, claiming, "They extorted two, three, four, and even five dollars a night for attendance, which would have been well paid by one dollar."⁵¹ In fact, Carey accused the black nurses of the economic crime of stealing in various forms: charging too much for their nursing services; plundering the homes of the sick; and neglecting the ill by taking pay for nursing but not performing the service adequately. Thus his account supports Gould's observation that many of the writings produced in response to the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia called attention to the "economics of citizenship during moments of social crisis."⁵² As Joanna Brooks has argued, "blacks as a class" during this period "were marked as 'publicly available'—that is, particularly vulnerable to criminal accusation, economic exploitation, social exclusion," public assault, and other abuses.⁵³ In this context, the mayor's public solicitation assuring African Americans that they were not susceptible to the illness and appealing to them to "come forward and assist the distressed, perishing, and neglected sick" and the criticism to which this service exposed them offers a potent example of blacks' public availability and vulnerability.

Furthermore, Carey's *Short Account* of the epidemic had defined the usefulness of black labor in terms of the white recipients. For example, Carey used

the word “salutary” to describe both white flight from the city and the procuring of black labor under the false pretense that blacks were immune to the disease, suggesting that he defined what was in the city’s best interest only from the point of view of its white citizens.⁵⁴ Carey reasoned that white flight was beneficial because it slowed the spread of the disease, but it was only beneficial to those who fled, not to the poor and black residents who had no way to escape. Likewise, Carey’s claim that the mistaken belief that blacks were immune had a “salutary effect” was premised on his assumption that “had the negroes been equally terrified” of getting the disease as were the white nurses who fled or refused to care for the ill, “the sufferings of the sick, great as they actually were, would have been exceedingly aggravated.”⁵⁵ Again, the effect may indeed have been salutary to the white people being served, but not to the black nurses whose own lives were endangered by offering that service. Jones and Allen therefore not only decry Carey’s partial representation of the black nurses, they also expose the compounded layers of his partiality. And, as if partial representation on multiple levels was not enough, Carey’s attempt to recast the black nurses’ benevolence as wage labor misrepresents the nurses’ service altogether, a point to which I now turn.

By so defining the nurses’ service as commerce or labor, Carey and other white informants appeared to want to put the black nurses back in “their place,” preferring to represent them as hired hands rather than as benevolent citizens. Commodifying their labor restored existing unequal social relations by redefining white recipients and black benefactors as employers and employees and absolved the white citizenry from needing to be grateful for the services received. By instead

redefining that aid as a gift, as Christian duty, as benevolence, Jones and Allen's account shifts from Carey's focus on them from laborers in a market-driven economy to a view of them as benefactors in a time of need and reframes Carey's economic argument in moral and civic terms. In their own account of events, Jones and Allen reject Carey's commodification of black labor and address his claims directly, saying that "we feel ourselves hurt most by a partial, censorious paragraph" in which Carey blamed "the blacks alone, for having taken advantage of the distressed situation of the people."⁵⁶ As Jones and Allen point out, their services and those of the black volunteers they organized for this purpose "were the product of real sensibility;--we sought not fee or reward, until the increase of the disorder rendered our labour so arduous that [the volunteers] were not adequate to the service we had assumed."⁵⁷ As they explain, at first their volunteers charged nothing for their services, accepting whatever payment the recipients thought fit. They also give an actual accounting of the payments they had received and the out-of-pocket expenses they had incurred for buying coffins and hiring help to bury the dead, which demonstrates that in fact they had lost a considerable amount of money, not even considering their lost earnings and gifts given to poor families for more than two months. The reality, they add, is that "we have buried *several hundreds* of poor persons and strangers, for which service we have never received, nor ever asked any compensation."⁵⁸

Albeit Jones and Allen admit that "some extravagant prices" were indeed charged by some who provided help, they explain that as more people were in need of help, it became harder to find enough people to provide it.⁵⁹ As the number of yellow fever deaths continued to rise, Jones and Allen had found it necessary to, at their own

expense, “call in the assistance of five hired men, in the awful discharge of burying the dead.”⁶⁰ As Carey’s account had also made clear, finding such help was difficult, as “it was very uncommon, at this time, to find any one that would go near, much more, handle, a sick or dead person,” and perhaps for this reason, two of the men who agreed were also brothers of Richard Allen.⁶¹ Jones and Allen began to find that persons who they had arranged to hire for a set weekly fee instead “had been allured away by others who offered greater wages,” often offering more for a day’s work than the modest weekly rates Jones and Allen could offer.⁶²

Jones and Allen present this turn of events—rising prices for hired help--not as price gouging, but as a natural result of supply and demand, an economic principle operating even though the nurses’ service was voluntary and required great bravery: “We had no restraint upon the people. It was natural for people in low circumstances to accept a voluntary, bounteous reward; especially under the loathsomeness of many of the sick, when nature shuddered at the thoughts of the infection, and the task assigned was aggravated by lunacy, and being left alone with them.”⁶³ They support this interpretation by noting that the mayor, who had become aware of the rising prices being paid for assistance, sent for them to see if they could “use our influence, to lessen the wages of the nurses, but on informing him of the cause, i.e., that of the people overbidding one another, it was concluded unnecessary to attempt any thing on that head; therefore it was left to the people concerned.”⁶⁴ In this account, the rise in prices was more a result of the recipients’ behavior, including exploiting the poverty of many of the nurses, than of the benefactors’ behavior. Thus it can be argued that it was the commodification of black labor and white persons’ insistence

on the perception of black nurses' service as commerce that actually caused the inflation of wages and had the unfortunate effect of making it harder for the ill to obtain the nurses they needed.

In the face of this dire shortage of persons to nurse the sick, Jones and Allen recount, they requested that city officials release volunteers among the city's prisoners to nurse the sick. Viewing this arrangement from the lens of gift theory, we might argue that in doing so, Jones and Allen enact notions of reciprocity similar to that of wage labor: the prisoners would gain some measure of temporary freedom in exchange for nursing the ill. Yet by asking those of perhaps the lowest social status in the community to help, Jones and Allen also appear to recognize the prisoners as capable of not only the concrete tasks of nursing, but also of the social function of benefactors to higher-status whites. The authors here give Carey credit for having observed that "for the honor of human nature, it ought to be recorded, that some of the convicts in the gaol . . . voluntarily offered themselves as nurses to attend the sick at Bush-hill [a hastily set-up hospital for the poor]; and have in that capacity, conducted themselves with great fidelity," although they also point out that he had failed to note that two thirds of those volunteers were people of color.⁶⁵ Perhaps Carey's willingness to praise the work of these prisoners in his account without mentioning that most of them were black can be explained by the fact that he could not commodify their unpaid labor.

Jones and Allen, in contrast, recast the work of tending ill bodies not as mere labor but as Christian charity at a time when most of the white residents of Philadelphia were able to distance themselves from the dirty, low-caste work of

nursing the ill by hiring others to do it or from the epidemic itself by fleeing. Jones and Allen instead posit an ethic of Christian care in which the black benefactors' primary activities during the epidemic, nursing the ill and burying the dead, are implicitly presented as two of the seven "corporal works of mercy," a codification of the golden rule familiar to the Anglican Communion. Through the narrative, Jones and Allen set forth a moral and political philosophy that is compassionate and inclusive. They present the black nurses' actions as those of ideal citizens and model Christians by explicit and implicit references to Christian doctrines and discourse, setting the terms of the argument in a way with which Christian readers would find difficult to argue.

Their narrative of events makes clear that Jones and Allen viewed their work as benevolence from their very first meeting with a few others in their community to discuss how they might be useful in response to the mayor's solicitation. Portraying themselves as motivated by higher principles than mere economic gain, they describe themselves as "sensible that it was our duty" as Christians and as citizens "to do all the good we could to our suffering fellow mortals." In contrast to Christian slaveholders of the time who used religious language to support their claims of black inferiority and that slavery actually benefited Africans by rescuing them from their heathen background, Jones and Allen, viewing themselves as brothers to all the children of God, use Christian imagery to claim moral equality with white persons. By invoking Christian charity and universal benevolence throughout their account, Jones and Allen elevate their labor and their status as fellow Christians and citizens. This use of such Christian terminology and tenets demonstrates Brooks' claim that

“by adapting, politicizing, and indigenizing mainline religious discourses, African Americans . . . established a platform for their critical interventions into early national formulations of race.”⁶⁶

Jones and Allen refer to those stricken with yellow fever not as whites or blacks, but as “our suffering fellow mortals,” as humans experiencing pain and discomfort, as hearts feeling uncertain and fearful, and as bodies that would someday die. And in embracing the ill as “ours,” they imagine a community in which there is a consensus of membership, connection, and responsibility, even in the face of “scenes of woe.” By reconceptualizing black-white distinctions in terms of theological as well as political discourse, Jones and Allen demonstrate modes of resistance to scientific racism identified by Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman.⁶⁷ Upon immediately visiting the homes of more than twenty families to better understand the situation facing the stricken city, according to the authors, “the Lord was pleased to strengthen us, and remove all fear from us, and disposed our hearts to be as useful as possible.” Thus conceiving their assistance in terms of both Christian and civic duty, they visited the mayor to offer their services to the beleaguered city. Asked to do what they could to procure nurses for the ill, they placed their own notices in the public papers, announcing that distressed citizens could apply to the authors for help in procuring nurses and burying the dead. For more than two grueling months, Jones and Allen and those they supervised responded to strangers in need of help, entering white homes and performing intimate offices for people with whom they were entirely unacquainted and who in most cases did not consider them their social equals.⁶⁸

As the epidemic continued to spread unabated and several of the city's physicians had died or succumbed to exhaustion or sickness, Benjamin Rush, a prominent physician who practiced medicine extensively among the poor and had cared for many of the ill, paid further testimony to the capabilities and character of Jones and Allen by asking them to offer actual medical assistance to patients under his direction, bleeding the ill and administering medication.⁶⁹ In the days that followed, the two men treated more than eight hundred patients, which they describe as being "of no small satisfaction to us, for, we think, that when a physician was not attainable, we have been the instruments, in the hand of God, for saving the lives of some hundreds of our suffering fellow mortals."⁷⁰ Here, too, the black authors reframe themselves as instruments of God's work—as benefactors—rather than as laborers, even when that labor is highly skilled. In the city of Philadelphia, many recognized Rush as a generous benefactor, and by aligning themselves with his efforts in the *Narrative*, Jones and Allen further support their own claims of being benefactors. Whereas Carey's view of the work of black nurses as labor had defined them as laboring non-citizens, Jones and Allen's view of their work as charity defines them as benevolent citizens.

Having thus accounted for their own behavior and that of the black volunteers they oversaw, Jones and Allen appear provoked enough by the injustice done those who provided such service to the city under the most horrifying conditions to directly compare their conduct with that of many white citizens under the same conditions. By thereby inverting the social position in which their critics have imposed upon them, they engage in the performativity of identity as they morally and rhetorically turn the

tables on Carey and other white citizens. Without mincing words, Jones and Allen criticize the hypocrisy and questionable actions of some of its white citizens in a claim that also plays upon the religious and social implications of blackness and whiteness: “We wish not to offend, but when an unprovoked attempt is made, to make us blacker than we are, it becomes less necessary to be over cautious on that account; therefore we shall take the liberty to tell of the conduct of some of the whites.”⁷¹ While the two clergymen thus clearly recognize that some white persons will see their strategy as taking liberty, they have by this point in the narrative constructed a moral and political basis on which to criticize the conduct of certain ill-behaved whites. In particular, Jones and Allen directly question Carey’s motivations and actions. Referring to the dangers and unpleasantness of caring for the sick and dead, they pointedly ask, “Had Mr. Carey been solicited to perform such an undertaking, for hire, *Query*, ‘what would *he* have demanded?’”⁷² In his account, Carey had taken the prerogative to judge what would be a fair wage for black nurses to accept for these onerous tasks, even though, as Jones and Allen intimate, he might well have felt entitled to a higher wage himself. This is also the place in the narrative where Jones and Allen reveal that Carey had, unlike themselves, fled the city. Although acknowledging that he had the right to do so, Jones and Allen nonetheless claim that “he was wrong in giving so partial . . . an account of the black nurses; if they have taken advantage of the public distress, is it any more than he hath done of its desire for information[?]. . . he has made more money by the sale of his ‘scraps’ than a dozen of the greatest extortioners among the black nurses.”⁷³ To Carey’s detriment, they compare his seeking to profit from his publication with their having

“sought not fee nor reward” for their services.⁷⁴ The profit motive driving Carey could not compare favorably with the Christian motives driving Jones and Allen. As volunteers, Allen and Jones present themselves as having no commercial interest in aiding the sick or burying the dead, but simply a moral interest in assuming responsibility and caring for any fellow residents who lived in their proximity.

Using narrative to claim the moral worthiness of the black community and their ability to contribute to the greater good, Jones and Allen singularly claim that “we can with certainty assure the public that we have seen more humanity, more responsibility from the poor blacks, than from the poor whites.”⁷⁵ In one example they offer, a poor black man refused the eight dollars offered to him for giving a dying man a drink of water after several white people had passed by without stopping. In another, a poor black man named Sampson assisted without fee in many houses where people were struck with the illness. At length, Jones and Allen describe such help provided by black benefactors when white citizens refused to come to the aid of the sick, and of care willingly given with little or no reward by black residents who found the courage to intervene where others refused involvement. As Jones and Allen note, “the dread that prevailed over people’s minds was so general, that it was a rare instance to see one neighbor visit another, even friends when they met in the streets were afraid of each other, much less would they admit into their houses the distressed orphan that had been where the sickness was.”⁷⁶

In this climate of fear, Jones and Allen become the voices and arbiters of decency in a way that Carey could not, noting that the fear and indifference they witnessed among the populace of Philadelphia “seemed in some instances to have the

appearance of barbarity; with reluctance we call to mind the many opportunities there were in the power of individuals to be useful to their fellow-men, yet through the terror of the times was omitted.”⁷⁷ While this is stated as referring to the population in general, it is followed by several examples of actual cruelty by white citizens toward the ill who were then helped by black passersby of no relation or acquaintance to them. Indeed, they claim, “Many of the white people, that ought to be patterns for us to follow after, have acted in a manner that would make humanity shudder.”⁷⁸

Despite slaveholder rhetoric claiming that white masters inculcated morals in their slaves and served as models of Christian behavior, Jones and Allen, free black men unsupervised by masters, postulate through their actions they were in a better position to teach some white persons about authentic moral behavior than the other way around. Again turning the social equation around, this time by giving examples of white hesitance and black willingness to help, Jones and Allen call attention to how moral worthiness and social equality are performed and perceived.

Jones and Allen recall the difficult circumstances under which the nurses worked as a way of conveying the extent of their sacrifices and their capacity for resilience, traits that their readers would deem admirable. With the purpose of humanizing the black nurses and contrasting their endurance with the indifference of some of the whites, the authors address complaints that the nurses sometimes neglected the sick. Noting that despite many of the nurses having been “up day and night, without any one to relieve them, worn down with fatigue, and want of sleep,”⁷⁹ Jones and Allen report having found few complaints about them in the homes they visited. Pointing to the hard work and courage that such care entailed, they note that

“the case of the nurses, in many instances were deserving of commiseration, the patient raging and frightful to behold”:

It has frequently required two persons, to hold them from running away, others have made attempts to jump out of a window, in many chambers they were nailed down, and the door was kept locked, to prevent them from running away or breaking their necks, others lay vomiting blood, and screaming enough to chill them with horror.⁸⁰

Not only did the nurses have to cope with their patients’ immense suffering and desperation, but they had to do so at the cost of their own and their families’ health and well-being. As the authors point out, these nurses, left alone in such a situation until the patient recovered or died, often were then immediately called to care for another patient, some going a week or ten days without adequate rest, often leaving behind their own families, including sick family members, while caring for white patients.

Having highlighted the compassion of the black nurses, Jones and Allen compare the response of white people to blacks who came down with the illness, uncovering white reluctance to make similar sacrifices and finding a lack of Christian charity among their supposed social and moral betters. While Carey’s account had admitted that blacks were not in fact immune to the disease, he nonetheless claimed that the number of blacks who became ill was small and that they responded to treatment more readily than white patients. In light of this, Jones and Allen point out

that blacks “suffered equally with the whites, our distress hath been very great, but much unknown to the white people.”⁸¹ This reference to equal suffering implies equality in other terms as well. Although black nurses cared for white patients, “few have been the whites that paid attention” when the reverse happened and blacks became ill; indeed, when black nurses came down with the illness while nursing white patients, some were turned out of the house, “wandering and destitute until taking shelter wherever they could” to “languish alone,” at least one of their acquaintance dying in a stable.⁸² (Being fairer to whites than Carey was to blacks, however, Jones and Allen also note that other whites treated their black nurses more humanely, citing two cases they knew of in which stricken nurses were cared for in the houses in which they became ill.)

Jones and Allen show the comparison of what blacks sacrificed during the epidemic with what whites claim to have lost to be a faulty comparison, and whites to be unappreciative of the difference in scale between the costs of the epidemic to the white and black communities, respectively. Not content to address Carey’s past accusations, Jones and Allen decide to confront the still “generally received opinion in this city, that our colour was not so liable to the sickness as the whites,”⁸³ citing the published bill of mortality for 1793 to show that as great a percentage of blacks as whites died that year, more than fourfold from the previous year, caused “in a great degree [by] the effects of the services of the unjustly vilified black people.”⁸⁴ Using evidence rather than rumor, they contrast their means of obtaining information with those of Carey and other whites. Turning on their heads the charges against the black populace, they argue that, as a result of the falsehoods perpetuated about the actual

illness and number of deaths among them, “thus were our services extorted *at the peril of our lives*, yet you accuse us of extorting *a little money from you*,” their italics calling attention to the incommensurableness of what they provided and again defining their action as benevolence rather than labor.⁸⁵

In a final if indirect rebuke of those who discounted their service as fellow humans and citizens, Jones and Allen conclude their narrative “with the following old proverb,” which they assert is “applicable to those of our colour who exposed their lives in the late afflicting dispensation”:⁸⁶

God and a soldier, all men do adore,
In time of war, and not before;
When the war is over, and all things righted,
God is forgotten, and the soldier slighted.

Although the authors do not identify the source of this poem, it appears to date back at least a century before the publication of the *Narrative* and to have been cited as part of American political protests as lately as debates over the ratification of the Constitution.⁸⁷

By including this poem, Jones and Allen appear not only to make a veiled reference to the poem’s use in earlier political discourse but to more overtly echo Carey’s own metaphor comparing white benefactors during the epidemic to soldiers: “Amidst the general desertion that prevailed, there were to be found many illustrious instances of men and women, some in the middle, others in the lower spheres of life,

who, in the exercise of the duties of humanity, exposed themselves to dangers, which terrified men, who have hundreds of times faced death without fear, in the field of battle.”⁸⁸ By concluding with this metaphor, Jones and Allen include black benefactors in Carey’s comparison and argue in the voice of an outside authority that the black nurses, too, are like soldiers, providing a civic service and putting their lives on the line to protect and serve their fellow citizens, and to have their contribution just as quickly forgotten. In the poem’s accurate prediction that when things in Philadelphia were “righted”—when ordinary power relations resumed once the epidemic ended—Jones, Allen, and the other black nurses would be forgotten, the poem ends the narrative by poignantly calling attention to the lack of gratitude of the white citizens of Philadelphia toward the black nurses who served so bravely in a time of civic crisis. Such gratitude would mean acknowledging the nurses’ assistance as benevolence rather than an economic exchange, something they seemed aware that many white persons would be unwilling to do. The psychology of gratitude would suggest that the high cost of the black nurses’ sacrifices would increase the likelihood that those they cared for would feel gratitude toward them; however, such a view clearly does not take into account the intervening and powerful social factor of race prejudice.

Appendices Relate the *Narrative’s* Arguments to Larger Issues of Concern to the Black Community and the Nation

As noted earlier, Jones and Allen include several appendices after the main body of the *Narrative*; these appendices support and link the *Narrative’s* arguments to the larger social issues of slavery and discrimination and suggest the authors had

multiple audiences in mind. Beyond the epidemic, how blacks are treated—as regulated by both law and custom—in a nation founded on equality matters. To support their claims and authorize their actions as public service, the authors include a memo they had written to Mayor Matthew Clarkson accounting for beds and requesting a statement of Clarkson’s official approval of their conduct during the epidemic, followed by the resulting endorsement of their work by the mayor. (Because a number of beds had disappeared from the homes of the ill, Jones and Allen had been accused of stealing them, when in fact they had buried them for at least a week because it was believed that such a practice would rid them of contamination from the yellow fever.) The inclusion of these pieces of evidence both echoes Carey’s inclusion of supposedly (if selective) official and objective evidence in his account and reinforces the firsthand knowledge and official approbation so central to Jones and Allen’s argument in the preceding narrative.

At first glance, the rest of the appendices appear less directly related to the authors’ narrative. On closer examination, however, they demonstrate Jones and Allen’s awareness that the ungrateful response to the heroic and benevolent service of the black volunteers during a specific moment of crisis in the nation’s capital was both conditioned by and had implications for larger issues around slavery, black capability, and Christian understandings of God’s judgment on not only individuals but the nation at large. These final pieces include three short essays, addressed, in order, to slaveholders, to people of color, and to white friends of the enslaved, and a religious poem.⁸⁹ None of these present evidence that directly supports the authors’ arguments or refutes Carey’s, but they serve both to enlarge upon several of the

implicit themes of the *Narrative* and to conclude the volume with larger moral and rational arguments for the inherent worthiness of black Americans and their fuller inclusion in American society.

The first of these essays, “An Address to Those Who Keep Slaves,” which we know from other sources was a sermon given by Allen and the first public challenge to slavery by a black leader since Congress had moved to Philadelphia, directly addresses the issue of the moral and intellectual capacity of black people. In a reasoned, informed, and articulate argument, Allen outlines the illogic of holding slaves in debased circumstances and then criticizing them for not conducting themselves as gentlemen. Enacting the very claims he makes, Allen argues that if black children were educated with the same care as that given to white children, it would become obvious that blacks are not intellectually inferior to whites.⁹⁰ No reasonable person, he points out, would seek “figs among thistles,” to find good in those whom they have debased. Instead, he argues, “It is in our posterity enjoying the same privileges with your own, that you ought to look for better things.”⁹¹ On the face of it, it seems unlikely that many slaveholders would read, let alone be moved to action, by this direct challenge to their claims to be religious, patriotic, and good parents even as they degrade other human beings. Yet Allen may well have hoped that his appeal to these core American values of the time would persuade white Philadelphians to revise their own unfair expectations and estimations of their black fellow residents as reflected in Carey’s account. Having emphasized in their narrative the partiality of this representation of the black nurses, Allen’s use of the word “partial” in his argument that “men must be willfully blind and extremely

partial, that cannot see the contrary effects of liberty and slavery upon the mind of man” has a reiterative effect on the reader that supports both arguments.⁹² By appending this address to the narrative, Jones and Allen also further underline the connection between black bodies as absolute commodities in slavery and free black lives as expendable commodities in an epidemic, which they present as unreasonable constructions in the new American republic. And if that point should be missed, Allen closes by warning the nation that God “has destroyed kings and princes for their oppression of the poor slaves” and that not merely Allen but “God himself has pleaded our cause.”⁹³

In another appendix, “To the People of Colour,” both free and enslaved, Allen directly addresses the topic of gratitude, as Jones and others had earlier in “To the Friends of Liberty and Religion in the City of Philadelphia.” In this address, Allen counsels other blacks to avoid bitterness despite the injustices and discrimination they have faced and to be continually grateful for their freedom and the kindnesses of their white benefactors: “Let your conduct manifest your gratitude toward the compassionate masters who have set you free, and let no rancor or ill-will lodge in your breast from any bad treatment you may have received from any.”⁹⁴ He asserts moral leadership by encouraging free blacks to show gratitude to white abolitionists and former owners, and civic leadership by insisting on the link between nurturing gratitude rather than anger and the deportment necessary to demonstrate their capability and morality to their white fellow residents. The subtext of Allen’s argument regarding benevolence and gratitude here is similar to that in the *Narrative*: that a lack of gratitude toward one’s benefactors denies the benevolence of their acts,

the debt incurred by it, and the implied equality in power and moral relations that occurs as a result of it.

A tension Allen must navigate in making this argument is between urging free blacks to prove their competence and virtue so as not to give their critics further reason to oppress them and acknowledging that whites may still not give credit to free blacks who perform in an exemplary way, as the preceding *Narrative* so dramatically demonstrates. One way in which he does this is to acknowledge free blacks' shared history with and responsibilities toward those African Americans who are still enslaved. Knowing well the arguments against black freedom, he discourages other free blacks from inactivity, because "if we are lazy and idle, the enemies of freedom plead it as a cause why we ought not to be free" and "by such conduct we strengthen the bands of oppression."⁹⁵ Rather than argue for such conduct simply in terms of conventional morality or self-interest, however, he also presents it as a means for free blacks to minimize their complicity in the oppression of the enslaved, thus stressing their agency rather than their victimization. First acknowledging that "we address you with an affectionate sympathy, having been ourselves slaves," he then transforms this identification into a plea for black solidarity, urging free blacks to "consider the obligations we lay under, to help forward the cause of freedom, we who know how bitter the cup is of which the slave has to drink."⁹⁶ To the enslaved, he offers the consolation that "no master can deprive" them of God's love dwelling in their hearts.⁹⁷ Thus declaring that white men can enslave black bodies but cannot enslave black souls, Allen also implies the equality of black and white Americans by asserting that God will welcome and reward people of all colors who love him.

In the brief “A Short Address to the Friends of Him Who Hath No Helper” signed by both Jones and Allen, the authors enact the gratitude Allen has urged on other free blacks and the lack of which they have decried in the *Narrative*.⁹⁸ Casting white abolitionists as people who “are not ashamed to call the most abject of our race, brethren, children of one father, who made of one blood all the nations of the earth,” Allen supports the authors’ claim in the *Narrative* that blacks belong in the human community with the testimony of white Americans who dare to call them brothers and invokes the biblical injunction that “what God has joined, let no man put asunder.”⁹⁹ In this allusion to marriage and his praise of white abolitionists’ striving not merely to free the enslaved but to “raise the slave, to the dignity of a man,”¹⁰⁰ Allen figures black and white social relations as a divinely endorsed and reciprocal exchange among social equals, or at least family members, rather than an exploitative and demeaning one.

Finally, Jones and Allen close their pamphlet with an admonition to other spiritual and civic leaders in the form of a poem that would have been a commonly known text among Episcopalians, white and black, and on a subject undoubtedly familiar to most Christians of the time:

Ye Ministers, that are called to preaching,
Teachers, and exhorters too;
Awake! behold your harvest waiting!
Arise! there is no rest for you.
To think upon that strict commandment,

That God has on his teachers laid,
The sinner's blood, who dies unwarned,
Shall fall upon their Shepherd's head.
But oh! dear brethren, let's be doing
Behold the nation's in distress,
The Lord of Hosts forbid their ruin,
Before the day of grace is past.
We read of wars and great commotions,
Before the great and dreadful day,
Oh, Sinners! Turn your sinful courses,
And trifle not your time away.
But Oh! dear sinners, that's not all that's dreadful!
You must before your God appear!
To give an account of your transactions,
And how you spent your time, when here.¹⁰¹

In the context of the larger *Narrative*, the authors thus close the volume with a vivid, even frightening, reminder that neither Carey nor other white people have the final prerogative to judge the black nurses, but that God himself will judge everyone, black and white alike. While the reference to “wars and great commotions” in these lines refers to the apocalypse preceding Judgment Day, the image would have had special resonance for readers less than twenty years after the Revolutionary War and just months after the “Awful Calamity in Philadelphia.” While the poem is explicitly

addressed to ministers, teachers, and other exhorters, Jones and Allen issue it as a warning clearly intended to give many of their less benevolent or grateful neighbors pause and to extend comfort to the unappreciated black benefactors.¹⁰²

Together, the appendices support the main arguments of the *Narrative*—namely, the injustice of the partial representation of black people, the commodification of black labor, and the double standard by which white and black behavior are measured--not only in the service of fostering black community, but also for the purpose of making the majority white society more inclusive. Although it is true, as Brooks has argued, that Jones and Allen wrote the *Narrative* to create black community,¹⁰³ they did so not for the purpose of isolating blacks from the white community but of enabling blacks to leverage their collective power to make inroads into the larger, predominantly white community. By doing so, the *Narrative* fulfills the larger purpose Katherine C. Bassard attributes to the African American women writers she studies: performing community “by which boundaries of self/other, insider/outsider become negotiated, as a challenge to racial proscriptions and definitions that served the material and economic interests of the larger white society.”¹⁰⁴ In performing this community, Jones and Allen’s account of the actions of the free black people of Philadelphia rescripts the racialized roles of whites as benefactors and blacks as recipients in the dynamics of benevolence.

What Jones and Allen chose to omit from their *Narrative* also sheds light on their rhetorical strategy. They choose not to include, for instance, that Allen himself contracted yellow fever and was hospitalized for nearly two months in the notorious Bush Hill Hospital in which so many died. Nor do they mention that the nail factory

that Jones and Allen had recently launched together failed because of the financial difficulties they suffered as a result of their service during the epidemic.¹⁰⁵ While cataloging how Allen had suffered physically with the fever and how they had both suffered economically from the epidemic may have increased readers' sympathy for them, Jones and Allen chose to bring attention not to their own sacrifices as individuals but to those of the black nurses as a group. Their protest, therefore, was not against the disservice done to them but against the misrepresentation of the black community's benevolence, which Carey had discounted precisely because it had originated among blacks. The reality of black benefactors helping white recipients may well have been disturbing to Carey and other whites because it necessarily questioned black inferiority, demonstrated the social networks and moral strengths of the black community, and suddenly shifted power among the races. Carey, by portraying the black nurses and, by extension, the entire black community as criminals taking advantage of white victims, had attempted to create sympathy for those who had been helped, preferring to view them as the victims of crime rather than the recipients of black benevolence so as to set the civic equation back to normal.¹⁰⁶

In response, Jones and Allen's *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People* sought to set the record straight and to reaffirm the value of black benevolence. Demonstrating their own capacity as African American citizens and writers as they argued for the acknowledgment of black citizenship and black benevolence in writing that is both respectful and radical, Jones and Allen outdid Carey at his own rhetorical game.¹⁰⁷ By claiming at least equal moral and civic

standing for themselves and their fellow African Americans, Allen and Jones acted, as Newman points out, as “fellow citizens” who clearly “understood public discourse about a virtuous citizenry” and employed it in defense of the courage, capacity, and compassion of the black volunteers. In the disquieting aftermath of the epidemic, Jones and Allen’s chronicle of black benevolence toward their fellow Philadelphians reaffirmed black humanity, capability, and potential for citizenship while also evoking the unfulfilled promises of universal equality promoted during the American Revolution. Yet despite the rhetorical power of Jones and Allen’s argument about the capacity for and the implications of black benevolence, it is one that, as we shall see, other African American authors would feel compelled to reaffirm at other major moments of transition and debate regarding the inclusion of black Americans in the larger body politic and society. Chapter 2 will examine the work of two authors who do so in the period just before and after emancipation, and chapter 3 that of an author during the imposition of Jim Crow laws following Reconstruction.

Chapter 2

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

and Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*:

Black Benevolence in Transition Before

and After Emancipation

Nineteenth-century writers clearly saw themselves as something more than members of disconnected and scattered groups, helpless chattel, or brute, subhuman creatures. They viewed themselves as men and women of intelligence and erudition and as active shapers of the world they inhabited. . . . African American intellectuals demonstrated how conversant they were with the wellsprings of American intellectual culture.

—Stephen G. Hall

This chapter examines two mid-nineteenth-century autobiographical narratives produced by African American authors at the apogee of the nation's struggle over slavery, one written just prior to and published shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War and the other published three years after its end. The former, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, is an account, published under the pseudonym Linda Brent, of Jacobs's life as a female slave and her eventual escape to the North and freedom.¹ The latter, Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, tells the story of this former slave woman's successful career as a dressmaker and eventual confidante of Mary Lincoln. In these texts, as in that of Jones and Allen discussed in the previous chapter, the authors claim the right and the social space to tell the story of their own experiences as African Americans. Unlike that earlier chronicle of

African American history and identity, however, they also self-consciously write as women, adding the gendered perspective of women to the record. As Gabrielle Foreman points out, these black female authors used the literary form of the autobiography to “write themselves into history.”² Foreman’s point reiterates a concern both of narratology and of my study—how a group can use narrative to claim a place in the body politic. Although neither book attracted a broad readership at the time, both have become important sources for literary and cultural historians of the period, Jacobs’s text for the insight it offers into the particular plight of female slaves, Keckley’s text most often for its behind-the-scenes view of the Lincoln White House.³

In their respective books, Jacobs and Keckley establish themselves as having met the demands of the transition from slavery to freedom and therefore as models proving the capacity of black Americans to leave the paternalistic system of slavery behind and successfully integrate themselves within the wider society. One way in which they demonstrate this capability is in their depictions of themselves and other African Americans acting as benefactors, not merely to their own race, but to white persons who occupy presumably higher positions than themselves in the social hierarchy. Thus, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *Behind the Scenes* continue the tradition of texts depicting black benefactors helping white recipients initiated by Jones and Allen in their 1793 *Narrative*. Of the four texts examined in this study, only these two directly address personal experiences of slavery. As we shall see, both authors skillfully employ rhetorical elements common to slave narratives and abolitionist discourse, on the one hand, and to sentimental fiction and discourse on

the other, to make powerful arguments that engage readers while avoiding the traps of sentimentalism. Knowing their work would shape how white Americans perceived African American identities, Jacobs and Keckley challenge popular conceptions of black criminality and white respectability. Not only do they question the moral grounding of slavery and social inequality for blacks in a free nation, they defy partial representations that ignore black agency and equate black people with neediness rather than with the capacity to benefit others.

I begin this chapter with a section on *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and how Jacobs addresses the rhetorical problems she faces in writing this book. My analysis explains how Jacobs identifies with her readers' values regarding femininity and propriety but demonstrates how her readers have a much greater chance of living out those values than Linda does as a slave, thus destabilizing the claim that slavery is a benevolent institution. The chapter then elaborates on her methods for inviting sympathy but avoiding pity from her readers. Jacobs does so by holding up an example of a white woman who pities Linda and offers her help, but Linda rejects her "help" and unnecessary pity as useless because she has a plan to enact her own agency. Furthermore, this chapter examines the way Jacobs structures Linda's rejection of the "gift" of a cottage from her master and her exposition of the decidedly unchristian and unfeminine behavior of her mistress. Gift theorists would view rejection of a gift under ordinary circumstances as disgraceful to the intended recipient for refusing to participate in a community's legitimate web of reciprocal social ties. In this case, however, under a system of slavery, I view Linda's rejection of Miss Fanny's "help" and her master's "gift" of a cottage as a refusal to participate

in what she considers an illegitimate social structure. Using the narrator to counter the accusations that slaves are “ungrateful,” Jacobs offers examples of slaveowners’ ingratitude toward their faithful slaves. Even as she recognizes the good intentions and kind acts of some white slaveholders, Jacobs imbues Linda with the wherewithal to deftly reinterpret their “gifts” to slaves. With the construction of two episodes in which Aunt Marthy acts benevolently toward white Americans, first to her mistress and second to two men whom she has every right to revile, Jacobs reverses the pervasive assumption that white citizens only occupy the position of benefactor and black Americans only occupy the position of recipient in the racialized power dynamic of benevolence.

The chapter then turns to Keckley’s *Behind the Scenes* and its treatment of white benevolence to black Americans. In countering the proslavery ideology of “family white and black,” Keckley demonstrates that she has surpassed the women in her former master’s family in personal and economic independence, drawing on the same capacity that enabled her to reframe as a “loan” the benevolence of her white patrons (whom she later repays) who buy her freedom. The next section discusses rhetorical issues, namely the strategies by which Keckley accomplishes two tasks: 1) sidestepping possible condemnation from her readers for writing about slavery by modeling forgiveness and friendship; and 2) gaining her readers’ sympathy rather than pity by citing some of the horrors of slavery but qualifying them by noting how she learned self-reliance while enslaved. Aware that her readers might criticize her for sharing intimate details of Mrs. Lincoln’s life, Keckley asserts her capacity to tell a more accurate story about the First Lady than those merely interested in gossip.

Recognizing that Mrs. Lincoln's actions themselves invited public criticism, Keckley believes her book cannot be harmful to but might partly repair Mrs. Lincoln's already badly damaged reputation. Keckley presents her refusal of numerous bribes while working in the White House as evidence that she knows how to exercise restraint and is not writing the book for self-aggrandizement. The chapter continues with a discussion of Keckley's use of black benevolence to white Americans as a means of asserting black agency. To this end, Keckley documents two key episodes in which she has been benevolent toward white Americans, first to her master's family while enslaved and later to Mrs. Lincoln. The final section of the chapter illuminates the socially subversive aspects of *Behind the Scenes* in relation to benevolence, particularly because, throughout the book, Keckley proves herself equal if not superior to white women, even instructing the First Lady on how to enact proper nineteenth-century womanhood by providing charity to the newly freed.

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

The work of several scholars has influenced my thinking about benevolence in Jacobs's book. First, my argument's implicit assumption that compassion has a political dimension is supported by philosopher Elizabeth Spelman's exploration of *Incidents*. In her reading, she argues that as Jacobs seeks compassion from white women and hopes to spur them to action on behalf of enslaved women, she has to balance the tension between being a "supplicant" and an "active agent."⁴ Spelman also argues that, as Jacobs elicits compassion, she needs to carefully control her reader's understanding of her situation lest her intentions backfire. My work demonstrates how Jacobs reveals her acute vulnerability through the supplicant's role

and transforms that vulnerability into dignity and power by becoming an active agent who chooses to write depictions of black benefactors aiding white persons. Second, Andrea Stone, who has analyzed literary and legal discourse in and surrounding *Incidents*, argues that, in becoming a fugitive, Jacobs's "criminal" response to her master's assaults "exposed gaps in paternalistic proslavery rhetoric" through which she could "question the law's legitimacy and complicate its notions of guilt and innocence."⁵ This insight helped me to see that Jacobs does something similar with benevolence in *Incidents*, questioning benevolence as an assumed virtue and complicating notions of help and harm. Third, in an article on Jacobs's use of motherhood as a force of resistance against slavery, Stephanie Li theorizes that "the predetermined violence of slavery disrupts conventional meanings attached to words such as 'mother' and 'womanhood.'"⁶ My work confirms that when Jacobs rewrites the American story of benevolence to include black Americans as virtuous benefactors to white citizens and white Americans as needy recipients of black benevolence, she illustrates the fact that because American society is white-dominated, meanings attached to terms such as "benefactor" and "recipient" have become racialized. Finally, according to Christina Accomando, Jacobs "rewrites virtue as a legal construction, as opposed to a racialized, naturalized fact." This argument led to my view that Jacobs rewrites benevolence (an expression of goodwill assumed to be inherently or naturally virtuous) as a social construction.⁷

Whereas all four texts in this study address the dynamics of benevolence between black persons and white persons, Jacobs's *Incidents* is the only one that specifically addresses those dynamics as enacted between masters and slaves. Within

her book, as we shall see, Jacobs capably overcomes two major rhetorical problems implicit in writing for a white female audience. While arguing that slavery is morally and politically evil, Jacobs specifically refutes the proslavery claim that slavery is a benevolent institution. Even as she plays on her readers' sympathies, Jacobs calls upon them to imagine themselves within actual slave conditions in order to argue that slavery is unconscionable for a free nation. In so doing, she invites recognition of a slave woman's agency rather than inviting pity for her. Jacobs calls attention to the particular vulnerabilities of being an enslaved female and mother but does so with humility, honesty, and dignity so that the reader recognizes her autonomy even within the constraints of slavery. By depicting an African American woman as a benefactor to white persons, Jacobs reverses racialized benefactor-recipient roles in which white persons are typically well off and black persons are typically needy. In representing Aunt Marthy's experience of loaning money to her mistress and Aunt Marthy's hospitality to her Christmas dinner guests, Jacobs denudes the system of slavery of its claim to benevolence and replaces it with images of black equality and capacity expressed through benevolence to white persons. In so doing, she highlights black accomplishment despite a history of enslavement, thus contributing to arguments about African Americans' readiness for full citizenship.

A biography of Jacobs's early life can be instructive for better understanding her use of depictions of black benevolence to white recipients in *Incidents*.

Experiences in Jacobs's life offer evidence that she exercises her agency from a young age, resourcefully gaining useful skills, and not truly feeling her condition as a slave until she lives in Norcom's household. She calls her early childhood one of

“unusually fortunate circumstances”; it was not until age six, when her mother died, that she learned “by the talk around me” she was a slave. Furthermore, her father had taught her and her brother “to feel that they were human beings.”⁸ In all circumstances, she proactively makes decisions to maintain what little control she had over her own life. Like the unusual story of Henry “Box” Brown, Jacobs stands out among the writers of slave narratives for her survival strategies. Taking a white lover to shield herself from Norcom’s sexual advances and hiding in an attic in sight of her master’s house for such an extended period of time are not standard features of slave narratives but show her creativity, determination and persistence. Writing letters that would make her master believe that she actually was in New York instead of North Carolina demonstrates the rhetorical power she commanded. The power reversal she accomplishes with the letters parallels the power reversal she achieves by depicting black benevolence to white persons.

Jacobs was born a slave in Edenton, North Carolina in 1813, where, according to her biographer, Jean Fagan Yellin, her first mistress taught her to read, write, and sew.⁹ As she recounts her story in *Incidents*, after the death of her enslaved parents and her mistress, the twelve-year-old Jacobs was bequeathed to her mistress’s five-year-old niece, the daughter of Dr. Norcom, whom she calls Dr. Flint in her account. To escape his physical abuse and sexual exploitation, she took another white man, Samuel Sawyer (called Mr. Sands in her book), as a lover, with whom she had two children. When this failed to end Norcom’s menacing behavior, she eventually fled Norcom’s household, hiding for seven years in the attic of Aunt Marthy’s (her free grandmother’s) home¹⁰ before eventually escaping to New York City in 1842, where

she earned her living by caring for the children of writer and publisher Nathaniel Parker Willis. In 1849, Harriet moved to Rochester, New York, to join her escaped brother, John S. Jacobs, where she met his antislavery colleagues, worked in the abolitionist reading room, and joined a group of abolitionist women who gathered weekly there. That year Jacobs met and confided her story to the Quaker reformer Amy Post, who encouraged her to share her story in print. After asking Post to approach Harriet Beecher Stowe to see if Stowe would be willing to write Jacobs' story for her and learning that she was interested only in using elements of it in a book of her own, Jacobs decided to write her story herself.

Fearful of being recaptured after the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Jacobs returned to New York, where Willis's wife, Cornelia, hid her and bought her freedom from the husband of her legal mistress in 1852. Jacobs's first autobiographical sketch appeared anonymously in the New York *Tribune* as a letter from a fugitive slave. Jacobs struggled to find time to write while earning her living caring for Willis's children. Perhaps because she believed Willis to be a Southern sympathizer and may have been aware that he did not fancy the aspirations of women writers (including his own sister, who published popular sentimental novels under the pseudonym Fanny Fern),¹¹ she wrote the rest of her book-length manuscript secretly at night, completing it in 1858.

Perhaps because her book raised the supposedly delicate issue of the sexual exploitation of black female slaves, she had a difficult time finding a publisher, eventually finding one who agreed to publish the manuscript if she could secure an introduction by the author and anti-slavery activist Lydia Maria Child.¹² According to

Yellin, Child, who had been writing from an antislavery perspective since the early 1830s, could reasonably be expected to again break taboos by bringing forth a black American slave woman's "shocking story in defiance of the rules of sexual propriety."¹³ Through black abolitionist William C. Nell, Jacobs met Child, who agreed to edit the book, although the publisher went bankrupt before the book could be published. Finally, in 1861, a Boston printer published the book "for the author" under the pseudonym "Linda Brent," and Child helped distribute the book among anti-slavery networks. Child had found that the Boston booksellers were, as she reported to John Greenleaf Whittier, "dreadfully afraid of soiling their hands with an Anti-Slavery book," and thus she and Jacobs were having "a good deal of trouble in getting the book into the market."¹⁴ A British edition of *Incidents*, under the title *The Deeper Wrong*, appeared in a somewhat modified version in 1862, facilitated by the London Emancipation Committee, of which her brother, John S. Jacobs, was a member.¹⁵ In her editor's introduction, Child claimed that she had only suggested a few deletions and changed a few words of Jacobs's narrative. Although Child actually did substantial editing, it is still clear that, unlike most "as told to" slave narratives, Jacobs' had been capably penned by its author.¹⁶ Not until after the war, when her later published reports on the conditions of freed slaves in the South started appearing in newspapers and editors identified Jacobs as "Linda," the former slave portrayed in *Incidents*, did readers learn for certain that she was the author of the book.¹⁷

In writing the book Jacobs acts benevolently toward her readers, as she seeks to exercise an enlightening influence on white women. Jacobs implicitly reframes the white master's assault on female slaves as an assault on all womanhood, black and

white alike. Arguing that slavery corrupts slaveowners and all of white society, Jacobs attracts white women's attention to her cause by arguing that slavery weakens white families as well as black families; slavery is neither benevolent to slaves nor to slaveholders' families. Jacobs not only counters the belief that slavery is a benevolent institution; she insists that its effects are necessarily insidious and corrupting.¹⁸ As she states in her preface, Jacobs's narrative was written expressly to prompt white Northern women readers to comprehend "the condition of two millions of women still in bondage" and to take action against slavery.¹⁹ While many scholars see the Northern white woman as Jacobs' intended audience, Gregory Eiselein specifies the audience more narrowly: "Jacobs's ideal implied reader is a Northern white woman, presumable middle class, *who has benevolent inclinations*" (emphasis mine). To me this indicates Jacobs was not as interested in motivating large numbers of white women to do what they thought they could for enslaved women as in deeply educating women who already had benevolent intentions to take actions that would effectively address the problem instead of replicating power inequalities.

Consciously writing within an abolitionist framework and tradition, Jacobs pulled back the veil from a topic only indirectly alluded to in most antislavery discourse: the sexual exploitation of slave women by white masters. As Christina Accomando has noted, Jacobs's narrative "issues a call to activism—a demand to reframe the law and redefine standards of womanhood."²⁰ Jacobs's stated intention in *Incidents* is to make a political and moral argument about the cruel and morally corrupting effects of slavery itself ("how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations"),²¹ and in that way shares many of the same rhetorical intentions and

strategies as Jones and Allen's narrative. Among the book's forty-one chapter titles, which define the text's narrative arc as the journey from slavery to freedom, many are given explicitly political titles, such as "The Slave Who Dared to Feel Like a Man,"²² "What Slaves are Taught to Think of the North," "The Church and Slavery," and "The Fugitive Slave Law." Such titles give further indication of Jacobs's purposes and how she wishes readers to understand her story, not simply as a personal story but as one that calls into question systems or institutions such as organized religion, the law, Southern ideology, and the regard of slaves as property rather than humans with legal rights.²³ As we shall see, within this larger argument about the moral and political evil of slavery, Jacobs's text also provides a compelling counterargument to the proslavery discourse that insists slavery is a benevolent institution and that depends on a belief in black unreadiness and incapacity to act as equal, contributing members of society.

Of the three most commonly noted sub-genres of slave narratives—stories of religious redemption, stories supporting the abolitionist cause, and stories of racial progress—Jacobs's text falls most squarely into the second.²⁴ As Amy Post had recognized, Child believed Jacobs' story was "well calculated to take hold of many minds, that will not attend to *arguments* against slavery."²⁵ For her readers, Jacobs models a kind of benevolence that rests on reciprocity. If they will withhold judgment about her life circumstances, she will confide in them and educate them in the school of slavery. She is not asking them for pity but for openness to her argument. If they will listen, she is giving them a gift of understanding normally unavailable to them because of their social position as white women. The emotional risk she takes in

doing so perhaps inspires her readers to rise to the occasion and face the ugly truths she presents. In *Incidents*, Jacobs worked to capture the minds of her female readers by also engaging their emotions, employing a number of the conventions of the sentimental fiction and social commentary of the time, and hoping thereby to make them more receptive to her underlying rational and persuasive argument.²⁶ Yet to avoid the potential traps of sentimentalism while moving her white female readers to identify with her across the chasm of race and to take action, she needed to demonstrate both her similarities with them as women and how the system of slavery compromised those shared values and aspirations about femininity and propriety. To this end, Jacobs faced two primary rhetorical problems in accomplishing the book's purpose: overcoming possible moral condemnation of her sexual behavior and inviting sympathy without being seen as an object of pity.

Rhetorical Problems Faced by Jacobs

Jacobs carefully constructs her rhetoric not simply to activate readers' idealism but to make the case that benevolence that really matters necessarily presses them to engage a more realistic perspective on slavery, from a woman who knows first-hand. To overcome the first rhetorical problem she faces, countering possible condemnation for what readers might view as her sexual promiscuity, Jacobs demonstrates both that she shares her readers' conventional sexual mores and sentimental views of romantic relationships and that slavery makes those impossible for most slaves to live out. By doing so, Jacobs avoids being perceived as sexually promiscuous, which was often used as evidence of the depravity of African Americans and as justification for denying them full citizenship. For example, she

explains that when her first suitor, a free black man, proposed to marry and even buy her, Dr. Flint refused to consent. Although Linda loved this man “with all the ardor of a young girl’s first love,” because of her status as a slave, she recognized “that the laws gave no sanction to the marriage of such”²⁷ and rationally decided that “for *his* sake, I felt that I ought not to link his fate with my own unhappy destiny. . . . Hard as it was to bring my feelings to it . . . I advised him to go to the Free States,” accepting the hard reality that “the dream of my girlhood was over.”²⁸ In this and many similar episodes in the narrative, such as Linda’s later pragmatic decision to take a white lover, Jacobs draws an emotional contrast between the options open to her and to her white readers even as she demonstrates her individual agency and resistance within the constraints of the institution of slavery. Jacobs’s white female readers benefit from white male protection but she does not. In fact, her master is her sexual predator. He denies her the possibility of the limited protection of a free black man and she gains only limited white male protection by taking her white lover. Having surmounted the judgments readers might pass on her own moral character, Jacobs rhetorically reverses the circumstances when Linda questions the “honor” of Southern gentlemen: “Slaveholders pride themselves upon being honorable men; but if you were to hear the enormous lies they tell their slaves, you would have small respect for their veracity.”²⁹

The second major rhetorical problem faced by Jacobs is how to avoid the failure of sympathetic identification that other scholars have identified as the result of most sentimental fiction—that is, to avoid falling into the trap of engaging white female readers only superficially, evoking pity at the expense of the enslaved without

acknowledging the philosophical contradictions of the nation's founding and the complicity of the readers themselves. Despite the obvious differences between sentimental narratives and slave narratives, Jacobs' work takes advantage of their shared purpose of creating sympathy for the subject, using sentimental conventions to meet readers' expectations of depictions of female vulnerability and benevolence while also pushing the reader to acknowledge the systemic plight of the enslaved and to act on that awareness through social and political advocacy. Jacobs prompts her readers to move from a complacent or smug approach to benevolence to a stage in which they struggle with the contested meanings of "help" and ponder the underlying causes of enslaved women's need for assistance. As an example of the failure of sympathy, after Linda has been sent to Dr. Flint's plantation as a punishment for insolence, Miss Fanny, the great-aunt of Dr. Flint and the sister of Aunt Marthy's former mistress, is disturbed by Linda's situation, and when she asks Linda if she can do anything to help her, Linda replies that she thinks not:

She condoled me in her own peculiar way; saying she wished that I and all my grandmother's family were at rest in our graves, for not until then should she feel any peace about us. The good old soul did not dream that I was planning to bestow peace upon her, with regard to myself and my children; not by death, but by securing our freedom.³⁰

In her own mind, Linda thereby rejects Miss Fanny's pity and solidifies plans to enact her own self-efficacy.

The belief that the only escape from slavery was death, not integration into society, prevailed among even the most sympathetic white friends. Even Miss Fanny, who Linda describes as “the good old lady who paid fifty dollars for my grandmother for the purpose of making her free, when she stood on the auction block,”³¹ lacks a vision of a society in which black persons can operate autonomously from white people. While Miss Fanny acts benevolently toward Aunt Marthy in buying her freedom, that act does not estrange Miss Fanny from Dr. Flint in any way. For Miss Fanny to truly help Linda, she would have to try to purchase Linda’s freedom at the risk of courting anger from Flint, who, as the readers know, has refused to sell Linda to anyone. Miss Fanny’s purchase of Aunt Marthy was a relatively uncomplicated act of benevolence that did not threaten her familial relations. Perhaps aware of Flint’s simultaneous malice and attachment toward Linda, Miss Fanny holds back from taking any bold action on her behalf. Instead she reverts to the relatively weak position of wishing for the death of Linda and all her family, a perversion of notions of life-giving benevolence. Surely Jacobs constructed this scene to suggest the decreasing motivation of white people to act benevolently toward the enslaved as the costs of such benevolence increase. Linda rejects Miss Fanny’s pity and her desire to offer unspecified help; she plans instead to relieve Miss Fanny’s distress by escaping. Writing in the tradition of slave narratives, Jacobs focuses *Incidents* clearly on the situation of the enslaved black person, thereby not allowing effect to displace event, which, as Goddu has noted, “tends to relocate the horror of slavery from the slave’s experience to the white viewer’s response.”³² By introducing her readers to slave

women as agents rather than as objects of pity, Jacobs avoids the failure of sympathetic identification that would have undermined her argument.

Destabilizing the Claim That Slavery Is a Benevolent Institution

By characterizing slavery not as a benevolent institution to slaves but as an instrument of self-interested slaveholders, Jacobs reconceptualizes benevolence as something that can involve black agency. Rendering the enslaved not as passive recipient of what the master deems benevolent, but rejecting the master's terms when necessary and defining benevolence on her own terms, Jacobs conveys black agency in two ways: by rejecting what whites term benevolent, and by herself acting benevolently toward whites. Jacobs writes Linda as a character who rejects her received identity, adopts a chosen identity, and recognizes the performativity that enables each. Gift theory would suggest that a gift recipient should not indicate what gift is desired, but rather accept what is given, since the proper function of gift-giving is to strengthen social ties rather than threaten them. In contrast, my reading suggests that Linda rejects gifts that would reinforce the bonds of domination between her master and herself because she can tell they are not gifts meant to strengthen mutually agreeable social ties. Jacobs uses many references to the subject of benevolence, a staple of the sentimental literature with which her readers would be familiar, to support her argument about the immorality of slavery and the fitness of African Americans for full inclusion in American life. In the incident described above, for example, rather than using the theme of imperiled femininity so common to nineteenth-century melodrama and sentimental literature to introduce a benevolent rescuer, Jacobs demonstrates Miss Fanny's helplessness and inability to offer her

anything useful and Dr. Flint's predatory rather than protective inclinations toward Linda.³³ Instead, Linda becomes the architect of her own journey to freedom. Time and time again in her narrative, Jacobs presents scenes that clearly contest proslavery claims. She rejects the idea that the institution of slavery is itself a form of benevolence for which slaves should be grateful. She also denies the corollary of the concept of slavery as a benevolent institution: that blacks are lazy, morally depraved, and therefore in need of white supervision and the civilizing effects of Christianity.

In a scene that perhaps most directly destabilizes the myth of the benevolent master, to give but one example, Dr. Flint announces to Linda his supposedly benevolent plan to build her a small home away from the town and "to make a lady" of her. Linda correctly reads his intention not as beneficent but as predatory, yet another attempt to make her his concubine and thus to further degrade rather than elevate her as he claims.³⁴ When Linda rejects Flint's "gift" of a cottage and informs him she is pregnant by her self-chosen white lover, Flint becomes enraged and exclaims, "Curse you! You obstinate girl! I could grind your bones to powder!" Labeling her resistance to his wishes "criminal,"³⁵ he characterizes himself as benevolent, claiming that "you are blinded now; but hereafter you will be convinced that your master was your best friend," and depicts Linda as ungrateful, accusing her of turning aside all of his "good intentions" and "lenity" and charging that her "ingratitude chafes me beyond endurance." Perhaps Flint was counting on Linda following the old colloquialism, "Don't look a gift horse in the mouth," which means a gift recipient should be grateful for whatever gift is given and not assess its value (or, in this case, its potential damage). Linda, however, examines the "gift" critically.

When she continues to defy him, Flint eventually drops his benevolent stance, his angry words vividly revealing the power relations and violent threat behind his supposed benevolence: “I don’t know what keeps me from killing you.”³⁶ Not fooled or swayed by Flint’s interpretation of this event, she explicitly labels it as simply another example of “the old threadbare discourse about his forbearance and my ingratitude.”³⁷ When Flint promises one “last act of mercy”—to take care of Linda and the child and to forgive her “insolence” and “crime” if she cuts off all communication with the child’s father—Linda directly challenges the schema in which Flint imagines himself as the benefactor and her as the ungrateful slave, declaring that she is “unwilling to have my child supported by a man who had cursed it and me also.”³⁸ Despite Flint’s past threats to kill Linda and to sell her children, and despite his physical and verbal abuse, Linda enacts both her own agency and a counterargument to the habitual discourse through which he justifies his position as a slave owner by calling upon her sentiments and strength as a woman: “I had a woman’s pride, and a mother’s love for my children. . . . My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will. There is might in each.”³⁹ Jacobs’s invocation of womanly virtues—virtues frequently held up as model female traits in sentimental literature--would have especially appealed to her female readers.

Jacobs further disproves the myth of the benevolent master by extending her argument to the mistress as well, showing Mrs. Flint as, unlike Linda, markedly lacking in the womanly virtues of compassion, charity, and care.⁴⁰ In one very telling scene, for instance, when Aunt Marthy, as everyone calls her, became ill, “many ladies, who were her customers, called to bring her some little comforts,” although

Mrs. Flint did not—at least until “she found other ladies in the neighborhood were so attentive, not wishing to be outdone in Christian charity, she also sallied forth, in magnificent condescension.”⁴¹ Even then, Mrs. Flint demonstrates a shocking lack of maternal feeling when she is told that Linda’s son, Benny, is lame because of a dog bite, departing “with these Christian words”: “I’m glad of it. I wish he had killed him. It would be good news to send to his mother. *Her* day will come. The dogs will grab *her* yet.”

Throughout her narrative, Jacobs repeatedly appeals to her readers’ understanding of the cult of true womanhood to persuade them to see slavery in an anti-sentimental light and to evaluate the moral climate of their own homes. To this end, Jacobs portrays Mrs. Flint as disregarding her sisterhood with other women, albeit enslaved, and neglecting the proper domestic role of a nineteenth-century woman. Linda reports, “Mrs. Flint . . . had not the strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped” with equanimity. Having shown Mrs. Flint’s inability to act as a virtuous woman, Jacobs turns toward Mrs. Flint’s behavior as a Christian. According to Linda, although a churchgoer, “partaking of the Lord’s supper did not seem to put her in a Christian frame of mind” for she expresses no sympathy for the suffering of her slave.⁴² Indicting Mrs. Flint for failing as a moral guardian of the home and the nation, Jacobs suggests that her own enactment of proper female behavior qualifies her for citizenship. Jacobs engages issues of moral and political philosophy and grounds them in the specific historical context of slavery in the South in the mid-nineteenth-century.

Beyond singling out Mrs. Flint for her hypocrisy as a woman and a Christian, Jacobs generalizes her commentary to indict religion as an institution complicit in slavery. In the chapter titled “The Church and Slavery,” for instance, Jacobs refutes the pro-slavery argument that enslaving Africans did them the favor of converting them to Christianity by noting the hypocrisy of benevolent Christians who “send the Bible to heathen abroad, and neglect the heathen at home. I am glad that missionaries go out to the dark corners of the earth; but I ask them not to overlook the dark corners at home. Talk to American slaveholders as you talk to savages in Africa. Tell *them* it is wrong to traffic in men.”⁴³ Here Linda inverts the image of the “heathen abroad” to signify the “heathen at home,” white male slaveholders who not only buy and sell human beings as property, but behave lasciviously to the slaves under their own roofs, destroying the home’s sanctity.

Jacobs further destabilizes proslavery claims that slavery is a benevolent institution by giving examples of slave owners’ ingratitude toward faithful slaves, accusing them of being the ungrateful ones. For example, she is critical of slaveholders’ practice of “getting rid of *old* slaves, whose lives have been worn out in their service,” recounting the tale of an old woman “who for seventy years faithfully served her master” and “had become almost helpless, from hard labor and disease” but was left behind “to be sold to any body [sic] who would give twenty dollars for her” when her owners moved to Alabama.⁴⁴ Even Linda’s grandmother, portrayed in the book as a model of virtue who, if white, would be considered an ideal citizen, had suffered from ill treatment by her owners while a slave. In one passage, Jacobs writes, “Notwithstanding my grandmother’s long and faithful service to her owners, not one

of her children escaped the auction block. These God-breathing machines are no more, in the sight of their masters, than the cotton they plant, or the horses they tend.”⁴⁵ By interrupting the thought beginning “these God-breathing machines are no more” with the phrase “in the sight of their masters,” Jacobs leads the reader to believe for an instant that the children have died, although the portion of the sentence referring to the auction block makes it clear that they have been sold away, suggesting that such permanent separation is the equivalent of death in a slave mother’s eyes.⁴⁶ Thus Jacobs here enacts at the sentence level her larger rhetorical strategy of interrupting and revealing the cruelty masked by proslavery rhetoric in the narrative as a whole.⁴⁷

Refusing to demonize all white slaveholders, Jacobs acknowledges that even white slaveholders can be capable of generosity to black persons, although she often adeptly reinterprets whites’ “gifts” to slaves. For example, when Miss Fanny gives Linda’s grandmother the gift of her freedom by buying her at auction and setting her free, Jacobs recognizes Miss Fanny’s act as kind-hearted but also undercuts its generosity by making clear that Miss Fanny was able to afford it because other potential buyers, appalled by Dr. Flint’s refusal to honor his sister’s wish that Aunt Marthy should be emancipated upon her death, refused to bid for her. In another example of reinterpreting whites’ “gifts” to slaves, Jacobs demonstrates that even seemingly benevolent acts or sincere gifts can carry personally painful social messages.⁴⁸ Linda recalls how, after her daughter’s christening, her father’s old mistress “clasped a gold chain around my baby’s neck. I thanked her for this kindness; but I did not like the emblem. I wanted no chain to be fastened on my

daughter, not even if its links were of gold.”⁴⁹ Linda recognizes the potential symbolism of the chain to which the mistress seems oblivious; the mistress’s presumably kind intentions do not reassure Linda of her affection but rather remind her of the constant threat that slavery will pose for her daughter as she grows up. According to gift theorists, a gift usually functions to create and strengthen social ties. My application of gift theory to this case recognizes that the gift of the necklace reminds Linda of the bonds of chattel slavery rather than of mutually rewarding social ties.

As Kenneth S. Greenberg and other scholars have shown, one of the premises undergirding the argument that slavery was beneficent was that gift giving, one form of benevolence, “flowed in only one direction in the master-slave relationship,” from the slave owner to the slave.⁵⁰ Yet Linda claims that any comforts she knew as a girl came from her grandmother’s earnings, not from Flint: “I was indebted to *her* for all my comforts. . . . It was *her* labor that supplied my scanty wardrobe.”⁵¹ Flint’s failure to provide at least exposes his inability to enact proper gift-giving and, at most, his failure as a Southern gentleman. As Greenberg explains, Southern gentlemen gave gifts in part because it was one of the ways they distinguished themselves from slaves, who did not own property but were themselves property. Thus the capacity for gift giving implies dominance over others who are unequal and freedom among equals: “To be immersed in a system of reciprocal gift giving,” in contrast, “was to be part of a community of freemen.”⁵² In this case, however, Aunt Marthy proves to fulfill the gift-giving obligations of a Southern gentleman better than Flint and therefore reaffirms her belonging to a community of free people.

Reversing the Typical White-to-Black Direction of Benevolence

In addition to challenging the characterization of slavery as a benevolent institution, Jacobs disproves the tenet of proslavery discourse that gifts flow only in one direction and demonstrates the agency of black persons in two scenes in which she portrays her grandmother, Aunt Marthy, as a benefactor to white persons. In the first of these, which occurs very early in the narrative, Linda relates an incident in which her grandmother shows generosity to her mistress rather than the other way around. Aunt Marthy had created a business baking and selling crackers to customers in the local community that was so successful that she had been saving to buy her children's freedom.⁵³ Knowing this, her mistress had "begged" her for a loan to buy two silver candelabra, an act that suggests at least some recognition of equality between the mistress and Aunt Marthy. Ironically, black equality with whites is the exact premise for which Jacobs argues throughout the narrative. According to Jacobs, Aunt Marthy's mistress had "begged" her for a loan of three hundred dollars, promising timely repayment. Knowing that "no promise or writing given to a slave is legally binding," Aunt Marthy nonetheless lent her the money, which she had saved to purchase her children, "trust[ing] solely to her [mistress's] honor."⁵⁴ The loan, however, is never repaid; as Linda sardonically notes, such is "the honor of a slaveholder to a slave!" Upon the death of her mistress, Aunt Marthy requested repayment from her estate from Dr. Flint, the mistress's son-in-law and executor of the estate, who claimed "the estate was insolvent and the law prohibited payment."⁵⁵ By depicting Dr. Flint as hiding behind the veil of the law to avoid repayment of the loan but retaining the decorative candlesticks that were purchased with that money,

Jacobs documents white persons' use of the law and expropriation of black labor to deny any debt to black persons or the need for gratitude toward them.⁵⁶ In avoiding the loan repayment, Flint not only retracts any prior recognition of equality between slaveowner and slave, but also uses that occasion to announce that although her mistress "had always promised her that, at her death, she should be free," he intends to sell her. In this episode, Jacobs both disrupts readers' perceptions of gift-giving as operating in one direction only and dares to criticize white recipients' ingratitude toward black benefactors. In so doing, she illustrates black capability to understand and refute proslavery discourse and highlights Aunt Marthy's economic self-sufficiency.

This loan-request scene suggests a linkage between the individual example of Aunt Marthy's generosity toward her mistress and the coerced generosity of generations of American slaves whose labor built the physical infrastructure of the nation and facilitated its economic strength. Of the silver candlesticks, Linda remarks, "I presume they will be handed down in the family, from generation to generation," alluding to the fact that slaves were also handed down within families through inheritance, as was the case with Linda and her grandmother, and showing her understanding of the economic legacy of slavery. In other words, white slaveholders' families accumulate wealth and enjoy cumulative gains in their inheritances over time, enabling them to maintain their roles as benefactors to enslaved families, at whose expense the slaveholders' gains materialized, and for whom economic disadvantages accumulate over the generations too, thus cementing blacks' roles as needy recipients. The candelabras represent the ingratitude of a white recipient to a

black benefactor and the expropriation of both the grandmother's labor and the potential freedom of her children so the white mistress can purchase a commodity. Denying the debt to Aunt Marthy or the need for gratitude toward her amounts to a refusal to acknowledge black benevolence and black capability.

In a second episode in which Aunt Marthy serves as a black benefactor to white persons, Jacobs portrays her as one who has left behind the constraints of slavery and embraced self-sufficiency in every way. To this end, Jacobs constructs a scene in which Aunt Marthy invites the town constable and a slavecatcher into her home for Christmas dinner, enacting through this scene of hospitality the capacity of black persons to be self-sufficient contributors to society, in this case by providing and sharing a feast.⁵⁷ Although Jacobs makes clear that this act of hospitality had the ulterior motive of taking Linda's pursuers on a tour of her house to show them Linda was not there, thereby obtaining a greater measure of security for her granddaughter, Aunt Marthy treats her guests graciously, as social equals rather than as needy recipients or as ruthless antagonists, even giving them presents of pudding for their wives as they depart. While the constable and slavecatcher seem to accept the holiday dinner invitation as their due as white persons and her social superiors, Jacobs presents Aunt Marthy as more than their equal. As a refutation of whites' assumption of black neediness and criminality, Linda recounts a muster in which "low whites" searched the houses of black persons and robbed them of anything worth taking. When such a group discovered a large trunk containing bedding and tablecloths in her grandmother's house and one of the men asked where she got these goods, Aunt Marthy responded that "You may be sure we didn't pilfer 'em from your houses,"

declaring both her economic self-sufficiency and moral superiority to those who found it acceptable to steal from slaves.⁵⁸ To perhaps invite a sense of identification on the part of her white female readers, elsewhere in the text Linda mentions that her grandmother has china cups, silver spoons, a “snow-white” tablecloth, fresh cream, hot muffins, tea rusks, delicious sweetmeats, and an old-fashioned buffet cabinet, all the accoutrements of a respectable hostess, demonstrating both her economic success and female sensibilities.⁵⁹

To underscore Aunt Marthy’s dignity, capability, and strong moral compass, Jacobs characterizes her grandmother as “a very spirited woman,” respected by many in the community for her intelligence, character, and long, faithful service to the family. In this scene, she contrasts these virtues with the morals of her guests, especially those of the slavecatcher, a “free colored man” who ought to feel some bond of compassion for others of his color but who “for the sake of passing himself off for white . . . was ready to kiss the slaveholders’ feet” and “always ready to do any mean work for the sake of currying favor with white people,”⁶⁰ including spending many nights hunting for Linda.⁶¹ As social historians would argue, whites found ways of dividing blacks so that they would be less likely to collectively challenge white power, but, from Jacobs’s perspective, this does not absolve the slavecatcher of responsibility for falling into the white man’s clutches. Linda also condemns the behavior of the constable, who at least “did not pretend to be what he was not” and was, therefore, “superior to his companion,” but who nonetheless relished his authority to whip slaves caught out at night after curfew, which he deemed “a privilege to be coveted.”⁶² For her granddaughter’s sake, however, Aunt

Marthy takes the moral high ground and shows kindness to the two men, reminiscent of the Christian admonition to “turn the other cheek.”⁶³

In the same chapter, “Christmas Festivities,” Jacobs provides another example of the agency and sharp-wittedness of the enslaved more generally, describing the “greatest attraction” on Christmas morning, the Johnkannaus, an accepted social ritual in which slaves would beg for rum and money from white people, who were fully expected to provide the requested “donations.”⁶⁴ Although the white persons participating in this ritual were seemingly acting hospitably, they notably did not invite the parading slaves into their homes, which might denote social equality among the slaveholder’s much vaunted “family white and black.” Instead, the slaves would take the money or rum home with them to enjoy with one another. Furthermore, these “donations” were not made solely out of the kindness of the slave owner’s heart, as Genovese and others have pointed out, but out of a recognition that not doing so would cause dissension among the slaves, who felt such gifts were part of their due.⁶⁵ The slaves would enforce the benevolence of the master largely by the threat of serenading him with a mocking song if he did not contribute:

Poor massa, so dey say;

Down in de heel, so dey say;

Got no money, so dey say;

Not one shillin, so dey say;

God A’mighty bress you, so dey say.⁶⁶

This song and the entire ritual demonstrate slaves' sense of reciprocal relations and obligations and, whether white persons of the time would want to admit it or not, the possibility of black resistance and agency even within the constraints of slavery. As Peter Reed has asserted, the invocation of the Jonkonnu ritual in Jacobs's text conveys the potential for resistance, liberation, and reversals of power in the complicated dynamics of interactions between slaveholders and the enslaved.⁶⁷ The reversals of power embedded in the Jonkonnu ritual resemble the reversals of power that Jacobs illustrates when she depicts black benefactors aiding white recipients. Such reversals depend on performativity, thus naming and producing identities and power relations.

Moving from Jacobs's *Incidents* to Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*

Although both write as women and as African Americans at mid-century, Keckley positions herself differently from Jacobs due to her varying readership, experiences, the times in which she wrote her book and the purpose for which she wrote it. Emerging from different contexts, Jacobs's and Keckley's books serve different purposes, because at the time of Jacobs's publication, the nation's political and social context centered around slavery and its abolition whereas, for Keckley, the political and social context focused more on reunification, if not reconciliation, between North and South after the Civil War and Emancipation. Whereas Jacobs writes for white Northern women, Keckley writes for Southern readers as well as Northern ones, balancing the tension between being critical of slavery and the South and yet not offending or condemning individual Southerners. Keckley, like Jacobs, argues against a partial representation of African Americans' capabilities and

contributions, in Keckley's case by providing a fuller representation of what formerly enslaved African Americans can become after emancipation. Both Harriet Jacobs's and Elizabeth Keckley's narratives prove true to their status as self-conscious chronicles. They read as slave narratives with the avowed purpose of such chronicles--to challenge the dominant historical perspective. In contrast to framing benevolence as a dynamic in which white benefactors give to black recipients, thus reinforcing the existing social hierarchy, Jacobs's and Keckley's memoirs give equal credence to benevolence as a dynamic in which black benefactors give to white recipients, an arrangement that unsettles the existing social hierarchy. From two African American women who rejected white friends' offers to buy their freedom⁶⁸ and who both exploited the underlying paradox of slavery--that the enslaved can damage the master's reputation--come narratives that celebrate black benevolence, continuing the legacy of Jones and Allen and inviting further variations from future African American authors.

Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*

A few biographical facts about Keckley reveal her pride, independence, agency and competence, making it easier to see why Keckley would become a black American author who would depict black benefactors and white recipients. Elizabeth Keckley was born to enslaved parents in Virginia in 1818 and later moved to St. Louis with a branch of her master's family.⁶⁹ At various times, her master punished her severely for her "stubborn pride."⁷⁰ Another white man sexually harassed her and she bore a son. She later married a black man who falsely claimed he was free, but, weary of his dissipation, she left him after eight years. Like her mother before her,

Keckley was a highly skilled seamstress and designer, or modiste, who not only sewed for her owners but developed a clientele of prominent St. Louis ladies. After buying her freedom in 1860, Keckley established her own dressmaking business in Washington, D.C. Keckley worked in the White House for four years, becoming Mrs. Lincoln's confidante as well as her modiste.⁷¹ During the war Keckley founded the Ladies' Contraband Association in Washington, run by free African American women, which helped outfit the thousands of "contraband" escaped slaves who enlisted in all-black Union regiments.⁷² After the assassination of President Lincoln, Keckley continued to befriend Mrs. Lincoln, accompanying her on her trip back to Illinois. Later Keckley assisted her in her ill-starred attempt to sell her clothing to help pay off the enormous debts she had secretly accrued during her years as First Lady, which came to be known as "the old clothes scandal" when news of it hit the papers. Having declared in the preface that she would not have written a book about Mrs. Lincoln "had Mrs. Lincoln's acts never become public property," Keckley published *Behind the Scenes or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* in 1868.⁷³

The book's reception reflects a readership that would generally view Keckley as audacious for claiming authority to write a book about so prominent a figure in the national landscape. Any insider account of President and Mrs. Lincoln's activities would have attracted significant attention and sensationalism; in Keckley's own words, "no President and his family, heretofore occupying this mansion, ever excited so much curiosity" as the Lincolns.⁷⁴ To name just a few reasons, Mary Todd Lincoln was the daughter of a slaveowner from Kentucky and she suffered from depression,

erratic behavior, and periods of instability throughout her life. The fact that the author of *Behind the Scenes* was a former slave perhaps increased the drama surrounding the book's release.

The general public expressed outrage at the book.⁷⁵ Keckley's revelations about Mrs. Lincoln in the book ultimately drew a negative picture of the First Lady; although it may well have been defensible for Keckley to write the book for the reasons she gives, Keckley appropriately expected the book to shock and anger readers.⁷⁶ Certainly Keckley's New York publisher, Carleton & Company, had primed the public to expect a sensationalized insider's account, their prepublication advertisement describing Keckley's book in language typical of the period's sentimental literature, using terms like "romantic" and "tragic." In Thurlow Weed's *Commercial Advertiser* the publisher advertised it as "A Literary Thunderbolt!" and called its contents "startling." Later, in a new advertising campaign, the New York publisher Carleton & Company heralded the book's subtitle as "The Great Sensational Disclosure by Mrs. Keckley."⁷⁷ Thus, advertising for the book may have shaped its reception.

Many white readers, in the North as well as the South, were simply not ready to accept the book's portrayal of a self-sufficient black woman serving as not only an intimate of but benefactor to an elite white woman. One reviewer called *Behind the Scenes* an "atrocious invasion of her [Mrs. Lincoln's] privacy" and "the vile slanders of an angry negro servant,"⁷⁸ while another condemned the book as "the back-stairs gossip of negro servant girls."⁷⁹ After reading the book supposedly written in her defense, Mary Todd Lincoln renounced Keckley and the remaining Lincoln son,

Robert Lincoln, refused to speak to her. Ultimately, though, the sensational headlines about Keckley's book only lasted a few months and the book, having sold few copies, was eventually withdrawn from stores.⁸⁰ According to biographer Jennifer Fleischner, some of Keckley's white customers "quietly disappeared" after the book's publication.⁸¹ The text was largely forgotten until it was reprinted in the late 1960s, when it began to receive new attention as a primary source for scholars studying the Lincoln administration and family.⁸²

Keckley's narrative reflects the American dream of upward social mobility but places that dream within the reach of African Americans, thus breaking a racial taboo that would reserve social mobility only for white Americans. Here, Keckley achieves some measure of "chaotic justice," defined by John Ernest as an "historically informed, ongoing negotiation of the overwhelming complexity and vicissitudes of a society shaped by the ideologies of race."⁸³ Her ascendancy includes becoming a benefactor to whites, a visible marker of elevated social status. In her preface, Keckley claims two primary purposes for writing this book: to give an account of a life—her own—that others have found "eventful" and "full of romance," and to dampen the public's criticism of Mrs. Lincoln in the wake of the Old Clothes Scandal.⁸⁴ Although she also goes to some lengths in the preface not to take sides in the recent hostilities between the North and South, going so far as to seemingly blame the Constitution rather than individual white people for the injustice of slavery, the narrative of her life is itself a potent argument for black capability and readiness for economic, political, and social inclusion into the newly reunited nation. Technically a slave narrative, like Jacobs's, her focus on her ascent from slavery and dependency to

the highest circles of American society and self-sufficiency falls most clearly into the subgenre of narratives of racial progress. Her rise as a successful business owner and arbiter of elite white women's fashion and social status in the nation's capital markedly contrasts the generic poor seamstress story that would have been familiar to most readers of sentimental fiction, in which the protagonist declines morally.⁸⁵ At a historical turning point for white and black Americans alike, when it was still unclear whether reconciliation between North and South and the integration of millions of newly freed slaves into society were possible, Keckley offers her life as an example that transcends the assumptions of the political, social, and literary discourses of the time to show black persons as contributing members of society rather than an inferior and needy class of people.

While several scholars analyze *Behind the Scenes* in ways that have indirectly informed my argument, these analyses tend to be tangential to my primary focus on black benefactors and white recipients. For example, Steve Criniti views Keckley as a "fairy godmother" figure to Mrs. Lincoln and Michael Berthold briefly articulates Keckley's thematization of charitability in her book (even labeling her a "philanthropist"), but neither explicitly examines Keckley as a black benefactor to a white woman nor focuses on her work as a benefactor within the text of *Behind the Scenes*.⁸⁶ Similarly, Xiomara Santamarina elucidates Keckley's recasting of slave labor in order to "produce herself as an agent rather than solely as a victim of bondage."⁸⁷ My study certainly foregrounds Keckley's identity as an agent rather than a passive victim, but does so by recasting certain acts of labor as acts of benevolence to her master's family and Mrs. Lincoln. Finally, Carolyn Sorisio

explains how Keckley's text disrupts the self-construction of the white American middle class, presenting herself as genteel and pointing out the ungentle behavior of the white women around her.⁸⁸ I argue that Keckley's portrayal of her own benevolence in particular and black benevolence in general disrupts the self-construction of the white American middle class.

Keckley's Treatment of White-to-Black Benevolence

In a reversal of chapter one in my study in which white persons attempt to dismiss the black nurses' services as hired help rather than acts of benevolence, Keckley recasts sentimental white benevolence as economic exchange as a means of asserting her personhood and preserving her dignity. Additionally, Keckley's manner of explaining how she obtains freedom demonstrates her loyalty to her master, patrons, law and country, thus appealing to her readers' sense of virtue. To give but one example, Keckley insists on buying herself and her son for \$1200, even though her master tells her to simply cross the nearby Mississippi River into Illinois to be free, explaining to him, "I do not wish to be free in such a manner. . . . I will only be free by such means as the laws of the country provide."⁸⁹ Keckley does not appear to harbor bitterness toward her master or disrespect for the law of the land but rather casts herself as a moral, law-abiding person. Willing to accept legitimate help from the North or the South to gain freedom but refusing to gain it through unlawful means, she decides not to become a fugitive but to embrace freedom only in a way that enables her to live a respectable, self-sufficient life. Lacking the funds to purchase freedom, she resolves to go to New York and appeal to the "benevolence of the people," but when Mrs. Le Bourgeois, one of her patrons, hears of her plan, she

states, “it would be a shame to allow you to go North to *beg* for what we should *give* you” and so ends up raising the funds for the purchase of Keckley’s freedom.⁹⁰ The patrons present the money as a gift; Keckley represents it as an amount “advanced,” thereby converting it into an economic transaction and avoiding the appearance of accepting charity. Using the insights of gift theory, which insists a gift creates an obligation to reciprocate, my reading of this example recognizes Keckley’s conscious choice to perform like the business woman that she is rather than identify herself as a charity recipient. Despite her unsentimental approach, Keckley uses sentimental language that would be familiar to and expected by her readers to describe the feelings associated with her new freedom: “Free, free! What a glorious ring to the word. Free! the bitter heart-struggle was over. . . . Free! the earth wore a brighter look, and the very stars seemed to sing with joy.”⁹¹ Keckley maintains that she “consented to accept” her patrons’ funds “only as a loan,” staying in full control of her position as an economic agent. In her typically conscientious manner, she “in a short time paid every cent that was so kindly advanced by my lady patrons of St. Louis.”⁹² As she announces elsewhere in the book, Keckley would rather submit to “eternal slavery rather than be regarded with distrust by those whose respect I esteemed.”⁹³

Rhetorical Problems Faced by Keckley

In *Behind the Scenes*, Keckley faces two rhetorical problems that largely parallel those of Jacobs discussed above. First, Keckley has to overcome the possible moral condemnation of her readers, in this case not for her sexual behavior, but for two other reasons: 1) because she has “invited criticism” by writing harshly about

slavery at a time when the South has already been humiliated and the nation is still recovering from the effects of the Civil War; and 2) for sharing confidences about her social “betters.” By bringing up the recent and painful memory of the war, Keckley suggests that the nation must remember what it would rather forget, perhaps stemming from a conviction that slavery cannot be buried before its social consequences are fully acknowledged.⁹⁴ Second, Keckley needs to enlist her readers’ sympathy without being considered an object of pity by them.

To avoid her readers’ strong disapproval for her decision to write honestly about slavery’s brutalities, Keckley appeals to her readers’ emotions by embracing forgiveness and friendship in the face of the injustices incurred by law and custom. Keckley does not want to “wound those Southern friends by sweeping condemnation” of slavery and she carefully assigns herself a national identity rather than a regional identity when she claims having “kind, true-hearted friends” in both the North and the South.⁹⁵ Not wishing to alienate either Southern or Northern readers, Keckley seems to send a dual message about her views on slavery in the preface, in which she claims to look at both the “dark” and “bright” side of slavery, though there does not appear to be much of the latter. Consistent with this rhetorical shifting in her preface, later in the book she appears to forgive those who constructed the Confederacy (“even I, who was once a slave, can say to Mr. Jefferson Davis, ‘Peace! You have suffered! Go in peace!’”) and to at least appear even-handed, although ambiguous undertones exist.⁹⁶ She presents an explicitly sympathetic portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson Davis in her chapter about them, for instance, though she pointedly chooses not to return South with them, saying, “I preferred to cast my lot among the people of the North.”⁹⁷

Keckley does not blame Southern slaveholders for slavery, but rather she holds the “fathers who framed the Constitution for the United States” responsible.⁹⁸ Her reference to a then ninety-year-old document distances her contemporaries from responsibility for slavery, for, as she explains, “The law descended to them [Southern slaveholders], and it was but natural that they should recognize it, since it manifestly was their interest to do so.” She delicately undercuts this distancing, however, by naming the wrong and deprivation she experienced, giving subjectivity only to “custom:” “And yet a wrong was inflicted on me; a cruel custom deprived me of my liberty, . . . my dearest right.” Here Keckley engages issues of moral and political philosophy, thereby claiming an understanding of the foundations of citizenship.

As one way of overcoming her readers’ second reason for potentially judging her negatively--for sharing intimate details about the private life of one of her social “superiors”--Keckley points out that many others have already criticized Mrs. Lincoln, often without fair justification. Unlike “the public journals [that] vilified Mrs. Lincoln” and ladies in Washington social circles who “gloated over many a tale of scandal” about her, Keckley claims the right to speak publically of Mrs. Lincoln’s history as a party with first-hand information who can therefore give a more accurate and contextualized assessment of Mrs. Lincoln’s actions.⁹⁹ Reminding readers that “none of us is perfect,” and that Mrs. Lincoln’s “life, like all lives, has its good side as well as its bad side” Keckley justifies speaking with “utmost frankness” in regard to the former First Lady’s “faults” as well as her “honest motives.” Like Jones and Allen’s *Narrative*, Keckley bases the authority of her narrative on her direct knowledge of the incident under consideration and counters the claims made by those

whose information is more speculative. She returns to this theme several times throughout her account. As she explains in a later chapter, early in her employment in the White House, not knowing what to expect of Mrs. Lincoln, having “heard so much, in current and malicious report, of her low life, of her ignorance and vulgarity,” Keckley makes a contrary assessment when she actually meets her: “Report, I soon saw, was wrong”: “No queen,” Keckley asserts, “could have comported herself with more calmness and dignity than did the wife of the President.”¹⁰⁰ Keckley consciously corrects the historical record and potentially blunts criticism of her work, since she has given the readers an example of her evenhandedness.

Another way that Keckley deflects anticipated criticism from her readers for exposing Mrs. Lincoln’s indiscretions is by placing the blame back on Mrs. Lincoln herself. According to Keckley, “Mrs. Lincoln, by her own acts, forced herself into notoriety. . . and invited public criticism.” Keckley believes her book can do “no harm,” for nothing in her book “can place Mrs. Lincoln in a worse light. . . than the light in which she now stands.” For those white readers who might believe black women have no honor to defend, Keckley explains the necessity of safeguarding her own character: “To defend myself I must defend the lady that I have served” because through her others “have partially judged me.” As described in chapter one, Jones and Allen were offended by slander against the black nurses; here Keckley similarly feels her own character traduced through public derision of Mrs. Lincoln.

Further highlighting her own trustworthiness as a witness and perhaps hoping to forestall claims that she was trading on her friendship with Mrs. Lincoln for profit,

Keckley reports that although she was often “approached by unprincipled parties” who thought they could tempt her to “betray the secrets of the domestic circle,”¹⁰¹ she reports telling one such party that (like a sentimental heroine whose virtue is threatened) “sooner than betray the trust of a friend, I would throw myself into the Potomac river,” and insists to the reader that she has “indignantly refused every bribe offered.” She also several times contrasts her unwillingness to judge Mrs. Lincoln’s behavior with other white associates’ and friends’ readiness to evaluate Mrs. Lincoln’s faults. For example, Keckley suggests that, if Mrs. Lincoln had received some of the women who called during her period of mourning instead of refusing them, “perhaps she would have had many warmer friends today than she has” but she exercises polite restraint nonetheless by saying, “But far be it for me to harshly judge the sorrow of any one” and declares that those rebuffed ladies might have “learned to speak more kindly of” Mrs. Lincoln.¹⁰² On another occasion, shortly after Keckley informs the reader she has stayed by Mrs. Lincoln’s side during the “five weeks [she] . . . was confined to her room,” Keckley identifies a lack of manners in Mr. Andrew Johnson, President Lincoln’s successor, who “never called on the widow, or even so much as wrote a line expressing sympathy for her grief and the loss of her husband.”¹⁰³

To address the second rhetorical problem—to gain the sympathies of female readers from both North and South for herself without invoking their pity—Keckley includes several incidents that would presumably invite condemnation of slavery but indirectly qualifies them with the curious claim, anticipating similar claims made by Booker T. Washington, that she finds some “good” in slavery, namely self-reliance,

which she suggests is the byproduct of enslavement.¹⁰⁴ As she states in the preface, “in all things pertaining to life, I can afford to be charitable,” perhaps suggesting that her current status invalidates all of the past abuses done to her, and grants her a standing from which she can show generosity in attitude and action, marking her moral and social superiority to the white Americans who perpetrated injustices toward her.¹⁰⁵ Invoking the horrors of slavery, Keckley divulges the story of her master beating her until she “was unable to leave . . . [her] bed for five days,” of the cook being “whipped for grieving for her lost boy” after he was sold away and how her uncle “hung himself” because it was preferable to being “punished the way . . . [his master] punished” his slaves.¹⁰⁶ Yet Keckley states, “I had been raised in a hardy school”—the school of slavery, and therefore represents herself as an African American who has turned adversity into an education.¹⁰⁷ Demonstrating that she can be charitable in retrospect does not preclude rightful anger however, for Keckley states that soon after a dreadful flogging, “though I tried to smother my anger and to forgive those who had been so cruel to me, it was impossible.”¹⁰⁸ Immediately after sustaining that vicious beating, she makes the effort to forgive but cannot because it is humanly impossible, not because she is incapable or has not made the attempt. Keckley also acknowledges, however, that slavery often has the opposite effect from teaching self-reliance, noting that for many of the newly freed, “dependence had become a part of their second nature.”¹⁰⁹ By naming some of the brutalities of slavery, suggesting that the institution of slavery nurtures positive attributes in some people and negative qualities in others, and yet showing herself to have become self-reliant and mostly forgiving rather than bitter and dependent, Keckley paints a picture

of herself with which readers coming from multiple perspectives can understandably identify. As is true for Keckley and her readers, Keckley seems to assert that ultimately all Americans, white and black, Southern and Northern, suffered in the Civil War--recall Keckley's melodramatic language about the intense fighting: "Oh, the front, with its stirring battle-scenes! Oh, the front, with its ghastly heaps of dead!"¹¹⁰--and now have choices to make about seeking reconciliation in the aftermath.

To further enlist her readers' sympathy, Keckley underscores the affection Mrs. Lincoln has for her, even in moments of social disapproval by others, as a means of winning readers to her side. For example, at the St. Denis Hotel in New York, the clerk refuses to give Keckley a room on the same floor as Mrs. Lincoln (disguised as a Mrs. Clarke). When the clerk insists Keckley take a room in the "dingy, humble quarters" in the attic, Mrs. Lincoln avows her decision to stay on the same floor also, stating, "What is good enough for her is good enough for me."¹¹¹ Later, when Keckley is informed that "servants are not allowed to eat in the large dining room," Mrs. Lincoln becomes indignant at how Keckley is treated by the staff, whom she calls "insolent, overbearing people." This ordeal, in which Mrs. Lincoln hides her true identity and thus is not treated with the according respect, and in which Keckley goes to bed "without a mouthful to eat," enacts female hardship and trial undergone while trying to preserve moral virtue or social respectability, a convention of sentimental novels. Here Keckley introduces the problem of poor treatment of African Americans in the North, implying that the South is not the only section with problems related to race. Neither the formerly proslavery South nor the abolitionist but hypocritical North

can yet comfortably integrate African Americans into society, so Keckley emphasizes female solidarity, downplays regional conflicts, and urges national reconciliation.

Keckley's Use of Black-to-White Benevolence to Assert Agency

Keckley's memoir can thus be viewed as a narrative of how one African American's competence and hard work made it possible for her to build a successful business, one that not only enabled her own economic self-sufficiency but also put her in a position to act as a benefactor to her fellow citizens, white as well as black. Of the two primary instances of Keckley serving as benefactor to white persons, the first—in which she supports her master's family—is primarily an economic form of benevolence, whereas the second instance—in which she befriends Mrs. Lincoln—is primarily an emotional form of benevolence. In the course of these two examples, Keckley elevates her individual agency to a national level and suggests the potential of African Americans as contributing and able citizens in a country that had deemed them inadequate for citizenship. With this shift in focus from the tangible labor of an African American woman to the intangible but very human and admirable qualities she possesses, such as wisdom, sympathy, compassion and patience, Keckley presents herself as a contributing member of society rather than a needy ex-slave. The very terms of the outrage expressed by the predominantly white reading public suggest it was based less on a concern for the supposed wrong done to Mrs. Lincoln than on the potential implications of accepting a black woman as a worthy model of benevolence, civic involvement, and citizenship for whites and blacks alike.

Although Keckley includes in her book an important example of her benevolence to her white master's family when she was still enslaved, she spends

more time focusing on her benevolence to Mrs. Lincoln once she was free and working in the White House. Given that she published her book after Emancipation, when many white Americans felt anxious about the future of the freed blacks, she must have believed it more important to portray herself as a benevolent free black than as a slave acting benevolently while still within the confines of the paternalistic system of slavery. A greater emphasis on the latter might have played into white Americans' notions about the grateful slave. Jacobs, on the other hand, treats Aunt Marthy's major acts of benevolence to white citizens under two different sets of conditions, once while still enslaved and another time after becoming free, in fairly equal measure. Undoubtedly reflecting an awareness (on her publisher's part, if not her own) of what the reading public was interested in, only the first three chapters of Keckley's book depict her pre-Washington life, the remaining twelve offering her personal accounts of the people and events that surrounded the White House during the Civil War. Unlike Jacobs's more politicized chapter titles in *Incidents*, Keckley's chapter titles all allude to people and events, many to famous political figures and their families. These titles, such as "In the Family of Senator Jefferson Davis," "Willie Lincoln's Death-bed," and "The Secret History of Mrs. Lincoln's Wardrobe in New York," convey a familiarity and intimacy with the famous people and events about which she writes that is confirmed in her account, perhaps surprisingly to her readers. Keckley's account is often novelistic in its vivid and detailed description of scenes, and perhaps even in its inclusion of numerous letters, epistolary elements that were common in the novels of the time.¹¹² She often employs sentimental, even

melodramatic language and scenes in her narrative, something to which her readers would have been accustomed.

Behind the Scenes as Socially Subversive

After overcoming the rhetorical problems discussed above, Keckley begins to reverse the social hierarchy by presenting herself not only as equal to white persons, but also as their benefactor and therefore as someone not simply as capable as them but even more so. The first major instance of Keckley as a benefactor to white persons appears in her story of supporting her masters' family while she was still enslaved: "with my needle I kept bread in the mouths of seventeen persons for two years and five months."¹¹³ Editorializing about her circumstances, she says she found herself "working so hard that others might live in comparative comfort, and move in those circles of society to which their birth gave them entrance."¹¹⁴ Despite working toward purchasing her own freedom, Keckley cannot save any money when "Mr. Garland's family claimed so much of my attention—in fact, I supported them—that I was not able to accumulate anything."¹¹⁵ Keckley's inability to buy her own freedom at this point because she is supporting her master financially echoes Jacobs's text in which Aunt Martha cannot buy the freedom of her children because she has loaned the money earmarked for that purpose to her mistress. By outlining the costs to herself and the gains to the Garlands of her extraordinary labor, Keckley makes visible the often unacknowledged connection between the labor of the enslaved and the wealth of both white slaveholding families and the nation. As Xiomara Santamarina notes, Keckley recasts slave labor in order to produce herself as an agent.¹¹⁶ Seeking to relieve some of his financial difficulties, Mr. Garland suggests

that Keckley's mother would be put out to service; for this reason, Keckley steps in and acts out of filial piety to her mother. Echoing the melodramatic language of the sentimental novel, at the thought of her mother's being sent to work for strangers, Keckley declares, "No, a thousand times no! I would rather work my fingers to the bone, bend over my sewing till the film of blindness gathered in my eyes; nay, even beg from street to street."¹¹⁷ Although Keckley intends primarily to aid her mother rather than Mr. Garland, his family still reaps the benefits of Keckley's skilled labor and generosity. Beholden to her for their survival, the Garlands could now expect the dynamics between their family and Keckley to change. Keckley earns their respect and obtains acknowledgment on some level that she could be their equal.

Later in the book a reunion scene between Keckley, a former slave, and her former owner's family after the Civil War that divided them, provides further evidence of Keckley's self-sufficiency and confirms Keckley's capacity to outdo her "betters." During Keckley's five-week visit with her former master's family at Rude's Hill, in Virginia, the affection expressed suggests the possibility of reconciliation within the country, among North and South. One of the grown daughters in her master's family, Miss Nannie, had written to Keckley that she must visit because other family members have gathered and "you only are needed to make the circle complete."¹¹⁸ The family has actually "kept a light burning in the front window" anxiously awaiting Keckley's arrival for ten nights. Admittedly "an object of great curiosity in the neighborhood" whose "association with Mrs. Lincoln, and . . . attachment for the Garlands . . . clothed [her] . . . with romantic interest," the Garlands nonetheless hold a deep affection for Keckley, aside from the fact of her

celebrity.¹¹⁹ In Keckley's earlier letter to her mother she requests, "Give my love to all the family, both white and black," articulating an interracial definition of family (not uncommon among ex-slaves) in which her circle of affection operates.¹²⁰

Keckley writes of the beginning of her visit, "Could my friends of the North have seen that meeting, they would never have doubted again that the mistress had any affection for her former slave. I was carried to the house in triumph. . . and placed in an easy chair before a bright fire" while "the servants looked on in amazement."¹²¹

Keckley's characterization of her reception by the Garlands would seem to support the proslavery ideology of "family white and black." Explaining this affection to Northerners, however, encourages reconciliation, perhaps persuading Keckley's readers of the possibility of equality among black and white, among Northern and Southern "members" of the family. In contrast, Jacobs's white "family" centers on paternalism rather than the potential for equality. This metaphor of a reconstituted "family black and white" seems to offer an image of Keckley as a full-fledged member of the Garland family and thus suggests the possibility of African Americans becoming full-fledged members of the nation. Imagining such a possibility—the social and economic integration of African Americans into the nation as equals, or in Keckley's case, as even more than equal because she was the missing piece that completed the family portrait—reveals Keckley's apparent lack of bitterness toward her former owners.¹²² Keckley's tolerant attitude toward the Garlands demonstrates her moral superiority and contrasts greatly with Mrs. Lincoln's bitterness toward "an ungrateful country" when awarded a "petty sum" from Congress by "men who traduced and vilified the loved wife of the great man who *made them*, and from whom

they amassed great fortunes,” an act she describes as wrongfully “permitted by an American people, who owed *their* remaining a nation to my husband!”¹²³ In literary terms, Keckley reverses the grateful slave trope by identifying an ungrateful white America.

At the same time, Keckley challenges the notion of family often found in proslavery discourse, a notion of black and white together that rests upon a doctrine of paternalism. In contrast to the way the Garland family greets her and fusses over her, however, Keckley disrupts this image of sentimental, familial intimacy with the cook’s observation: “I declar, I nebber did see people carry on so. Wonder if I should go off and stay two or three years, if all ob you wud hug and kiss me so when I cum back?”¹²⁴ Keckley, who uses the notion of “family black and white” to her advantage to enter circles of society previously closed to her, actually undercuts this notion of family, even as she appears to reinforce it. It is as if Keckley says to her readers, in so many words, “I could be part of *your* family.” The cook perceives that the family treats Keckley very differently from herself and disingenuously imagines that distance and time has caused this excessive affection. As the cook well knows, however, what Keckley has achieved is what makes her so triumphant at this moment, not time or distance. Keckley includes this turn of events to alert the reader to the fact that the family does not afford the current cook even the few advantages—access to the local elite who became Keckley’s clients and enough financial stability of their own to allow Keckley to later keep her own earnings from dressmaking--that they gave Keckley as their slave. Of course, the family’s social status and economic power has probably been greatly reduced by the Civil War. Rendering the cook’s

remark in dialect, which seems problematic to the extent that it reinforces white stereotypes about black persons not being educated or not speaking standard English, however, suggests to the reader that although she and Keckley are both black and have presumably shared the experience of slavery, a class difference and an individual achievement gap now exists between them. Here Keckley posits that characteristics other than blackness affect one's outlook and one's chances of successfully achieving self-sufficiency, a claim that directly contrasts with dominant antebellum beliefs about black inferiority. For example, Keckley writes about the freedmen who flocked to Washington, DC in 1862-3, "looking for liberty, and many of them not knowing it when they found it" and having "exaggerated ideas of liberty"¹²⁵ who "were not prepared for the new life that opened before" them, but even though some of the newly freed "pined for the old associations of slavery, and refused to help themselves, others went to work with commendable energy."¹²⁶ As Carol Faulkner notes, "mothers of the race" such as Keckley and other African American women leaders, both felt a "close identification with former slaves" and "reaffirmed their superiority" to them.¹²⁷ As she elevates the readers' view of her as a "refined" African American, Keckley almost seems to be blaming the victim, in this case the newly freed, for dependency and lack of initiative. While Keckley believes slavery produces dependency as its byproduct, however, she also believes the newly freed can learn to become self-sufficient.

Keckley, who has removed herself from the paternalistic system of slavery despite being deprived of education, now has the capacity to be benevolent to white Americans. Keckley's remark about her lack of education during the reunion scene

tacitly asks the reader to compare what white women have done with formal education and what black women have achieved without formal education. Evidently, when Keckley admits to Miss Ann Garland (another of the grown daughters of her master's family) her "one unkind thought. . . that you did not give me the advantages of a good education," Miss Ann's reply, "you get along in the world better than we who enjoyed every educational advantage in childhood," recognizes Keckley as having higher social status and more economic self-sufficiency than the women in the family that had owned her, a positive assessment of Keckley despite her earlier deprivations.¹²⁸ As Carol Faulkner has noted about Keckley's book generally, "Keckley reversed the white view of black dependency, showing white women as helpless without the black women who sustained their households and their wardrobes."¹²⁹ Not only are white women rendered helpless without their black female slaves, but those slaves have, in some cases, become more independent than the white women whom they served, suggesting a black view of white dependency.¹³⁰ In fact, Keckley implicitly locates white Southern women as still trapped in the paternalistic system from which Keckley has extricated herself—both from slavery and from economic dependence on men. The significance of this economic positionality registers with the Garland women. Thus, in response to the spoken and unspoken questions of many Americans about whether the newly freed could handle freedom, Keckley's text resounds with a powerful example of how African Americans might rise to the occasion.

As William Andrews has pointed out about the political significance of reunion scenes between former slave and master in literary texts, Keckley's reunion

scene suggests a quest for unity and reconciliation that will help preserve the nation.¹³¹ Some implications of that reconciliation is a nation in which black citizens are integrated into society, have the capacity to enact benevolence toward white Americans, and do not find black benevolence summarily rejected by white Americans. One seemingly minor scene in which this plays out is a peculiar story about benevolence between a mistress (Mrs. Ann Garland's mother) and a slave (Keckley's aunt Charlotte), which Keckley relates through dialogue between herself and Miss Ann during the reunion. William Andrews notes the importance of dialogue to the slave narrative because it "tells us something about the negotiation of power" between master and slave and demonstrates "neither master nor slave was in full control of the situation."¹³² In Ann's telling of the story, the give-and-take of power hinges on a silk dress, for the mistress "had but one silk dress in the world, silk not being so plenty in those days" and she gives this hand-me-down silk dress to her slave as a means of reconciliation after a fight.¹³³ The intimacy signified by slave and mistress wearing the same dress and the shifting of power shown between slave and mistress challenges social norms in and of itself. Sometime after giving Charlotte the dress, when invited to a social occasion and having no other attire appropriate to the event, the mistress made an "appeal to the generosity of your aunt Charlotte" and the slave "proffered to loan" the dress to the mistress, who was "only too glad to accept."¹³⁴ By mentioning she attended the social occasion "duly arrayed in the silk that her maid had worn to church on the preceding Sunday," Keckley suggests a reversal of the usual pattern of gift-giving from mistresses to their slaves, further challenging social norms and exemplifying effective use of the politics of narrative.

She writes that both she and Miss Ann “laughed over the incident,” suggesting that, because they could admit the intimacy demonstrated by the dress situation and recognize the power dynamics and humor in it, readers could recognize the need for and the possibility of reconciliation of the North and South after the war. If Keckley and Miss Ann could reconcile as individuals, surely the nation could too.

In the second and central instance of Keckley serving as benefactor to white persons, she befriends and supports Mrs. Lincoln during trying times both during and after her time in the White House.¹³⁵ As her dressmaker, Keckley saw Mrs. Lincoln “every day or two,” and her employer soon came to call her “Lizabeth.”¹³⁶ Mrs. Lincoln begins to consult Keckley on matters such as practicing wartime economy in relation to public receptions and state dinners, and they become especially close when Mrs. Lincoln’s son Willie becomes ill. Keckley helps care for Willie, and when he dies, she is “immediately sent for” to console Mrs. Lincoln.¹³⁷ Prior to this Keckley had lost her own son in the war so she was particularly qualified to offer solace to Mrs. Lincoln in her bereavement.¹³⁸

Before President Lincoln’s second inauguration, Mrs. Lincoln confesses to Keckley that she has many debts, about which her husband knows nothing; the intimacy of sharing such secrets demonstrate the degree to which Mrs. Lincoln relies on Keckley in her darkest days.¹³⁹ When, after Lincoln’s assassination, a White House staff member asks Mrs. Lincoln, “Is there no one, Mrs. Lincoln, that you desire to have with you in this terrible affliction?” she replies, “Yes, send for Elizabeth Keckley.”¹⁴⁰ Keckley responds compassionately to Mrs. Lincoln’s call: “I shall never forget the scene—the wails of a broken heart. . . I bathed Mrs. Lincoln’s

head with cold water, and soothed the terrible tornado as best I could.”¹⁴¹ To her credit, Keckley recognizes Mrs. Lincoln’s isolation and desperate need of her support: “I was her only companion, except her children, in the days of her great sorrow,” because Mrs. Lincoln “refused to have anybody about her but myself. Many ladies called, but she received none of them.”¹⁴² That Mrs. Lincoln selected her alone, over dozens of eligible white women, to console her at a time of grief speaks volumes about her trust in Keckley and therefore Keckley’s worthiness to act as a consoling presence to her. Apparently Mrs. Lincoln did not fear unburdening herself to someone who she did not consider as her social equal and who she knew would not gossip about her to more socially prominent people in Washington.

As Mrs. Lincoln’s confidante, Keckley extends herself well beyond her duties as an employee hired for the making and fitting of dresses while in the White House. After Mrs. Lincoln leaves the White House, Keckley continues her benevolence to the widow even at great inconvenience and economic loss to herself. In her demanding way, when Mrs. Lincoln insists that Keckley accompany her to Chicago, despite Keckley’s strong objections (“You forget my business, Mrs. Lincoln, I cannot leave it. Just now I have the spring trousseau to make for Mrs. Douglas, and I have promised to have it done in less than a week”), Keckley reports, “no excuse would be accepted” by Mrs. Lincoln, who unabashedly replies, “Never mind. Mrs. Douglas can get someone else to make her trousseau.”¹⁴³ Mrs. Lincoln also asks Keckley to help her raise money by selling her wardrobe in New York. What Keckley sacrifices to be Mrs. Lincoln’s friend and companion – leaving her business for months at a time— exacts a high price from Keckley, who notes, “My New York expedition has made

me richer in experience, but poorer in purse.”¹⁴⁴ Mrs. Lincoln might have had more status and resources than Keckley, but she was the more dependent of the two. As a white woman who had never worked to support herself, Mrs. Lincoln could not have understood what it meant for Keckley to be self-sufficient.

Black Americans extended gratitude toward Mrs. Lincoln in appreciation of the benevolence that President Lincoln had shown them. Despite the claim in proslavery discourse that declares black Americans ungrateful, this instance portrays black people as expressing more gratitude than white Americans. Keckley “consented to render Mrs. Lincoln all the assistance in my power,” perhaps taking to heart what Frederick Douglass wrote to her, that Mrs. Lincoln “should be indemnified . . . for the loss of her beloved husband. Honor, gratitude, and a manly sympathy, all say yes to this.”¹⁴⁵ Douglass viewed this as a “national duty,” one that especially falls to African Americans because “Abraham Lincoln . . . broke the fetters of our enslaved people. . . . When he was slain, our great benefactor fell, and left his wife and children to the care of those for whom he gave up all.” Implicitly attributing her motivation to help Mrs. Lincoln as stemming from her deep loyalty to Mr. Lincoln¹⁴⁶ partly shields Keckley from criticism since Mr. Lincoln was widely mourned upon his death. Keckley’s respect for Mr. Lincoln appears tellingly in the appellations such as “a noble soul,” “no common mortal,” “the Moses of my people,” and “a demi-god” that she frequently assigns to him.¹⁴⁷ Saving Mrs. Lincoln from pecuniary embarrassment stands for more than rescuing her financially or salvaging her respectability; the nation owes her a debt of gratitude, because her husband kept the Union together and then sacrificed his life for it, especially in the minds of blacks.¹⁴⁸ Applying gift theory

to Abraham Lincoln's act of signing the Emancipation Proclamation, I highlight the notion that gifts incur obligations. Just as individuals can owe gratitude to a benefactor, so can the people of a nation owe gratitude to a national leader.

Keckley conceives of her benevolence as not just to Mrs. Lincoln as an individual, but also as benevolence to the nation. In this light, Keckley's actions are not merely interpersonal but also begin to take on political significance, especially because Keckley presents herself as politically interested and sophisticated, even more so than Mrs. Lincoln, and models active black participation in the public realm. For example, on one particular night, Keckley asks Mrs. Lincoln for permission to come to the White House and hear Mr. Lincoln speak. Mrs. Lincoln replies affirmatively, "Certainly, Lizabeth; if you take any interest in political speeches," highlighting Keckley's intention to monitor national events affecting her identity and destiny and that of all African Americans.¹⁴⁹ Earlier in the book, Mrs. Lincoln, anxious about her husband's re-election, asks Keckley her opinion of his chances and in the space of about five sentences, Keckley offers a well-reasoned argument as to why she believes Mr. Lincoln will be re-elected. By demonstrating that she is politically aware and astute, Keckley's account not only affirms black capacity to participate in public life and anticipates womens' future political involvement, but also serves as a fine example of political engagement for all citizens.

Keckley presents her very writing of the book as a benevolent act toward Mrs. Lincoln because she hopes it will persuade the public to judge Mrs. Lincoln less harshly, thereby easing Mrs. Lincoln's emotional suffering and perhaps her financial insecurity. Yet even as Keckley calls for the public to exercise honest, compassionate,

rational judgment on Mrs. Lincoln's actions, not one motivated by envy or malice, she simultaneously juxtaposes her own civilized behavior as an ex-slave with the erratic behavior of the prominent (and notorious) white woman she serves. For example, when her son Willie died, Mrs. Lincoln was "inconsolable," thrown into "convulsions," prone to "paroxysms of grief" and "so completely overwhelmed" that she did not attend his funeral.¹⁵⁰ In fact, Mr. Lincoln feared she would go mad. In contrast, Keckley speaks of her own son's death in an understated manner, calling it simply "a sad blow." Upon President Lincoln's assassination, Mrs. Lincoln emitted "unearthly shrieks," suffered "wild, tempestuous outbursts," experienced fits of "hysterics," and refused to leave her room for five weeks.¹⁵¹ As Carolyn Sorisio observes, Keckley's text disrupts the self-construction of the white American middle class in her depiction of mourning, in which "the most pronounced juxtaposition [is] between the gentility of Keckley and the ungentle behavior of Mary Todd Lincoln."¹⁵² As social historians interested in class-based behavior might study class differences in mourning behavior, my work focuses on the different dynamics that ensue when black benefactors give to white recipients as opposed to the more common racialized dynamics of benevolence when white persons serve as benefactors to black recipients. By placing herself in the company of white people at the highest levels of national life and demonstrating that her competency and independence exceeds that of the First Lady, Keckley demonstrates to the reader her high social status, strong moral character and exemplary behavior as confidante to the President's wife and therefore as an African American woman more than worthy of citizenship.

Beyond her benevolence to Mrs. Lincoln, Keckley also depicts herself in the role of caring benefactor more commonly filled by white middle-class women in the sentimental literature of the time, not only organizing volunteers to provide charity and care to soldiers and former slaves but persuading Mrs. Lincoln to accompany her, the former slave instructing the First Lady on her proper role as a woman. Despite her attempts not to alienate either her northern or southern readers and to represent herself as sharing the same middle-class, Christian values of her probable readers, white readers did not look favorably on Keckley's portrayal of herself as an intimate or equal of Mrs. Lincoln's, as mentioned earlier. Clearly Keckley's intervening in and unsettling of the dominant discourses of gender, race, and citizenship played a major role in the book's negative reception. Probably most telling of the general public disdain for the book—in both the North and the South--was a published parody written in black dialect called *Behind the Seams; by a Nigger Woman who took work in from Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Davis*,¹⁵³ of presumably Southern authorship but published in New York the same year as Keckley's memoir, which manages to use the word "nigger"—a term of contempt toward blacks already familiar as an insult in the early nineteenth century¹⁵⁴--on every one of its twenty-three pages. As Elizabeth Young writes in *Disarming the Nation*, "The racism of the text . . . offers further evidence of the cultural resistance prompted by Keckley's narration of her achievements" and represents a protest "against the very idea of African American authorship."¹⁵⁵ However convincing Keckley's argument about black benevolence and black contributions to the nation in *Behind the Scenes*, Keckley overestimated the

willingness of white Americans to follow sweeping political change with notable social change.

Conclusion

Both Keckley and Jacobs write about white benevolence to black Americans in ways that undercut what white Americans define as benevolence and indict white benevolence for being complicit in the racialized power dynamics that pervade so many other social interactions. In *Incidents* and *Behind the Scenes*, both authors redefine benevolence on their own terms, from a black perspective. In so doing, they wrest from white Americans the claim to the superior position in the benefactor-recipient relationship and make visible black benevolence to white Americans that has largely been ignored in society and in literature. By reversing the benefactor-recipient positions between black and white Americans, Jacobs and Keckley reconceptualize benevolence as a site for the emergence of black agency. Although they share a strategy of disproving the claim that slavery is a benevolent institution, they accomplish this by different means. At moments in which white slaveholders give what they believe are gifts to their slaves, Jacobs reinterprets those “gifts” from the perspective of the enslaved. While Jacobs critiques slaveowners’ ingratitude toward their faithful slaves and reveals the hypocrisy that underlies white accusations that slaves are “ungrateful,” Keckley unabashedly counters the proslavery ideology of “family white and black.” Having proven herself to be more economically self-sufficient than the women in her former master’s family and even an elite white woman such as the First Lady, she portrays herself as equal if not superior to white women. Their arguments differ, but both Jacobs and Keckley depict black

benevolence to white Americans in ways that emphasize black contributions to American society more generally.

Whereas the first and second chapters of this dissertation have illuminated black benevolence in African American-authored nonfiction, the third chapter takes a different turn by analyzing black benevolence in African American-authored fiction. As we shall see, Charles Chesnutt, writing during a resurgence of white supremacy, chose the genre of fiction to explore the conditions under which white Americans might acknowledge, value, and seek out black benevolence. In his book, *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt creates a character of the black professional class, a highly educated and skilled doctor, whom he uses to tease out the beliefs of several white citizens who initially find black benevolence to white people objectionable or distasteful.

Chapter 3

Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*:

Black Benevolence During the Imposition

of Jim Crow Laws

Every site of cultural control and subjugation . . . is also a potential site of agency and change.

—Michael Levenson

In the immediate aftermath of emancipation, African Americans had reason to feel optimistic about their inclusion in the body politic and prospects for economic independence. Many took advantage of their newly granted constitutional freedom, legal protections, and male suffrage, following in the footsteps of the freed black authors of the texts discussed in the previous chapters and eagerly seeking education, buying land and homes, and starting businesses. Their hopes seemed ratified by the emergence of a still small but significant African American middle class and a black professional elite that included lawyers, doctors, educators, and authors. As Reconstruction came to an end with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South in 1877, however, Southern whites responded to such progress with Jim Crow laws and violence to reset social relations and ensure white supremacy and access to cheap black labor. Less formal but similar forms of segregation, prejudice, and violence in the North also made progress difficult for the increasing numbers of African Americans living there.

Compared to the works examined earlier in this study, Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* reflects three transitions in national discourses about race: from the

”slavery question” to “the Negro problem,” from white paternalism to white supremacy, and from the quest for freedom to formulations of racial identity. While black authors may have no longer needed to argue that they were deserving of freedom, they still faced the daunting and sometimes dangerous task of asserting their right to and readiness for social inclusion, equality, and respect. This was the turbulent social, political, and literary context that Charles Chesnutt addressed in his 1901 novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*, based on the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina riot in which white mobs burned the offices of the city’s black newspaper to the ground and killed a number of black residents. Within this larger narrative frame of the events leading up to and marking the riot, Chesnutt constructs the novel so that the only son of white newspaper editor Carteret experiences two medical emergencies for which the assistance of the black Dr. Miller is requested. As we shall see, Chesnutt uses benevolence to underscore the heavy price the nation will pay if black capabilities are not developed and if black contributions to society go unutilized. By ultimately depicting a dramatic act of black benevolence to whites in a novel that also includes a race riot and the near-lynching of a black man, Chesnutt raises disturbing questions about the lack of white restraint in the treatment of blacks, even in the face of black achievement, principled action, and generosity.

Like the earlier authors discussed in this study, Chesnutt was well aware he bore the burden of representativeness and representation: that is, of serving as a role model for and representative of his race and of countering partial and negative depictions of African Americans. By Chesnutt’s time, this responsibility of representativeness had come to be referred to by middle-class black leaders as racial

uplift, the belief that it was ultimately the responsibility of accomplished African Americans to serve as inspirational role models, to call other black Americans to “progress” and “respectability,” and to use their accomplishments to advance and advocate for the progress of all African Americans. Chesnutt’s work both serves as an example of racial uplift and as a commentary on racial uplift through his treatment of the black Dr. Miller in the novel.

In many ways, Chesnutt was ideally placed to understand the complexity of race relations in the United States and to use that understanding to serve in the role of author and activist. The first of the writers studied here (Jones and Allen; Jacobs; and Keckley) to have been born free to free parents, Chesnutt chose to identify himself as black despite his mixed-race bloodline and skin so light that he could have easily passed for white.¹ He had also lived in both the North (in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was born and later spent most of his adult life) and the South (Fayetteville, North Carolina, where his parents returned when he was nine and where he was educated). During his career, he would serve as an educator, a lawyer, a business owner, a published man of letters, and a founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Among the authors in this study, Chesnutt is unique in aspiring to be a professional author, and while he was not successful enough to support himself by his writing, he left behind a significant body of published work, including numerous short stories and essays and several novels.² Nonetheless, his work also makes clear that despite his more literary intentions, Chesnutt, like the authors of the other three focus texts in my study, consciously wrote to intervene in a historical moment of

social and political crisis for African Americans and to influence an audience of white as well as black readers. As he once noted in his journal, Chesnut's purpose in his novels was not "so much the elevation of the colored people as the elevation of the whites—for I consider the unjust spirit of caste . . . a barrier to the moral progress of the American people."³ Like Keckley, Chesnut considered his writing itself an act of benevolence, as discussed in chapter two of this study.

Not the only or even the first African American novelist to struggle with issues of representation and benevolence, Chesnut had been preceded by several black fiction writers in the mid to late nineteenth-century who also addressed these issues. Frank Webb, Harriet Wilson, William Wells Brown, Frances Harper and Pauline Hopkins among others attempted to illustrate the complexities of racial uplift and to counteract the stereotypical views of white readers by depicting blacks as benefactors to their own people and by warning of the dangers of African Americans' dependence on the benevolence of even well-intentioned whites.⁴ For example, Frank Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857), critiques Northerners for their pretended friendship to blacks such as the Garies, a mixed-race family living in a white Philadelphia neighborhood, including a neighbor who plots to rob the black community of their land and wealth by instigating a riot and an abolitionist who abandons the idea of hiring a black apprentice when his white employees threaten to quit. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859) details the story of Frado, a girl of mixed race left by her impoverished parents at the house of rich white neighbors who treat her badly as their indentured servant, whose

sympathetic white friends nonetheless fail to take decisive action to free her from tyranny.

Several African American fiction writers used the occasion of the Civil War and its aftermath to portray blacks' benevolence to the nation by supporting the Union cause in addition to working toward black uplift. In William Wells Brown's 1867 edition of *Clotelle*, the widowed Clotelle becomes a nurse ministering to Union soldiers as an "angel of mercy."⁵ The mixed-race title character of Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892) also becomes a nurse to Union soldiers, self-identifies as a black woman, and commits herself to a public life of work, returning with her mixed-race husband to North Carolina to elevate the race, he as a physician and she as a teacher. In *Contending Forces* (1900), Pauline Hopkins writes about upwardly mobile African Americans such as Dora, who "scattered brightness along with charitable acts" at hospitals and homes for aged women and marries the head of an industrial school for blacks in Louisiana. Although the narrator reports that "many fat contributions found their way annually" into the school's treasury and allowed him to accomplish great things, "he had been forced to compromise, and the educational advantages allowed the pupils had been curtailed to suit the view of those who placed a low estimate on the ability of the Negro,"⁶ suggesting that black uplift that depends on white philanthropy is bound to compromise the ideals of the black leaders of those efforts.

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnut not only engages these themes of black uplift and black support of the Union cause, but takes the even more radical step of depicting a member of the African American elite serving as a benefactor to powerful white recipients. Chesnut's early career demonstrates both his awareness of and

participation in the major literary movements of his time and a turn toward an increasingly overt and complex examination of American racial relations. Chesnut's earliest published work consisted of local-color stories, including the first story by an African American to appear in the highly respected *Atlantic Monthly*, and which were published as a collection, *The Conjure Woman*, in 1899. In these stories, the black characters speak in dialect, which was popular in Southern fiction of the time. In that sense, his early stories followed in the vein of work by such white Southern writers as Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris that romanticized slavery and the Old South and stereotyped blacks as superstitious, simpleminded, and in need of white supervision. For this reason, earlier literary critics often dismissed or criticized these stories, although later assessments have recognized within them elements that in fact satirized the plantation tradition, revealed the brutality of slavery, and illuminated white-black power relations.

With his next collection, *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color-Line*, Chesnut's work began to move in a more realist vein, and both collections were highly praised in a review by William Dean Howells, although other reviewers complained about what they saw as Chesnut's excessive concern with the issues of miscegenation and segregation. Apparently finding the short form insufficient to fully explore the complex issues of racial relations and identity, including passing, miscegenation, segregation, and prejudice, Chesnut turned to writing novels. The first of Chesnut's published novels, *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), tells the story of a mixed-race young woman who attempts to pass for white, which, Chesnut seems to argue, might benefit a few individuals socially and

economically but cuts them off from their racial heritage and does nothing to support the elevation of the race. This was followed by *The Marrow of Tradition*, which the critic Eric Sundquist, in *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Culture*, calls “probably the most astute political-historical novel of its day.”⁷

At that point, Chesnutt’s writing history (including twenty-three speeches and essays and over twenty-five short stories⁸) as an advocate for African American rights and culture already demonstrates that he was certainly more than capable of producing an effective non-fiction refutation of the dominant discourse of black inferiority and powerful rebuke of the actions of the white rioters in the Wilmington incident. A clue to why he chose to do so next in the form of a novel may lie in the fact that he also decided to make the main characters of the novel white. A central rhetorical issue that Chesnutt, like the authors of the other three texts in this study, had to face was how to criticize white society in a way that would not be met with complete defensiveness by white readers. By using the form of a novel, Chesnutt is able to largely distance himself from implicating white people and to let white characters in the book convict themselves. While Chesnutt creates a number of dramatic and emotionally charged scenes in the novel, his prose style is more spare and less emotionally evocative than the sentimental novels typical of earlier in the century. Articulating brutal truths indirectly through fiction, truths which would be too risky or potentially offensive to assert in non-fiction, Chesnutt illuminates the dynamics behind the riot and the dilemma it poses for African Americans rather than focusing primarily on the representation of the riot itself. Thus Chesnutt invites readers to critique the illogic and inhumanity of the white characters as revealed in

their own words and actions. This approach also frees Chesnutt from the difficulty of addressing head-on the debate over how horrific the riot actually was.

As the only text in my study to use the term “philanthropy,” *The Marrow of Tradition* examines a specific form of benevolence. The term “philanthropy” implies the existence of a middle-class, ties to an institution, relative distance of the benefactor from those being served, and a monetary gift rather than one of goods or services. Chesnutt’s novel reflects the limits of organized philanthropy to address post-bellum racial inequalities that seem just as pronounced as those in the days of slavery. The novel foregrounds Dr. Miller’s more individualized and direct healing powers as the kind of benevolence that matters, as if to argue that Reconstruction did not heal the racially divided nation, but citizens themselves need to examine their own hearts and minds to create a better shared future.

Conventional readings of *The Marrow of Tradition* tend to locate a sentimental narrative in the Delamere-Sandy plot, and a “public” or “realistic” plot in the white attack of the black community during the riot.⁹ Much critical debate also focuses on whether Chesnutt supports what is viewed as Miller’s accommodationist position or Josh Green’s revolutionary stance. To me, the Millers together are pragmatic realists who are not necessarily so much accommodationist as disciplined revolutionaries who employ language, ideals, and empathy in the place of guns. Few critical readings address what Susan Danielson calls its “professional” plot, which she herself addresses, but does so as a means to highlight Janet’s domestic feminism.¹⁰ Instead, I address the novel’s professional plot as a means of examining the centrality of benevolence to the novel’s conclusion. Through this nexus, Chesnutt ties the issues

of representation and race raised in the novel to the underlying question of just what it is that black and white Americans owe one another, both as citizens and as moral beings.

Chesnutt Concerns Himself with Black Representation in Print

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt concerns himself with the prominent role of representation in the denigration or advancement of African Americans. We know from Chesnutt's activism related to black representation in print and national racial discourse how important to him was this work of racial representation through literature. While he points out examples of how whites represent blacks partially, Chesnutt also takes the prerogative of representing white custom as questionable. For example, the book's narrator states that on the day of the riot, "A negro had killed a white man, -- the unpardonable sin . . . A dozen colored men lay dead. . . inoffensive people. . . but their lives counted nothing against that of a riotous white man. . .,"¹¹ a statement which foreshadows a mother's assertion about her own son and her sister's son at the end of the novel ("yours is no better to die than mine!")¹² and echoes the observation in the Jones and Allen narrative (see chapter one of this study) that white lives are more valuable than black lives. Suggesting how Southern white persons exploit black persons, the narrator states: "the negro is not counted as a Southerner, except to fix the basis of congressional representation."¹³ Like Jacobs who wrote about lies slaveholders tell to their slaves (see chapter two of this study), Chesnutt details the way the South represents itself to Northern visitors and how Southern hospitality sometimes serves as a guise for the partial representation of black persons: "Whether accidentally or not, the Northern visitors had no opportunity to meet or talk

alone with any colored person in the city except the servants at the hotel.” When one of the visitors proposed seeing the colored mission school, “a Southern friend kindly volunteered to accompany them.”¹⁴

In *Marrow*, an authoritative narrator and the characters introduce doubt about and pronounce judgment on the social customs surrounding race that govern residents of Wellington, the name of the fictional town Chesnutt uses to represent Wilmington. In particular, Chesnutt habitually uses qualifying clauses to illustrate the illogic of a given belief or claim related to white superiority or the “necessity” of segregation. For example, because Chesnutt portrays the newspaper editor Carteret as a white supremacist, the reader probably would not expect Carteret to acknowledge any black entitlement to protection of the law. Therefore when Carteret says, “Even a negro. . . is entitled to the protection of the law,” it surprises the reader momentarily.¹⁵ The qualifying clause, “as long as he behaves himself and keeps in his place,” however, explains how Carteret can possibly make this statement. White persons can exploit the vagueness and the versatility of the phrase—after all, what behaving and keeping in one’s place means depends on context--to conveniently change its meaning from one context to another and therefore constrain black persons. For example, as we shall see later in the chapter, when Carteret has access to plenty of white doctors, he wants the black Dr. Miller to “keep his place.” When he needs Miller to save his child, however, because white doctors are unavailable, Carteret does not want Miller to “keep his place.”

In a second example, Chesnutt puts such an arresting clause in the mouth of the narrator. When the narrator explains, “Thus a slight change in the point of view

had demonstrated the entire ability of the [white] leading citizens to maintain the dignified and orderly processes of the law. . .,” Chesnutt momentarily portrays as seemingly respectable the white leaders who can uphold the law and persuade others to rationally change their minds and therefore respect the law when the situation requires it.¹⁶ When the narrator gives voice to the words, “whenever they saw fit to do so,” however, Chesnutt interrupts this moment of approbation with a sinister suggestion: the leading citizens’ assumption that seeing fit to take a particular action amounts to a matter of choice and that they, as whites, could anoint themselves as the persons empowered to decide such matters.

In a third example, Chesnutt uses such a qualifying clause to reveal a white doctor’s interiority. By declaring that Dr. Price’s “claim of superiority to the colored doctor rested fundamentally upon the fact that he was white and Miller was not,” the narrator temporarily normalizes the link between white skin and superiority.¹⁷ By adding the clause, “and yet this superiority, for which he could claim no credit, since he had not made himself, was the very breath of his nostrils,” Chesnutt sardonically conveys the reminder that although Price’s superiority infuses him with valuable and ongoing advantages, it was not achieved through his own merit. This qualifying clause greatly undermines Price’s superiority by suggesting that it is accidental or random, not something that he earned for himself (in contrast to Miller who has fully earned his professional standing). By pointing to the social construction of the meaning of white skin and the haphazard assignment of superiority, Chesnutt reveals the instability underlying the presumed fixedness of white privilege. Through the

frequent juxtaposition of certain statements with qualifying clauses in both dialogue and narration, Chesnutt poses the possibility of new points of view.

Chesnutt's understanding of and intense concern about the power of representation called him to activism when racial discourse in the nation had sunk to new lows. For example, in 1901 the Macmillan Company published *The American Negro* by William Hannibal Thomas, a book that censured blacks as immoral, irresponsible, and destined to fail. Thomas himself was a mulatto, which he considered superior to black Americans, whom he deemed as hopelessly deprived. White supremacists used *The American Negro* as a basis to argue for the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment. Charles W. Chesnutt and other prominent African Americans, such as W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington, sought to suppress the book. Similarly, knowing that Thomas Dixon's book, *The Leopard's Spots*, had achieved great popularity, Chesnutt sent his own novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*, to President Theodore Roosevelt and several congressmen hoping to counterbalance Dixon's virulently racist views.¹⁸

While Chesnutt occasionally had reason to be hopeful about improving racial discourse in the nation, he and others who shared his mission faced a daunting literary challenge. The reactions of several contemporary reviewers to *The Marrow of Tradition* in white publications reveal the kind of racial discourse in circulation at the time. At the end of the spectrum most sympathetic to Southern views, a reviewer in the *Independent* argued simply that Chesnutt's book was "vindictive to a remarkable degree."¹⁹ Even Howells, who espoused literature as a force for social change, found Chesnutt's novel "bitter." Aside from literary considerations, these reviews make

clear that many white Americans doubted if the Wilmington race riot of 1898 actually happened or whether the violence was as severe as Chesnut depicted it. A reviewer from *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* avowed the truth of such incidents as Chesnut described but qualified their significance, suggesting, “It is probable that the author has warrant in real life for all or most of the incidents brought into the story. Similar occurrences have happened in the recent history of the South, but they have always been isolated. The bringing of them together in one locality results in a false perspective when regarded from the viewpoint of real life.”²⁰

Several reviews judged the novel in a manner more sympathetic to African American experience, although to different degrees. In less than a 100-word review in *The Beacon* of Boston a reviewer declared Chesnut’s book “lays bare the motives making for the subjection of the negro. . . . Its ethical significance is emphatic.”²¹ The reviewer in another publication, *Modern Culture*, took an approach that focused more on the behavior of white than blacks: “the question this book raises concerns the civilization of the white race, not of the black race, in the South. Is that civilization on the retrograde toward barbarism?”²² In *The Illustrated Buffalo Express* a reviewer stated, “Events have proved that there has been just such plotting, that just such sentiments are common in our Southern States, that just such men have been permitted to control public thought and action” as Chesnut has depicted in his book.²³ In *The Appeal* from St. Paul, Minnesota a reviewer argued that Chesnut indicts “not only the white demagogue, but white respectability which endures and tolerates with such charming composure the Southern mob and its bloody work.”²⁴

Two extant letters—both anonymous--offer first-hand insights into the violence of the Wilmington Riot of 1898 from a black perspective. The two letters, one from a “negro woman” and one from a “colored citens,” both of Wilmington, NC, appeal to President McKinley for assistance in the few days after the bloodshed of Nov. 10, 1898. Together they reveal several important themes: the corruption of local white-run newspapers, the irony of a nation which brutalizes its own racial others but tramps across oceans to “save” other nations (an example of corrupted white benevolence), the insufficiency of the law to protect the black citizen, the magnitude of the anti-black violence, and the certainty on the part of the blacks that they will pay dearly if they speak out.²⁵

The author of the first letter states, “there is no paper to tell the truth about the negro here” and she relates how the office of the “negro daily press” was burned, “negro” churches were searched for arms and that “some of our most worthy negro men have been made to leave the city.” She pointedly asks, “And are we to die like rats in a trap? with no place to seek redress or to go with our Grievances?” and notes the irony of this unaccountable violence in a free nation: “Is this the land of the free and the home of the brave? How can the negro sing my country tis of thee?”²⁶ Reminding the president that Africans did not ask to be enslaved and brought to this country, and demonstrating African American understanding of the connection between imperialism abroad and racial ideology at home,²⁷ she inquires accusingly, “Why do you forsake the negro? who is not to blame for being here. This Grand and noble nation who flies to the help of suffering humanity of another nation? And leave the Secessionists and born Rioters to slay us.” The author’s use of the verb “slay”

here suggests an outrage of Biblical proportions, reinforced by her later statement that “There was not any rioting simply the strong slaying the weak.”

Similarly, the author of the second letter to President McKinley explains, “the poor citzens of the colored people of north Carolina are suffering. There is over four hundred women and children are driven from their home far out into the woods by the dimocrate party” because “the city of Wilmington is unde the confradate laws. . . and they set fire to almost half of the City.” Most remarkable, however, of all of the claims in these two letters are the claims that they will invite retribution if they reveal their identities: “I cannot sign my name and live. But every word of this is true. The law of our state is no good for the negro anyhow,” says one, and the other concurs, saying, “I would give you my name but I am afraid. I am afraid to own my name.” In my reading, these two letters portray African Americans only as victims of the riot, but Chesnutt does not let victimization have the last word. Instead he enriches the text with the portrayal of black benevolence toward white Americans through Miller’s benevolence to Carteret. Chesnutt, in contrast to the black citizens who wrote to the president, could sign his name to *The Marrow of Tradition* and live, although it dampened his literary career.

With few primary sources in wide circulation, and, having a network of contacts within the Wilmington community, Chesnutt turned to fiction to help instill the remembrance of this African American experience for, according to Belau and Cameron, “Following political or social crises, literary writers have often composed fictional works to, paradoxically enough, correct the sometimes all-too-fictive nature of the journalistic public record.”²⁸ As literary scholar Richard Yarborough has

written, fiction was an effective means at the time “to depict Wilmington blacks sympathetically” and create an account that “was not so invested in justifying the illegal acts of the riot organizers.”²⁹ Another scholar, Ryan Simmons, observes that Chesnut calls his readers to “active involvement in the making of meaning” and that Chesnut’s realism uses “disruptive moments” and “dissonance” to “refocus individuals’ understanding of surrounding realities rather than affording them the luxury of escape,” although in the form of a novel.³⁰ In writing *The Marrow of Tradition* only two years after the Wilmington riots, Chesnut took “the genre of the historical novel and the historical romance in a new direction by adapting it to contemporary events,” as William Gleason has explained.³¹ Defining this new direction more precisely, Matthew Wilson characterizes Chesnut as the “first African American writer to represent and critique white folks and whiteness in fiction.”³²

Black Benevolence Provides Alternative Kind of Racial Representation

Chesnut highlights the role of newspapers in *The Marrow of Tradition* because newspapers have so much influence on the representation of blacks at this time. Of over 30,000 English-language newspapers extant in the United States in 1900, only about 500 were African American owned or operated.³³ White newspapers both fomented the riot and then carefully shaped public opinion about it afterwards. The racial violence that erupted on Nov. 10, 1898 in Wilmington resulted from a several months long white supremacy campaign conducted by the white newspapers leading up to the November election. The white Democrats had grown tired of black-supported Republicans who had dominated public office and resented the blacks who held minor offices under the Republican regime. Motivated to end “Negro

domination,” the white-controlled Wilmington newspaper printed an editorial in August 1898 that advocated lynching to deter black men from practicing sexual aggression toward white women. The editor of the black-owned *Wilmington Daily Record*, Alex Manly, responded with an editorial implying sexual relations between black men and white women (unremittingly characterized as rape in the white community) might actually be relationships of mutual consent. Manly had dared to write an editorial that subverted typical white representations of blacks. The suggestion that white women willingly participated in miscegenation insulted white women’s virtue, according to the editorial responses in white newspapers which helped fuel racial tensions. As Wilson has noted, the *Wilmington Messenger* “reproduced parts of Manly’s editorial every day from 23 August until the election . . . ,” a total of 79 days.³⁴

In the novel, Chesnutt documents the ultimate power the white press has to shape public opinion in the days after the riot, by revealing some of Carteret’s interiority about his paper’s influence: “Upon the presentation of this riot would depend the attitude of the great civilized public toward the events of the last ten hours. The Chronicle [sic] was the source from which the first word would be expected; it would give the people of Wellington their cue as to the position which they must take in regard to this distressful affair.”³⁵ Thus Chesnutt illustrates the propensity of the white newspaper editors to manipulate and lead public opinion and the habit of too many individual citizens to unwittingly follow.

Having voiced his concerns about the white newspapers, Chesnutt turns to his commentary on black newspapers in the novel. Chesnutt elevates the significance of

black benevolence in light of the immense suffering generations of black Americans experienced under the system of slavery and still experience (in a different form) under its legacy. For example, the character of Carteret overlooks the achievement of the black newspaper in Wellington because of its small size, the poor quality of the paper upon which it is printed and its preponderance of advertisements. Having thrown the newspaper there earlier in the day “without looking at it,” Carteret retrieves from the wastebasket an “eighteen by twenty-four sheet, poorly printed on cheap paper” and mocks it as “an elegant specimen of journalism.”³⁶ Chesnutt metaphorically retrieves what Carteret considers trash, imbuing it with redeeming value, observing that “it was not an impressive sheet in any respect, except when regarded as the first local effort of a struggling people to make public expression of their life and aspirations” and as written by a “class to whom, a generation before, newspapers, books, and learning had been forbidden fruit.” By adding this context through the narrator, Chesnutt expands the criteria by which to judge the black newspaper from mere appearance to what it represents—a community speaking with a collective voice, having overcome a lack of educational opportunity, and with the capacity to create a community asset on their own, without white supervision or philanthropy.³⁷

In addition to the two African American-authored letters mentioned above, reading *The Marrow of Tradition* in relation to one of two other African American-authored accounts of the Wilmington riot shows us how white newspapers responded in unusual ways (i.e., inadvertently spotlighting the inadequacy of their own accounts) in the wake of the riot, never mind neglecting their journalistic and civic

responsibilities.³⁸ J. Allen Kirk wrote a nonfiction account, "A Statement of Facts Concerning the Bloody Riot in Wilmington, N.C. of Interest to Every Citizen of the United States" (c. 1898). Kirk's account documents the white newspaper's suppression of the names of black people who died in the riot by quoting the newspaper itself: "The *Evening Dispatch*, of Wilmington, NC, published Friday evening, November 11, 1898, states that a correct list of the fatalities will never be published" and that "a detailed account of the trouble yesterday will never be given—that is a correct statement—as it was impossible in the excitement to get at the details or to recollect them; and the number of Negroes killed and wounded will probably never be known."³⁹ At the same time, Kirk reports that an "eye witness says that she believes there were more than one hundred destroyed in the said conflict." Thus, the *Evening Dispatch* in effect censored itself and used its space to deliver propaganda while white community leaders silenced the opposition press.

Kirk's account indicts the white press for its attempts to minimize the anti-black violence. As a counterpoint, Kirk suggests that the black community knows much more about the victims than the white press when he corrects whites' assumptions about what kind of black persons were being persecuted:

It is generally supposed by the better white citizens, that the Negroes who suffer at the hands of these atrocious mobs, are of the lower or vicious class of our race, but in the case of Wilmington, NC, the reverse is the truth. For the colored citizens of Wilmington were progressive and enterprising and were characterized by their endeavor to live as worthy citizens. They are property

holders, [with land] averaging [in value] from five to forty thousand dollars, respectively. From their ranks are furnished teachers, lawyers, physicians, clergymen, merchants and business men. The intellectuality of the colored citizens is beyond the average, in so much that it has been recognized by the conservative white people of the city and State.⁴⁰

While Kirk thematizes black agency, he does not say that there were philanthropists among their ranks, or even black professionals who enacted benevolence toward the white population. In *The Marrow of Tradition*, however, Chesnutt makes black benevolence to whites a central concern.

Black Professionals Complicate the National Picture

Chesnutt shows how an emerging black professional class complicates the national picture because whites can no longer ignore the educational and economic advancement among a growing number of African Americans. Like several generations before them, white people still had a conflicted attitude toward black benevolence, even from black professionals. As social historian Jerrold Packard explains about the Jim Crow period, “the highest-class black, the most educated black, the black learned in his profession of law or medicine or academia was required to respond to a white person of any social class as his superior...not to do so represented a potentially life-threatening breach of the . . . social order.”⁴¹ From a white perspective, merit was no apology for race and furthermore, merit was no excuse for blacks aspiring to become philanthropists.

Partly because an emerging black professional class did not exist until the latter half of the nineteenth-century, Chesnutt's novel is the only text in my study to use the term "philanthropy," for although Keckley portrays herself performing acts of charity in *Behind the Scenes* (see chapter two) by founding the Ladies' Contraband Association, she does not refer to it as "philanthropy." Chesnutt uses the term twice, probably recognizing the burgeoning of philanthropic institutions (both black and white) toward the end of the nineteenth-century. As giving to organized institutions became increasingly popular, American society turned from an emphasis on personal ties of sympathy and friendship to the professionalization of charity.⁴² This approach was obviously less personal, but, more importantly, operated apart from social relationships. Significantly, *The Marrow of Tradition* parallels this shift by beginning to focus on the black hospital as an institutional beneficiary rather than on black individuals. Moving away from the personal (and often more personally gratifying and private) nature of individual charitable acts meant moving toward the benefactor's potential acquisition of something else socially valuable: claiming humanity and citizenship, being named publically as a donor or supporter, attaining respectability, and asserting social superiority.

Chesnutt's approach to benevolence in *The Marrow of Tradition* can be understood in microcosm by turning to the train scene early in the novel when Miller and Burns are traveling to Wellington from the North. Symbolically, the train represents the American nation, which includes people of all different races and classes. Despite their differing circumstances, the riders on the train share a public space and seek to reach the same destination. Through dialogue, the narrator's

observations, and Miller's own thoughts on the train, Chesnutt creates numerous scenarios to force nuanced comparisons of racial categories and emphasize their social construction—a pattern that he repeats elsewhere. For example, Chesnutt juxtaposes images of Miller, an educated, middle-class black man in the white car, with the white physician, Burns, in the “Negro” car, a lower-class black man in the black car, and the various occupants of the white car: a Chinaman, a colored nurse with her mistress, a dog with a white man, and lower-class white farm laborers.⁴³ By setting up such a series of images, each one slightly modified from the last, Chesnutt tests his readers' receptiveness to certain ideas about the arbitrariness of racial categories and the foundations for their truthfulness or their fictiveness.

Chesnutt exploits this pattern again—and quite effectively—in addressing black benevolence. Chesnutt presents a pair of matched incidents, one near the beginning and one at the end of the novel, that constitute the only direct encounters between his main protagonists, the white Major Carteret and the black Dr. Miller. Occasioned by the serious illness of Carteret's only child and heir, both of these incidents raise questions about black capability and fitness for integration into the larger society and white willingness to acknowledge and accept black progress. That the final scene involves a plea for black benevolence, even in the face of the horrors and injustices rendered by the white recipients, demonstrates Chesnutt's awareness—one he shares with the other authors in this study—that in the end, these are moral and not simply practical or political questions.

In the novel's two matched incidents of potential black benevolence, the former in which Miller obliges a colleague's request to attend to the Carteret infant

but is rejected by Carteret himself, and the latter in which the Carterets implore the hesitant Millers to rescue their son, Chesnutt questions assumptions about race and benevolence, merit and custom. In the first incident, Carteret denies Miller's humanity, whereas in the second incident, Carteret appeals to Miller's humanity. Chesnutt's scene serves to inform white people that they cannot have it both ways.

In another similar series, this time in the streets during the riot instead of on a train, Chesnutt juxtaposes images of an aged black woman (an ex-slave and now faithful servant), a young boy of mixed race who can pass for white (the black doctor's son), a white ex-convict, a Jewish merchant, the black lawyer, a young white man whose father had been a Quaker, and a black rabble rouser as Miller crosses town. For most of the novel, white supremacy serves Carteret and other white community members and carries no cost. By the end of the novel, however, the chaos engendered by the white supremacy campaign and the resulting violence threatens white and black citizens alike. In a matter of life and death, Carteret's racist principles threaten to cost him greatly. Early in the novel, when the status quo reigns and Carteret exercises control over his environment, Chesnutt sets up Miller to be non-essential to Carteret and his son's life. In a moment of social crisis, however, Chesnutt sets up Miller to be absolutely essential to Carteret.

It seems intentional that Chesnutt uses the professional role of his main black character in *The Marrow of Tradition* as a subversive strategy, for the black physician in fiction "represents an expertise that subverts the master's corporeal power. . . he masters a somatic discourse that empowers him to help those bodies, like his own, that have been violated by the master."⁴⁴ A doctor represents the body, healing, and

matters of life and death. Between 1891 and 1901, several American narratives addressed issues of race and medicine, as does Chesnut in *The Marrow of Tradition*. From William Dean Howells's *An Imperative Duty* (1892) and Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892) to Chesnut's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), several authors—all African American but one --wrote fiction that depicted a central character as a doctor living or working on the color line.⁴⁵ In each case except for one, Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman's novella, *Beryl Weston's Ambition* (1893), that character was a white doctor.

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, the main black character, Dr. Miller, representing the newly emerging group of professional, middle-class African Americans, settles in Wellington and builds a hospital for black residents with the inheritance from his father's estate.⁴⁶ His wife, Janet, is the unacknowledged black half-sister of Olivia Carteret, wife of Major Carteret, the editor of *The Morning Chronicle* and a white supremacist who instigates racial unrest and the ensuing violence. Miller has an opportunity to provide services to a white recipient--twice--when Major Carteret's only child, his infant son Dodie, is having trouble breathing, once early in the novel and again near the novel's end. In the first instance, as several white doctors rush to the Carteret home to attend to Dodie, one of them invites Miller to join them. When Miller arrives, however, Carteret rejects him due to race prejudice, a rhetorical move on Chesnut's part that establishes the status quo according to Carteret at the beginning of the novel so that it can be challenged by Chesnut later.

On the day of the riot, Miller's son is accidentally killed in the violence and Carteret's son, whose life is also endangered, requires the services of a skillful

physician. When the Carterets seek out Dr. Miller to save their son, the two half-sisters, Olivia and Janet, confront the demons of their intertwined past. Miller puts the decision of whether to treat the Carteret boy in the hands of his wife, who agrees to let Miller go to the boy, but Chesnutt ends the story at precisely that moment, without revealing the outcome. As we shall see, these two significant matched incidents of potential black benevolence to white recipients form what Dean McWilliams has called the “narrative’s central complication,”⁴⁷ in which Chesnutt asks how far race prejudice will go in an environment in which there is an emerging black middle class, or, more concretely, how long Carteret will cling to his racist beliefs in the face of risking the life of his only son. Despite *The Marrow of Tradition*’s realistic portrait of the conditions of African Americans during the late nineteenth-century, the two matched scenes that frame the novel seem artfully shaped for political and allegorical purposes.

In the novel, Chesnutt uses the two main couples, the Millers and the Carterets, to represent black progress, on the one hand, and white resistance to that progress, on the other.⁴⁸ The two matched incidents of black benevolence at the novel’s thematic center addresses two issues that the nation and the South in particular had to face regarding the integration of black citizens. The first incident, which centers on interaction principally between the men, addresses the issue of whites accepting black Americans as equals. As such, the novel challenges the irrationality of the justification for white supremacy and its implications—both political and social. The second incident, which centers on interaction between the two wives, who are in fact related to one another, addresses the issue of whites

accepting black Americans as kin, literally and symbolically. At the same time, it presents the human rationale for acceptance and kinship between black and white Americans and espouses the moral and ethical implications that flow from such a stance.⁴⁹

Nancy Bentley notes that the genre of the novel, which “has been a dominant discourse for representing the claims of kinship,” was problematic for black authors, whose history was shaped by kinlessness. Even so, Chesnutt manages to use the form of the novel to address the need for white Americans to accept black Americans as kin. While the other authors in my study had all experienced slavery directly, Chesnutt is instead a descendent of slaves and constructs his main black character, Dr. Miller, as the descendent of slaves. As such all of the benevolent black characters in my study embody an increasing threat to white citizens. Unlike their forebears, members of the black professional class of Chesnutt’s time start out their lives with some of the advantages that middle-class and elite white people try to reserve for themselves, such as education, economic self-sufficiency, a sense of personhood and manhood, and even notions of entitlement.

In the fifth through seventh chapters, Chesnutt appears to raise the question of how white professional men should respond to the benevolence of a black man of their same professional class, and how they can continue to justify belief in white supremacy when black Americans are gaining in education and social standing. In these chapters, titled “A Journey Southward,” “Janet,” and “The Operation,” Chesnutt presents the first significant example of potential black service (in the form of Dr. Miller) to white citizens (the Carteret family). Finding their only son, Dodie, “gasping

for breath,” Major Carteret and his wife, Olivia, telephone the local doctor, Dr. Price, who informs the anxious couple that the baby needs a dangerous operation and that he would “prefer to share the responsibility with a specialist.”⁵⁰ Because the parents cherish this child “above any earthly thing,” Carteret asks Price to “spare no expense” and “send for the best . . . [surgeon] in the country.”⁵¹ The scene appears to be constructed to make the point that Miller enjoys a highly favorable professional reputation. Price calls on several white physicians, including Dr. Burns, a “distinguished specialist of national reputation,” who on his train ride from Philadelphia to Wellington encounters Dr. Miller, his former pupil at a “famous medical college,” on his return home from a trip to New York. Dr. Burns, having read in the *Medical Gazette* about a “rare” and “remarkable” case and “very interesting operation” handled by Dr. Miller, collegially invites Miller to assist him with the operation in Wellington.⁵² Chesnutt employs the character of Dr. Burns, a white Northerner who does not recognize how the constraints of Southern customs might come into play in this situation, as the voice of meritocracy, to authorize Miller as a skilled surgeon by demonstrating that the black doctor’s expertise not only equals but surpasses that of most white doctors of the day.

Once Chesnutt has established the reputations of the two doctors, the severity of Dodie’s case, the supreme value the parents place on this baby, and the fact that Miller will accompany Burns on this case, he has set up all of the elements needed to examine the intersection of race and competence. To do this, Chesnutt turns his attention to the segregated train on which the doctors are traveling,⁵³ a site of what Julia Lee calls “the turn-of-the-century’s persistent association between the railroad

and racial conflict” and a place “where assumptions about the relationship between race and national identity are made transparent.”⁵⁴ According to the narrator’s description of Miller’s assumptions about race and competence, Chesnutt reveals Miller’s belief that “when a colored man should demonstrate to the community in which he lived that he possessed character and power, that community would find a way in which to enlist his services for the public good” and that “having recognized his skill, the white people were now ready to take advantage of it.”⁵⁵ Here Chesnutt presents Miller as a bit naïve or inclined to indulge in wishful thinking, too hopeful to see the intransigence of race antagonism.

Perhaps optimistically, Miller “liked to believe that the race antagonism which hampered . . . his people was a mere temporary thing, . . . bound to disappear in time” and yet Chesnutt here introduces some dissonance between Miller’s attitude and his experience, for although Miller is “a credit to the profession” and respected by the white physicians, no white patient had ever come to his practice “except in the case of some poor unfortunate whose pride had been lost in poverty or sin.”⁵⁶ Such dissonance provides further evidence of Gregory E. Rutledge’s argument that Chesnutt “anticipates black intellectuals’ disenchantment with the enlightenment philosophy of racial uplift, that is that racial injustice would cease to exist once African Americans proved their intelligence and civility by European standards, thus enlightening white Americans.”⁵⁷ Chesnutt contrasts Miller’s positive attitude toward race relations with his actual experience of racial prejudice to demonstrate the gap between Miller’s willingness to act benevolently toward white community members and their hesitation to accept his benevolence.

Whites Find Black Benevolence Problematic

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt identifies and makes visible the problem black benevolence creates for whites who for so long have depended on belief in the inferiority of blacks as justification for racial inequalities. In my reading of *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt introduces the major civic and moral problem posed by black benevolence: If black Americans have risen to the level of being capable benefactors, then white Americans should recognize their equality. Because recognizing black equality, however, would entail giving up white privilege, Chesnutt argues that white Americans use custom and tradition to justify and perpetuate their denial of black humanity. In my view, Chesnutt was documenting white privilege long before David Roediger and other scholars named it “white privilege” and defined it. Custom and tradition serve the status quo well. In times of social crisis, however, custom and tradition often break down and benevolence sometimes occupies the void.

Let us turn for a moment to exactly what was at stake as Chesnutt fictionalized the riot, portrayed segregation, and made black benevolence visible in writing *The Marrow of Tradition*. Some brief historical background on the racial makeup in Wilmington helps put into context why many white residents considered the black population a threat. As the largest city in the state, Wilmington benefited from having the chief port and the county seat. After Reconstruction, it became one of the most economically and geographically integrated of Southern cities.⁵⁸ The black population of Wilmington grew from 4,350 in 1860 to 11,324 in 1890. During the same time, the white population of the city grew from 5,202 to 8,731.⁵⁹ The white

population, which had started out with a small majority, ended up significantly in the minority and many came to see the rise of the black middle class as a threat representing blacks acting without white supervision.

A look at the possible motivations of the white riot leaders reveals some lucrative financial benefits accruing to them as a result of white privilege. Democrats wanted to win the 1898 elections in order to protect business, manufacturing and railroad interests. The white men who would control Wilmington's wealth and power for decades held interest in local companies that would have become increasingly regulated if the Democrats lost. The Secret Nine, the group that engineered the Democratic victory, included Hugh MacRae, the director of the National Bank of Wilmington and owner of the Wilmington Cotton Mills. MacRae organized a merger that landed him a position at the top of the new Consolidated Railway Light and Power Company in 1902. Within five years, MacRae created the Tidewater Power Company which controlled the city and beach railway lines and electric and gas systems of Wilmington and the county in which it resided, New Hanover County. Along the rail line he also developed *Lumina*, a resort that was one of the most celebrated landmarks on the East Coast. In another dubious achievement, he established several white-only communities along the railway. The Tidewater Power Company monopolized transportation to the resort until 1939. By promoting a white supremacist narrative, the ruling white elite--who favored the privatization of utilities and transportation--obscured their class interests and profited significantly.⁶⁰

Returning to the novel, we see that, through his narrator, Chesnutt maps some of the potential social difficulties of including Miller in treating Carteret's son. Dr.

Price, the doctor initially consulted, who himself “saw no reason why a colored doctor might not operate upon a white male child,” reflects, however, that other doctors had been invited, doctors with what he would consider “old-fashioned notions” who might not approve what they would deem “such an innovation.”⁶¹ He cautions Burns to that effect, although Burns dismisses the concern. Taking advantage of Burns’s status as a Northerner, Chesnutt appears to preempt Southern whites’ potential objections to Burns’s liberality, showing it to stem from his self-interest and not a result of coming from the North: “We have our prejudices against the negro at the North, but we do not let them stand in the way of anything that *we* want.”⁶² Price, now understanding Burns’s determination to include Miller, realizes that even if the other doctors approved, the reaction of Carteret himself could not be predicted.

Knowing the strength of custom in Wellington and that “no colored person had ever entered the front door of the Carteret residence” makes Price uneasy, as he calculates to himself, “If Miller were going as a servant . . . there would be no difficulty; but as a surgeon” there could be conflict, since “he knew Carteret’s unrelenting hostility to anything that savored of recognition of the negro as the equal of white men.”⁶³ And yet Price also thinks, “Under the circumstances the major might yield a point.”⁶⁴ With each of these considerations, Chesnutt builds tension that soon culminates with the author’s portrayal of Carteret’s own reaction.

Carteret’s outright rejection of even the idea of Miller’s presence enables Chesnutt to raise questions of merit and custom in a more pointed way than he had in the scene in which Price had anticipated possible objections to Miller’s presence.

When it becomes clear that Miller has been invited to the house, Carteret, with a “crimsoned face,” declares, “I could not permit a negro to enter my house upon such an errand.”⁶⁵ Carteret states that although he was unfamiliar with the customs of Vienna or Philadelphia, “in the South we do not call negro doctors to attend white patients.”⁶⁶ The men assembled surely understand that the professions depend upon meritocracy; one can join the professions only through great individual effort directed at meeting a rigorous set of objective criteria. As such, Chesnutt’s choice to make Miller a physician adopts a measure of black equality and capability that would seem unassailable. By having Carteret reject Miller’s help, even when an acknowledged white specialist in the field attests to his expertise, Chesnutt illustrates Carteret’s belief that race trumps notions of professional competence and individual achievement.

Carteret never directly questions Miller’s competence, but rather he rejects him on the basis of the social impropriety of a black doctor’s presence in a white supremacist household. Dr. Price explains Major Carteret’s stance to the other doctors assembled in a way that enables Chesnutt to subtly elide “principles” with “prejudices” and “inflexible rules of conduct,” perhaps foreshadowing Carteret’s markedly different reaction to the second matched incident which illustrates black benevolence to white recipients at the end of the novel: Carteret “has certain principles, -- call them prejudices, if you like, -- certain inflexible rules of conduct by which he regulates his life.”⁶⁷ With this rhetorical move, Chesnutt deliberates as to how to define the contested terms of “principles,” “prejudices” and “rules of conduct.”

Amid invocations of his own “professional honor,” Burns reminds the others that he invited Miller “in a strictly professional capacity, with which his color is not at all concerned” and yet Price counters this claim, showing that for Carteret, the question of accepting the expertise of a black doctor is not “a mere question of prejudice” but rather “a sacred principle, lying at the very root of our social order, involving the purity and prestige of our race.”⁶⁸ Attempting diplomacy, Price suggests that Burns might “put Dr. Miller’s presence on the ground of imperative necessity,” to which Burns objects, retorting: “I have not come all the way from Philadelphia to undertake an operation which I cannot perform without the aid of some particular physician. I merely stand upon my professional rights.”⁶⁹ Provoked by Price’s suggestion and perceiving it as a threat to his professional pride and autonomy, Burns naturally acts to uphold his professional reputation and concedes to Carteret that although Miller’s presence would be sufficient to carry out the operation, it is not essential. Chesnutt thus silences Miller’s strongest advocate in the group of doctors.

Having delineated the opinions of some of the other white Wellington doctors as they respond to Carteret, Chesnutt foregrounds the arbitrariness of these racial distinctions among men who all belong to the same professional class. As a newspaper editor and a powerful leader in the white community, Carteret, also a member of the professional class, rejects Miller due to race prejudice and yet backs into coming up with other reasons to reject Miller besides race. In the narrator’s view, Carteret seeks “another way of escape.” Shortly thereafter Carteret claims to base the rejection solely on painful personal and family history, as we shall soon see. Miller’s

presence would undoubtedly cause great distress in the household, since his wife, Janet Miller, “was the living evidence of a painful episode in Mrs. Carteret’s family,” an allusion to the fact that the wives of the two men, Janet Miller and Olivia Carteret, are half-sisters.⁷⁰ Hearing this, and conferring privately with Price, Burns, who stood up for Miller’s rights to literal mobility as a citizen earlier on the train, backs down from the confrontation with Carteret, a conflict that centers on Miller’s figurative—that is, social--mobility.⁷¹ Chesnutt sets up Carteret to refuse to allow Dr. Miller to attend to his son, even though Miller had studied in Paris and Vienna, which, as Susan Danielson notes, signals that he had received a level of scientific training that would not have been available to any physicians educated in the United States at that time.”⁷²

Having been dismissed literally and figuratively, Miller goes home and the white physicians save the baby. Chesnutt highlights the fact that Burns’s availability makes Miller irrelevant while exposing both the irrationality and complexity of a white man’s rejection of a black professional who, along with Burns, is the most qualified to save his son when that son represents not only his own personal family legacy but the legacy of white supremacy.⁷³ While it may sound as if Chesnutt is merely challenging racism, Ryan Simmons views Chesnutt’s novel as “an exploration of racial discourse . . . how we talk about race and the implications of our manner of talking” as opposed to “an attempt to expose racism,”⁷⁴ an assessment with which I agree.

In the second matched incident in which Miller has the opportunity to act benevolently toward the Carterets, their son Dodie once again struggles to breathe.

Chesnutt uses the exchanges between the Carterets and the Millers in the book's two final chapters, "Fiat Justitia," and "The Sisters," to examine what it means to be human, and therefore vulnerable, quite apart from race, and how individuals enact professional ethical obligations and personal moral responsibilities when they become entangled with issues of race.⁷⁵

As a newspaper editor fueling a white supremacy campaign, Carteret created the very conditions that now endanger his son, the child to whom he owes protection and care. Although Dodie has croup and will die unless he has an operation, "there was no one to send" for a doctor because "the servants were gone, and the nurse was afraid to venture out into the street" during the riot that Carteret had helped generate.⁷⁶ Dr. Evans, a young and inexperienced doctor, attempts to call on at least four other white doctors but none of them are available because of the riot; they are all occupied with other professional responsibilities. By linking the unavailability of each white doctor with events that occurred during the riot, Chesnutt emphasizes the connection between the violence unleashed on the African Americans in the community and Carteret's inability to secure a doctor desperately needed by his son, essentially showing that the riot has also had the unintended effect of endangering Carteret's own family. The fates of black and white families are, after all, intertwined.

In this episode of Dodie's life-threatening emergency, Chesnutt's novel parallels the Jones and Allen narrative discussed in chapter one of this study, raising the question of what level of responsibility professionals should assume during a social crisis and to what extent white privilege enables certain individuals to flee from danger while others have no choice but to remain in close proximity to it. During the

yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, most of the white doctors fled and therefore the black nurses stepped in to maintain social order; in *The Marrow of Tradition*, when at the end of the novel Carteret finds “we have called all the best doctors, and none are available,” with “best” also implying “white,” he sends Evans to seek out Dr. Miller as a last resort.⁷⁷ Actually, the Carterets or their representative approach Miller three times during this episode (first Evans, then Carteret himself, and finally Mrs. Carteret), with each appeal becoming more personal.

Accustomed to white privilege and more familiar with coerced black labor than with black benevolence, Carteret “did not imagine” that the “doctor would refuse the call” (despite having been publically rejected by Carteret earlier) for three reasons over which he silently ruminates. Carteret’s first reason, that “it would be too great an honor for a negro to decline,” implies that for a moment he believes himself the benefactor and Miller the recipient, a reversal of the actual circumstances.⁷⁸ By exposing this rationale, Chesnutt registers the unfairness of blacks being marked as publicly available for labor, presumed to lack the agency to choose whether to respond or not. Furthermore, given the violence done to African Americans on this day of the riot, Miller might find no honor in Carteret’s request, but rather humiliation or capitulation. Miller actually rejects the supposed gift of honor Carteret is offering him, similar to the way that Jacobs rejected the dubious gift of a cottage from her master as discussed in chapter two of this study. By virtue of Carteret’s second reason, that “he was a man of fine feeling,--for a negro,” he attributes to Miller a positive quality that he would not normally attribute to a black man, perhaps to reassure himself that Miller will be sympathetic to him, however backhanded a

compliment it might be to Miller.⁷⁹ Carteret's reasoning also implies that a white man of sensitive feeling still has finer feelings than a black man of sensitive feeling, reinforcing the social and racial hierarchy that Carteret espouses. By invoking the third reason, that "professional ethics would require him to respond," Chesnutt sets up Carteret to appeal to Miller as a professional rather than as a human being.⁸⁰ All three of Carteret's reasons for expecting Miller to respond positively convey the overall sense of superiority that Carteret projects, keeping him in the seat of power and making him almost untouchable.

Perhaps because of Carteret's past rejection of Miller, a rejection based on personal grounds—at least that was the stated reason—the character of Carteret seems to place more faith in an affirmative answer from Miller if it comes from a professional rather than a personal basis. By counting on "professional ethics" to "require" Miller to respond to Carteret's request, Carteret appeals to a legal sensibility (perhaps more favorable and familiar for white citizens) for sympathetic action rather than a moral basis. In his allusion to the Hippocratic Oath that Miller has no doubt taken in the course of becoming a doctor, Carteret implicitly suggests that the black doctor should "do no harm" while Chesnutt subtly points out that, as a journalist, Carteret himself has neither taken nor upheld such an oath but rather has used his newspaper to instigate the day's violence.

Carteret, whose decision to reject Miller's service early in the novel signaled a belief that race trumps competence, paradoxically attempts to define what he is asking of Miller in the second incident as labor—even if labor of a rather elevated kind—rather than as a favor or benevolence, as we saw in chapter one of this

dissertation. Chesnutt's repetition of the word "professional" in passages relating to Carteret's interiority (as he waits for Evans to bring back Dr. Miller, for example) highlights this distinction.⁸¹ Yet, unlike the labor of the black nurses in Jones and Allen's *Narrative*, whose work was cast as unpleasant and unskilled domestic labor, Miller's labor as a doctor requires significant knowledge, skill and experience and therefore carries with it great prestige. In Carteret's eyes, nonetheless, black labor cannot be viewed as noble work. Because asking for a favor changes the power dynamic between two individuals, Carteret's appeal to a professional obligation instead avoids the inconvenience of having to grapple with the social relationship between himself and Miller and avoids recognizing Miller as a person in favor of viewing him as akin to hired help.

Yet Chesnutt animates Miller with a penchant for calling attention back to his humanity rather than to his professional identity. When Carteret goes to Miller himself to entreat him, he tells Miller he has come to seek his "professional services" for his child, thus denying the compassion that Miller would be exercising by responding to his son's needs and devaluing it as an act of benevolence. Carteret acknowledges Miller's professional expertise as a commodity and avoids counting Miller's personal vulnerability as an expression of humanity. Nonetheless, when Carteret approaches Miller "as a physician," Miller responds to Carteret, viewing him as "a father whose only child's life is in danger" and calls attention to his own plight as a father: "There lies *my* only child," killed in "this riot which you and your paper have fomented; struck down as much by your hand as though you had held the weapon with which his life was taken!"⁸²

By choosing to inform the readers that Miller's son was killed by a stray bullet in the streets at the same time that Carteret learns this fact, Chesnutt places the reader in Carteret's shoes at the moment in which Miller blames Carteret for his son's death, perhaps issuing a call to white people for self-examination. During a state of violence that made it dangerous for a black man to be out in the streets, Carteret, perhaps unconsciously, wants Miller to risk his own life by coming to see his child. Believing that Miller had never learned of Carteret's earlier outright rejection of him when Dr. Burns had invited him to the house, it did not occur to Carteret that Miller would have to exercise some level of graciousness toward him to be willing to aid his son at this critical moment.⁸³

In the second matched incident of potential black benevolence in the novel, Chesnutt considers again the relation of race to competence, this time in light of all that has changed for Carteret and Miller. By returning to a set of circumstances similar to what he presented in the first medical emergency that Carteret's son experienced in the novel, Chesnutt sets up a final frame in which the cost of rejecting black benevolence becomes too high for Carteret. To save his son, Carteret has to choose between his ideology of white supremacy and recognizing black humanity. Carteret recognizes Miller's capability only when forced to do so, in a case of "imperative necessity"⁸⁴ when "every other interest or consideration must give way before the imminence of his child's peril."⁸⁵ Miller points to the figure of his dead son in the next room and affirms to Carteret, "My duty calls me" to stay at home with "my suffering wife."⁸⁶ In Miller, Chesnutt creates a character who recognizes that the black physician can choose to withhold help from white bodies who have been

implicated in past oppression against him. For a moment, Carteret “saw clearly and convincingly that he had no standing here, in the presence of death” and “could not expect, could not ask, this father to leave his own household at such a moment.”⁸⁷ Carteret finally shifts from viewing Miller as a black man and a doctor to viewing him as a father, a husband and a human being.

Having ended the confrontation between Major Carteret and Dr. Miller in a seeming standstill, Chesnutt employs a showdown between Mrs. Carteret and Dr. Miller to examine the conditions under which white people become willing to accept and even plead for black benevolence. Upon Carteret’s return home, seeing that he has failed to bring the doctor, Mrs. Carteret rushes to Dr. Miller’s house and begs him, “Oh, Dr. Miller, dear Dr. Miller, if you have a heart, come and save my child!”⁸⁸ Miller acknowledges that he has a heart, but suggests its existence makes demands of him other than to save her child: “Madam, my heart is broken. My people lie dead upon the streets, at the hands of yours. The work of my life is in ashes” and there “lies my own child!”⁸⁹ He declares he cannot go because “you ask too much of human nature!”⁹⁰ She calls him a “murderer” and, just as impulsively, throws herself at his feet. Apparently for Mrs. Carteret, black people are human because they have hearts, but she seems surprised that their hearts can assert agency rather than just receive injuries. Chesnutt’s choice of words equates images of having a “heart” with having sympathy and being willing to help someone while at the same time questioning what it means to be human within a long tradition of the denial of black humanity.

Black Benevolence Privileges Moral Argument over Social Argument

For Chesnutt, black benevolence toward whites cuts through social and political arrangements as markers of personhood and offers a more essential moral or ethical argument to undergird a claim to humanity and dignity. By employing two matched scenes of black benevolence to whites in his narrative, Chesnutt implicitly seems to consider the premise that, according to religion and ethics scholar David H. Smith, “Moral citizenship is the ground or social foundation of political citizenship and is the end for which political citizenship is a means.”⁹¹ In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt captures the attitudes of many white community members who viewed citizen’s responsibilities toward one another in legal rather than moral terms that might impinge on their perceived role as privileged guardians of whiteness and social order. For example, the primary white supremacist leader in the novel, Carteret, cautions the elder Delamere from one of the town’s wealthy white families regarding his servant, “You should undeceive yourself. This man is no longer your property. The negroes are no longer under our control, and with their emancipation ceased our responsibility.”⁹² Similarly, another white supremacist leader, Belmont, comments that Northern rather than Southern philanthropists should be responsible for the local black hospital. What links Carteret’s advice to Delamere with Belmont’s abdication of Southern responsibility is the belief that since emancipation, white people no longer bear responsibility for the well-being of African Americans. Let us return to Chesnutt’s text to see how this shift to the moral and ethical plays out.

Ending an exchange between two men of the professional class and transferring that exchange to two women who are related by blood, Chesnutt shifts

the terms on which this confrontation rests. Miller turns the negotiations over to the two half-sisters, Olivia Carteret and Janet Miller, constructing a scene in which the narrator refers to Janet as an “avenging goddess” and Olivia as “trembling suppliant,”⁹³ suggesting an imbalance of power in this struggle to either reject or recognize kinship between individuals, families and races. When Miller says he will defer to Janet’s decision, Olivia fervently petitions her, “If you have a human heart, tell your husband to come with me,” as if to remind Janet who defines what is human and what is just in a white-dominated society.⁹⁴ Janet counters with her own authority as an African American woman to define what is human and what is right when she replies, “I have a human heart, and therefore I will not let him go.”⁹⁵ In this scene, Chesnutt questions whether white citizens’ willingness to accept black benevolence is based solely on self-interest or if it can also include the willingness to admit blood relations and the fact that their fates are intertwined.

In this encounter between Janet and Olivia, Chesnutt poses the possibility that African American citizens might reject white citizens’ tardy and tainted recognition of kinship. Despite Olivia’s admission that Janet is her lawful sister, it is a recognition which from Janet’s perspective “had come . . . in a storm of blood and tears; not . . . from an open heart, but extorted from a reluctant conscience by the agony of a mother’s fears.”⁹⁶ Accusing her white sister of criminality and simultaneously placing herself in the position of victim and charity recipient,⁹⁷ Janet declares, “My mother died of want and I was brought up by the hand of charity. Now, . . . you offer me back the money which you . . . have robbed me of!”⁹⁸ This “tardy recognition comes . . . tainted with fraud and crime and blood,” an example of what Julie

Iromuanya terms “the dangerous unlawfulness of law.”⁹⁹ Although she has long awaited this acknowledgment and it has finally come, Janet reasserts her agency and rejects “your father’s name, your father’s wealth, your sisterly recognition” for they are all “bought too dear,” mostly because Janet’s son is dead, but in part because these benefits have been seemingly packaged as a bargaining chip in this encounter.¹⁰⁰ Susan Danielson argues that, at this moment of renunciation, Janet, unlike Olivia, no longer cares about kinship and lineage.¹⁰¹ In my view, Janet does still care about kinship, but not in the sense of those who are directly and biologically related in the same immediate family, but rather in the sense of a universal brotherhood and sisterhood, in which all humans are connected. Returning to the question of heart and humanness, Janet finally announces her decision, “know that a woman may be foully wronged, and yet may have a heart to feel, even for one who has injured her,” telling her husband to go and attend to the child.¹⁰² Despite Janet’s injured heart, she can still enact agency. Chesnutt positions her on the moral high ground by demonstrating that she can still enact benevolence toward white Americans who have oppressed her people for centuries.

Black Benevolence Begs Question of Assimilation or Acceptance as Kin

In my reading of *The Marrow of Tradition*, adding moral and ethical concerns about black inclusion in American society to what had been more exclusively social and political concerns about that inclusion raises a parallel question about whether American society simply assimilates the racial other in its midst, or can accept the racial other as kin. As we have seen, the interactions in the first matched incident of potential black benevolence in the novel occur between the men and center on the

issue of black social and political equality, at least for black citizens of the professional class, and the illogical justification for white supremacy. In contrast, in the second matched incident, the interactions occur primarily between the women who engage each other far more personally, and center on the moral and ethical dimensions of accepting black Americans as family, issues that are even more difficult to negotiate. Perhaps this turn to the difficult moral and ethical dimensions of race can be explained by Chesnut's changing attitude toward what the public would accept in literature that addressed the state of racial discourse in this country.

Although Chesnut knew early on of the "exigencies of the genteel white literary market" to which he would have to "adapt,"¹⁰³ his view of race relations and constructive racial discourse became more pessimistic as he came to better understand the literary market and the public's taste over the years. In a March 4, 1889 letter to writer and critic George Washington Cable, Chesnut states "there is a growing demand for literature dealing with the Negro" and "the time is propitious for it."¹⁰⁴ A few months later, Chesnut wrote again to Cable, this time anxious that "the public, as represented by the editors of the leading magazines, is not absolutely yearning for an opportunity to read the utterances of obscure colored writers upon the subject of the Negro's rights."¹⁰⁵ At a more discouraging moment in 1893, Chesnut writes again to Tourgee, "in my intercourse with the best white people of one of the most advanced communities of the United States, . . . hearing the subject of the wrongs of the Negro brought up, . . . I have observed that it is dismissed as quickly as politeness will permit."¹⁰⁶ By the end of 1901, amid disappointing sales of *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnut declared, "I am beginning to suspect that the public as

a rule does not care for books in which the principal characters are colored people, or with a striking sympathy with that race as contrasted with the white race.”¹⁰⁷ *The Marrow of Tradition*—a book that asks its white audience to hear black perspectives on the riot and respond favorably to black benevolence--sold only 3,387 copies in the two years after its publication.¹⁰⁸ Although Houghton, Mifflin and Company published his first two story collections in 1899, his first novel in 1900, and *The Marrow of Tradition* in 1901, the publisher discontinued its work with Chesnutt shortly thereafter, citing “a large aggregate loss on the several volumes of which we had such hopes.”¹⁰⁹

Despite the lack of commercial success for *The Marrow of Tradition*, the novel demonstrates that Chesnutt developed a nuanced understanding of multiple black and white perspectives on the discourse of race. Chesnutt’s genius lies in his own moral agency as an author because, to borrow Simmons’s assertion, one’s ability “to understand a variety of perspectives and to accept the social responsibilities such an understanding implies—determines one’s moral agency.”¹¹⁰ Chesnutt sought to use literature “to accustom the public mind to the idea” of social recognition for black people and “while amusing them to lead them on imperceptibly, unconsciously step by step to the desired state of feeling.”¹¹¹ While Chesnutt might not have accomplished leading more readers in this direction, he forged a path that other black writers could emulate. The next generation of African American writers to follow Chesnutt would prompt and participate in the Harlem Renaissance.

Black Benevolence Recognizes Blacks' and Whites' Interdependence

Chesnutt's novel does not answer the questions it raises or solve the problems it poses, but seems to issue a warning to all American citizens: Like it or not, the American nation has both black and white citizens whose futures are interdependent; failure to recognize that interdependence will hinder the nation's progress. The racial other has not caused racial divisions in the nation; custom and tradition have. By writing the burning of Miller's hospital into the novel, Chesnutt undercuts Miller's seeming optimism that white citizens, despite their race prejudice, will not engage in completely irrational and uncivilized behavior, destroying an institution dedicated to the public good. During the riot, another black character warns Miller that the white people will burn the black schools, the churches and the hospital, but Miller naively replies: "They'll not burn the schoolhouses, nor the hospital – they are not such fools, for they benefit the community."¹¹² At the end of the day, when only ashes remain where the hospital had stood, the narrator characterizes the event as "a melancholy witness to the fact that our boasted civilization is but a thin veneer. . ." ¹¹³ and refers to Miller's hospital as "the monument of his. . . philanthropy," acknowledging both the prospect of black professionals' rising social standing and the perceived threat of black residents acting without white supervision.¹¹⁴

Through the destruction of the hospital, Chesnutt proposes that even white citizens' own espoused social norms about law, order, and civilization will not prevent them from acting out racial aggression and violence. Oddly, white citizens who hold such social norms so dear do not seem to apply them to themselves. This is an example of what Gregory Rutledge has described as Chesnutt's assertion "that one

of the key elements sustaining the American body politic is socialization” and that “each white citizen . . . becomes a white hero and warrior who polices and defends the racial mythology.”¹¹⁵ The last line of Chesnutt’s novel questions this socialization. Miller reaches the Carteret house and inquires about the child’s status. Dr. Evans declares, “There’s time enough, but none to spare,” a line which encapsulates the urgency of the nation’s need to heal its racial divisions. With this, Chesnutt affirms that the nation cannot afford to waste black talent, because, if it does, not only will blacks suffer, whites will suffer too. Chesnutt ties his arguments about black capacity, the need for black social inclusion and inclusion in the body politic to benevolence. Although critical readings often declare the novel’s ending ambiguous, that perspective seems to overly limit the scope of Chesnutt’s concerns in the novel.¹¹⁶ If the primary question in the novel is about Dodie’s survival, I would agree that the ending is ambiguous. For me, however, the primary question is about how personhood serves as the ground for citizenship. As such, the Millers clearly prove their humanity and worthiness for citizenship under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Through *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt argues that the problem of white benevolence proves more serious and damaging to the nation than the “problem” of black benevolence—and the legitimate claim of racial equality it signifies. Using the Millers as representative of black progress and the Carterets as symbolic of white resistance to black progress, Chesnutt contemplates under what conditions black benevolence to white people is objectionable, tolerable or desirable in the eyes of white people. In the two matched incidents of potential black benevolence in the

novel, Chesnutt addresses accepting black Americans as equals on a political and social level and as kin on a moral and ethical level. In the first incident, black benevolence appears to be objectionable to whites whereas in the second incident, black benevolence appears to be essential and desirable to them.

Chesnutt, who understood the power of black representation in print, also knew that depictions of black benevolence to whites could provide an alternative kind of racial representation to how white discourse represented blacks. With an emerging black professional class complicating the national picture, and despite a climate in which whites found black benevolence problematic, Chesnutt used black benevolence to advance a moral argument rather than a social argument for black humanity and citizenship. While Chesnutt recognized that many white Americans barely felt comfortable with the prospect of black assimilation into society, Chesnutt used the depiction of black benevolence to challenge white Americans to go further and accept black Americans as kin, for upon the interdependence of black and white Americans rested the future of the nation.

Even as Chesnutt's inclusion of multiple white and black perspectives in his fictional chronicle most distinguishes *The Marrow of Tradition* from the narratives of the authors examined earlier in this study, its inconclusiveness and refusal to make simple moral conclusions may be what most distinguishes it from the sentimental novels of the century that had just ended. Yet even if the final message of the novel cannot be summed up simply, the existence and model of this literary accomplishment itself is a hopeful one. That Chesnutt ends the novel with a painful but generous and uncoerced act of benevolence from a black family to a white family

seems to affirm the need for racial interdependence and ultimately argue that the inclusion of African Americans into the body politic and the human family will prove a gift to all Americans.

Epilogue

The focus texts of my study demonstrate how nineteenth-century African-American authors drew a connection between black benevolence toward whites and the positive racial representation of blacks. It is not hard to imagine these authors as keenly aware of the function this reversal of traditional, white-to-black benevolence might play in humanizing and dignifying African Americans in the eyes of their own people and perhaps in society at large. Turning to the historical event fictionalized in Chesnut's *Marrow of Tradition*, it is fascinating to note that even today, groups like the 1898 Wilmington Institute for Education and Research attempt to re-write history, placing whites in the seat of benevolence, acting as upright citizens and caretakers of blacks.

The 1898 Wilmington Institute website offers various reasons for the racial conflict in Wilmington that year. One reason, the website contends, was “the smallpox epidemic that hit Wilmington in January, 1898, with black citizens rioting and burning two houses to quarantine those suffering” and “a large mass meeting of mostly blacks assembled at City Hall on January 27, 1898, to protest mandatory smallpox vaccination in the city.”¹ In saying this, the website portrays blacks as unruly and resistant to the actions of whites who are ostensibly showing concern for the welfare of society in general by seeking to stem an epidemic, prevent social upheaval, and protect the black population. A check of Harvard's Contagion website, an authoritative source for historical views of diseases and epidemics, reveals no evidence of mandatory smallpox vaccination or a smallpox epidemic in

Wilmington, NC in 1898.² Clearly, the website's content seeks to bolster a narrative that deflects responsibility for the riot from whites onto blacks.

The website presents powerful images to reinforce its claims, showing what appears to be a pencil or charcoal drawing of two black men firing guns in the foreground and a handful of blacks firing guns in the background, thus reinforcing the contention that black residents fired on white residents first, provoking the violence. In the following passage, the website authors insist on blaming blacks for the riot, primarily Alex Manly, the black newspaper editor, but secondarily, the black residents who resisted the presumably responsible white residents intent on silencing the "radical" black newspaper: "Much less a 'race riot' than a political conflict involving racial dynamics in North Carolina, it is generally understood to be caused by the pen of a radical black newspaper editor who was cautioned by people of his own race to cease his racial agitation, lest it result in violence. While the potential for racial conflict was very near the surface after the installation of a Republican governor in 1896, violence did not occur until black residents fired upon white residents intent upon silencing the radical newspaper of Alexander Manly."³ Like the newspapers of Chesnut's day and those depicted in his novel, the website distorts and reinterprets events to bolster traditional narratives of white benevolence and representations of blacks as prone to violence and unable to assume the mantle of citizenship.

While the 1898 Wilmington Institute website is perhaps an extreme example, similar patterns of thought (traditional views of white benevolence toward blacks) are sometimes evident among the well-intentioned white college students I have worked

with in community-based learning (CBL) programs over the years. As noted in the introduction of this study, my initial interest in the topic of race and power in benevolent relationships was prompted by my participation in such programs in the racially diverse Washington, DC area. The CBL movement⁴ within higher education, although a late twentieth-century phenomenon, has roots in the late nineteenth century, as has been argued by various scholars.⁵ The influence of prominent white late nineteenth-century reformers, such as Jane Addams and John Dewey, on the emergence of CBL as a pedagogical practice has been well documented, but the influence of nineteenth century African Americans on the movement has not.⁶ My work begins to recover Jones and Allen, Jacobs, Keckley and Chesnutt as African American authors of four narratives whose depictions of black benefactors and white recipients anticipated many of the concerns of today's CBL movement as it struggles to understand and dismantle racialized benevolence.

Knowing the social, political and historical context of both American racism and American benevolence can help us understand how they developed, what conditions their existence and what often connects them. Although I dutifully took an introduction to sociology course as an undergraduate, and learned that race was socially constructed, it was not until graduate school that I more fully grasped how the social construction of race changes from one place to another and one time period to another. Similarly, models of benevolence, including models of racialized benevolence, are also socially constructed. My entire study views benevolence as socially constructed and historically grounded rather than unconditionally virtuous because, for example, white benevolence to blacks has been shown to frequently

involve the social control of blacks. In contrast, black benevolence to whites serves as a form of resistance. It should not be surprising that racism and benevolence are connected today, were intertwined in the nineteenth-century and might have been working in tandem since the early settlement of what is now the American nation.

Benevolence was a theme in attracting settlers to the New World from the beginning. The original seal of the Massachusetts Bay Colony featured a picture of an Indian with the words “Come over and help us” streaming out of his mouth.⁷ In a pamphlet called *New England’s Plantation*, Francis Higginson, a minister, wrote an account of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in which he suggested that the Puritans’ arrival there “will be a means both of relief to them [the Indians] when they want and also a defense from their enemies.”⁸ Appealing to immigrants with a moral purpose, Higginson had this pamphlet printed in London in 1630.⁹ He announced the abundance of good land, saying, “Here wants as yet the good company of honest Christians . . . to make use of this fruitful land: great pity it is to see so much good ground for corn and for grass as any is under the Heavens, to lie altogether unoccupied.”¹⁰ He also stated the Puritans’ “benevolent” intentions: “The main end of this plantation, being, by the assistance of Almighty God, the conversion of the savages.”¹¹

Benevolence still remains a prominent theme in the American psyche today. Racialized benevolence, particularly benevolence from white benefactors to black recipients, often follows close behind. Writing amid a flurry of American celebrity activists turning their attention to Africa at the beginning of the twenty-first-century, adopting black babies and raising funds for the fight against AIDS, journalist Andrew

Rice observed: “Indeed, the word ‘Africa’ has become a brand, synonymous with misery and moral obligation.”¹² These celebrities apparently are not adopting black babies from Baltimore or Detroit or, for that matter, white babies from Portland or Minneapolis at the same rate that they are adopting black babies from Africa. Rice concurs with and reinforces what literary scholar Susan Ryan asserted about the nineteenth century when she stated, “the categories of blackness, . . . (or, at times, a generic ‘foreignness’) came to signify, for many whites, need itself.”¹³ American benevolence has evolved as a set of practices embedded in a racialized society since the nation’s colonization and founding by white Europeans.

When Barack Obama was elected the first black President of the United States in 2008, claims of living in a post-racial society suddenly began to appear. Those claims, however, now seem overstated or overly optimistic. Similarly, good intentions and good deeds have created few post-racial models of benevolence. Collecting donated clothing after the Haiti earthquake of 2010, student leaders at a New England liberal arts college complained to me of the heedlessness of fellow students who put fur coats and winter boots in the collection boxes. The student leaders’ questions ranged from simple factual ones, “Do they know anything at all about how hot it is in Haiti?” to complex political ones, “Why is Haiti always portrayed in the media as one of the poorest nations and rarely as the first independent black nation?” These student leaders clearly saw contradictions in the American benevolence narrative and questioned a skewed focus on the dire economic conditions of a country at the expense of its rich cultural history. Compelled to respond, the student leaders held a

“TABOO” dialogue entitled “The Politics of Giving” to discuss their observations with their peers.¹⁴

Looking to literature to help students navigate the complexities of race and benevolence in an age in which the value and relevance of the humanities and the liberal arts have been called into question might reaffirm their worth. As historian Daniel Czitrom has said, "History is an act of imagination. You've got to try to re-create an event, a milieu, a person's life or whatever you are working on, using whatever sources you can find. But I think the best historical writing goes beyond that to interpreting and ascribing meaning to events, and to bringing people alive, so that the reader can understand the choices people faced at a particular time."¹⁵ Students are eager to unleash their energies upon the world, but they are often overwhelmed by the needs of people from every corner of the earth that globalization has brought them. They are tired of “diversity training” that they have encountered in bite-size two-hour workshops. They are living in a time of “disaster tourism” and “disaster fatigue.”¹⁶

Much of my professional life I have explored how to encourage students to be, in John Ernest’s words, “active readers of history” and to share James Sidbury’s concern with the relation of discourse to action.¹⁷ I expect my work to advance students’ understanding of the connection between narrative and ideology, between the stories Americans tell themselves and the beliefs and behaviors that those stories justify. My hope is that students who might dismiss the nineteenth-century texts I have examined here as melodramatic and distant from today’s concerns become interested in reading them. For twenty-first-century students, discussing race in the

context of the nineteenth century might seem less threatening than tackling current racial issues. Once they have been exposed to new points of view about race and benevolence in American history, perhaps they will become more able to engage in civil dialogue about race relations and benevolence today.

The depiction of white benevolence to black recipients has been well represented in American literature. As just one example, recall Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* encouraging slaves to embrace Christianity and giving them presents shortly before her death. Yet, despite the prominence of white benevolence to blacks in this novel, Stowe presents a nascent form of black benevolence to whites in the text. In an earlier scene given lesser critical attention than others involving Eva, the slave named Tom meets Eva on a boat and when she falls into the river, Tom saves her. Eva's father gratefully buys Tom, but Tom eventually dies a martyr's death when he refuses to tell his subsequent master Simon Legree the whereabouts of two escaped slaves. Black benevolence to whites appears briefly, but the black benefactor is eventually killed off.

Examples of black benefactors giving to white recipients have not been well represented in American literature. Even in Stowe's later novel, *Dred*, which is often cited as evidence of her developing views on race and the influence of black abolitionists on her work, we see black benevolence cut short. Harry and Dred (both black) rescue the white Clayton who was beaten by white men because he sympathized with blacks.¹⁸ Because Dred gets killed and Harry flees to Canada, they are both subject to the same social or physical death reserved for blacks who act as benefactors to whites that I lamented in my introduction chapter. In the same novel,

Milly, an ex-slave, raises forty destitute children in New York, black and white alike, but this fact occupies only a minor position in the book. There are hints of black benevolence to whites in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but the idea is not further developed in the novel nor in criticism about it.

Texts such as the four I have studied here can help students make meaning of these new forms of ancient human problems. These texts and this study can prod students to venture beyond typical sound-bite explanations to more fully understand the dynamics of race and benevolence. The portrayal of the black nurses who risk their lives caring for white people stricken with yellow fever in the narrative written by Jones and Allen, Aunt Marthy's resourcefulness in the Jacobs narrative, Keckley's compassion for Mrs. Lincoln in *Behind the Scenes* and characters like Chesnut's Dr. William Miller and Janet Miller in historical fiction can stimulate students' imagination. As books written for a social purpose, and books that are both literary and historical, the authors of the four focus texts in my study pay close attention to the social conditions of blacks. They examine and intervene in events hostile to African Americans because of their concern with the relation of discourse to action. They encourage readers to become critical readers of history too, because historical understanding can lead to and indeed, sometimes compels, moral action. The issues addressed by the authors of all four texts shift in light of evolving political and social contexts yet the authors consistently respond to and challenge the dominant literary and political discourses of their time. Using narrative, they claim a place for African Americans in the body politic.

The authors of my four focus texts show white civic networks to be weak or inadequate and black social networks to be stronger and more effective than thought possible under conditions of oppression. In this sense, these four narratives perform an important function in African American community formation. All four authors produce chronicles that counter official accounts of historical events. Individually and collectively, these four texts destabilize the status quo, display black agency, declare African American readiness for citizenship and cause us to rethink the dominant American narrative regarding benevolence.

These African American authors recognized that white Americans' use of benevolence rhetoric created ideologies of race and nation and then figured out how to use their own benevolence rhetoric to destabilize those ideologies. Writing against the grateful slave trope, these four authors have exposed the ungrateful master, the ungrateful white America. These authors established a pattern of portraying black benefactors as agents giving to white recipients and yet not being subject to social and/or physical death in literary terms or in actual life.

Identifying the four African American authored texts in my study, which contain depictions of black benevolence to white people, highlights a tradition of black benevolence that has been nearly hidden for many white Americans and puts these four texts directly in conversation with each other. My reading examines them as texts about benevolence, viewing them as narratives about moments of social crisis, moments in which white benevolence has failed in some way and black benevolence emerges as an alternative.

Although numerous scholars have written about benevolence and philanthropy in nineteenth-century American literature, including African American texts, scholarly discourse about the reversal of racialized dynamics of benevolence—specifically through the depiction of black benefactors aiding white recipients—has not been adequately addressed. While several scholars have argued that nineteenth-century middle-class white women used benevolence as a means of increasing their social status among themselves (perhaps even asserting social superiority in relation to blacks), little scholarly attention has been paid to the influence of benevolence on the social status of black Americans who act as benefactors to white Americans.

In the four texts included in my study, black benevolence to white people has the potential to improve the social status of black benefactors, giving them recognition in the public sphere and relief from the constraints of racial roles at crucial moments. Ironically, however, black benevolence to whites also invites a backlash. In some cases, the depiction of black benevolence has been perceived as a threat to white Americans, resulting in white discourse that downplays, discredits, or actually criminalizes black benevolence. While other scholars have critiqued white benevolence to racial “others” as paternalistic or condescending, the examples of black benevolence in my four focus texts do not necessarily present the black benefactor as making a claim of social superiority but rather a claim to humanity and equality with white Americans. These four texts illuminate how the power dynamic operates when the benefactor is black and the recipient is white. Because benevolence can construct and reinforce racial boundaries, it can also disrupt racial boundaries.

Plenty of literary critics view African American literature as an integral part of American literature. Among the general public, however, African American literature and American literature are too often viewed as separate entities. The literatures, histories and fates of black and white Americans are inextricably intertwined. As one of Chesnut's white characters in *The Marrow of Tradition* observes while in conversation with a black professional peer, the future of the black race "is a serial story which we are all reading," a story not only "yours" but "ours."¹⁹ May we keep reading, paying careful attention to the story and sharing it.

Endnotes

Introduction

¹ I did, however, see several examples of the reversal of subject positions that were not racially based. Some reversals depicted a woman who was a former recipient of charity going on to become a benefactor to other young women. Others depicted a benefactor eventually coming to need the very services she herself had been providing to others, such as a female nurse to Union soldiers during the Civil War becoming ill and being nursed by the more ambulatory of the recovering soldiers.

² Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1794).

³ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston: Published for the author, 1861); Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years a Slave, Four Years at the White House* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Company, 1868).

⁴ Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1901).

⁵ See Lauren Berlant, Citizenship entry, *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* at http://keywords.fordhamitac.org/keyword_entries/citizenship.html, accessed 6/18/12; Renato Rosaldo, "Cultural Citizenship and Education Democracy," *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3, Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future (Aug. 1994): 402; Shirley S. Tang, "Diasporic Cultural Citizenship: Negotiate

and Create Places and Identities in Their Refugee Migration and Deportation Experiences,” *Trotter Review* 19, no. 1 (2010): 5; and N. Stevenson, *Culture and Citizenship* (London: Sage, 2001).

⁶ Gerard Delanty, “Two Conceptions of Cultural Citizenship: A Review of Recent Literature on Culture and Citizenship,” *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1, No. 3, (March 2002): 65.

⁷ For a description of this genre, see Nina Baym’s *Woman’s Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America, 1820-1870* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 83. Also see Donna M. Campbell’s “Domestic or Sentimental Fiction, 1820-1865” at www.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/domestic.htm, accessed 9/6/10.

⁸ For a discussion of the impact of sentimental culture on males, see Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁹ Other American texts that could be included in this category are Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827), Susan Paul’s *Memoir of James Jackson* (1835), Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Blithedale Romance* (1852), Herman Melville’s *Bartleby* (1853), Louisa May Alcott’s *Hospital Sketches* (1863), Charlotte Forten Grimke’s *The Journal of Charlotte Forten* (1864), and Pauline Hopkins’s *Contending Forces* (1900). British texts that could be included in this list are Sarah Scott’s *A History of Sir George Ellison* (1766) and Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1853), *Little Dorrit* (1857), and *Great Expectations* (1861).

¹⁰ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). For more recent scholarship on this, see Cindy Weinstein's *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). See also Lauren Berlant's *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Literature*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Kristin Boudreau's *Sympathy in American Literature: American Sentiments from Jefferson to the Jameses*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); and Andrew Burstein's *Sentimental Democracy: The Evolution of America's Romantic Self-Image*, (New York: Will and Wang, 1999).

¹¹ Susan K Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretative Strategies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.)

¹² The problem of sympathetic identification and other contradictions within sentimentalism has also been addressed by other scholars such as Marianne Noble, June Howard, Robert Levine and Glenn Hendler. See Marianne Noble, *The Masochistic Pleasures of Sentimental Literature* (Princeton University Press, 2000); June Howard, "What is Sentimentality?" *American Literary History* 11 (1999): 73; Robert S. Levine, "Sympathy and Reform in *The Blithedale Romance*" in Richard H. Millington, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Hawthorne*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004); Glenn Hendler, *Public Sentiments: Structures of Feeling in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹³ Deborah Carlin, “‘What Methods Have Brought Blessing’: Discourses of Reform in Philanthropic Literature,” in *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. Joyce W. Warren (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 203-25.

¹⁴ Jill Bergman and Debra Bernardi, *Our Sisters’ Keepers* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 11-12.

¹⁵ Alice Wellington Rollins, *Uncle Tom’s Tenement: A Novel* (Boston: W. E. Smythe, 1888): 6. <http://pds.lib.harvard.edu/pds/view/3796578?n=1&s=4&printThumbnails=no> Accessed Dec. 20, 2010.

¹⁶ *American Transcendental Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (September 1997).

¹⁷ Eiselein, Gregory. *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), ix.

¹⁸ Eiselein, 5-9.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Julia Stern, *The Plight of Feeling* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2.

²¹ Stern, 2.

²² Susan Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 9.

²³ Ryan, 69-71.

²⁴ Ryan, 1.

²⁵ Ryan, 17.

²⁶ Sarah Robbins, *Managing Literacy, Mothering America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 4.

²⁷ Robbins, 4, 9, 13.

²⁸ Morgan, William M. *Questionable Charity: Gender, Humanitarianism, and Complicity in U.S. Literary Realism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2004), 68-99.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Bergman and Bernardi, 1, 9.

³¹ Although I do not examine benevolence texts as a gendered genre, it is important to note that nineteenth-century women used benevolence to make their foray into the public sphere in a way similar to how African Americans used benevolence to claim a space in the public sphere.

³² Bergman and Bernardi, 1, 9.

³³ Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁴ Yu-Fang Cho, "'Yellow Slavery': Narratives of Rescue, and Sui Sin Far/Edith Maude Eaton's 'Lin John' (1899)," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 12, no. 1 (2009): 35-63, and "Domesticating the Aliens Within: Sentimental Benevolence in Late-Nineteenth-Century California Magazines," *American Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2009): 113-136.

³⁵ Cho, "Yellow Slavery," 38.

³⁶ Cho, "Domesticating," 120.

³⁷ Examples of such works are novels by Edward Kimber (1754), Sarah Scott (1766) and Henry Mackenzie (1777). See George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The*

Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 35.

³⁸ Boulukos, 7, 15.

³⁹ In *Dred*, the title character dies and Harry goes North to settle in Canada. In *The Monster*, Henry Johnson does not die but he is severely disfigured and abandoned by the community. In *Margret Howth*, Lois Yare dies from smoke inhalation.

⁴⁰ James Sidbury. *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Sidbury, 8.

⁴² John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8-10. Some of the works in Ernest's study include Hosea Easton's *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States* (1837); Robert Benjamin Lewis's *Light and Truth* (1844); Charles Lenox Remond's 1844 address advocating the dissolution of the Union; Johnson Green's 1786 *The Life and Confession of John Green, Who Is to Be Executed This Day, August 17th, 1786, for the Atrocious Crime of Burglary; Together with His Last and Dying Words*; and *A North-Side View of Slavery* by Benjamin Drew in 1856.

⁴³ As quoted in Ernest, 8-10.

⁴⁴ Drexler, Michael J. and Ed White, eds. *Beyond Douglass: New Perspectives on Early African- American Literature* (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2008).

⁴⁵ Phillip M. Richards, "Anglo-American Continuities of Civic and Religious

Thought in the Institutional World of Early Black Writing,” in *Beyond Douglass: New Perspectives on Early African- American Literature*, eds. Michael J. Drexler and Ed White (Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 2008), 69.

⁴⁶ Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp. *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African American Race Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 7.

⁴⁷ Some examples Maffly-Kipp (p. 7) gives of these chronicles are Hosea Easton’s *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and the Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States* (1837), Lorenzo Dow Blackson’s *The Rise and Progress of the Kingdoms of Light and Darkness* (1867), and B. Clark’s *The Past, Present and Future, in Prose and Poetry* (1867).

⁴⁸ Philip Gould, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁴⁹ Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African- American and Native American Literatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵⁰ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) and *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁵¹ Leslie H. Hossfeld, *Narrative, Political Unconscious, and Racial Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 11. She particularly

refers to Molly Andrews, Shelley Day Sclater, Corinne Squire, Amal Treacher, eds. *Lines of Narrative: Psychosocial Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Elliot G. Mishler, 1995, "Models of Narrative Analysis: A Typology" *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 5, no. 2: 87-123; C. Wolkowitz. "Nuclear Families: Women's Narratives of the Making of the Atomic Bomb," in S. Ahmed, J. Kilby, M. McNeil, C. Lury, and B. Skeggs (eds) *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (London: Routledge, 2000).

⁵² Hossfeld, 1.

⁵³ Hossfeld, 4, 6.

⁵⁴ Personal Narratives Group (eds.), *Interpreting Women's Lives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 7.

⁵⁵ Personal Narratives Group, 7.

⁵⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁵⁷ Carolyn Betensky, "Philanthropy, Desire, and the Politics of Friendship in *The Princess Casamassima*," *Henry James Review* 22 (2001): 147-162. Betensky applies Bourdieu's term in her study of Victorian "friendly visiting" practices, in which the rich befriend the poor.

⁵⁸ Betensky, 147-162.

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (Chicago: Aldine, 1972); Annette Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Maurice Godelier, *The*

Enigma of the Gift (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ See, for instance, M. E. McCullough, M. B. Kimeldorf, & A. D. Cohen, “An Adaptation for Altruism? The Social Causes, Social Effects and Social Evolution of Gratitude,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17, no. 4 (2008): 281-85; Albert N. Katz, M. Lenhardt, and K. Mitchell, “On Acknowledging Thanks for Performing a Favor,” *Metaphor & Symbol* 22, no. 3 (2007): 233-50; Philip C. Watkins, J. Scheer, M. Ovnicek, & R. Kolts, “The Debt of Gratitude: Dissociating Gratitude and Indebtedness,” *Cognition & Emotion* 20, no. 2 (2006), 217-41; Todd B. Kashdan, A. Mishra, W. E. Breen, & J.J. Froh, “Gender Differences in Gratitude: Examining Appraisals, Narratives, the Willingness to Express Emotions, and Changes in Psychological Needs,” *Journal of Personality* 77, no. 3 (2009): 691-730; Catherine A. Roster, “Moments of Truth in Gift Exchanges: A Critical Incident Analysis of Communication Indicators Used to Detect Gift Failure,” *Psychology and Marketing* 23, no. 11 (2006): 885-903; Jo-Ann Tsang, “The Effects of Helper Intention on Gratitude and Indebtedness,” *Motivation and Emotion* 30, no. 3 (2006): 198-204.

Chapter 1

¹ Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1794).

² Laurie F. Maffley-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African American Race Histories* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010). See, e.g., Zoe Trodd, ed. *American Protest Literature*. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006); Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Dorothy Burnett, *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971). See also the web content for the PBS series on Africans in America at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html>.

³ Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 79.

⁴ Philip Gould, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁵ Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶ Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008); Jacqueline Bacon, "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, no. 1-2 (Jan. – Apr. 2001): 61-90; Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Joanna Brooks,

“The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (Jan. 2005): 67-92.

⁷ Clint Rodreick. “A Shared Vision and Joint Venture: Benjamin Rush, Richard Allen, and the Free Black Community of Philadelphia, 1787-1813,” unpublished thesis, Pacific University (2006), 2.

⁸ In various editions of his account of the epidemic, Matthew Carey estimated the exodus first at 23,000 and later as 17,000.

⁹ According to Deveze, “I did not know one inhabitant refugee from St. Domingo that died of this epidemic. An European who resided some time at Port au Prince may be reckoned as one victim to this scourge, but he had been near a year in Philadelphia.” Jean Devèze, *An enquiry into, and observations upon the causes and effects of the epidemic disease, which raged in Philadelphia from the month of August till towards the middle of December, 1793* (Philadelphia Parent, 1794), 130. See Contagion: Historical Views of Diseases and Epidemics, <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/yellowfever.html>, accessed 3/13/12.

¹⁰ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 86.

¹¹ According to Suzanne M. Schultz, these included thirteen outbreaks of smallpox, six of measles, nine of respiratory illnesses, eleven of scarlet fever, thirteen of yellow fever, one of flux, two of typhoid, three of typhus, two of diphtheria and six unclassified. See “Epidemics in Colonial Philadelphia from 1699-1799 and the Risk of Dying” at http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2007_winter_spring/epidemics2.html, (accessed 12/18/09). In Philadelphia, there is evidence of outbreaks of smallpox in 1773; unidentified epidemics in the summer and

fall of 1780; scarlet fever in 1783-4, 1786, 1787, and 1788; measles in the spring 1789; and influenza in the fall of 1789. There had been an earlier major yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1762.

¹² A sample of such works can be found at <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/concepts.html> (accessed 1/14/10).

¹³ For a discussion of the two best-known plague narratives in European literature, see Catherine Rubincam, "Thucydides and Defoe: Two Plague Narratives," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 11, no. 2 (2004): 194-212. For more background on Defoe, see Paula R. Backscheider's *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Philip Nicholas Furbank and W. R. Owens' *A Political Biography of Daniel Defoe* (Brookfield, VT: Pickering and Chatto, 2006); Maximillian E. Novak's *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions: His Life and Ideas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); John J. Richetti's *The Life of Daniel Defoe* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); and Cynthia Wall's edition of Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003).

¹⁴ For more discussion of Brown's choice of using the epidemic as literary material, see Robert A. Ferguson's *Yellow Fever and Charles Brockden Brown: The Context of the Emerging Novelist in Early American Literature* 14, no. 3 (1979/1980): 293-305, and Louis Kirk McAuley's "'Periodical Visitations': Yellow Fever as Yellow Journalism in Charles Brockden Brown's *Arthur Mervyn*," *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 19, no. 3 (2007): 307-340. In *Villainy and the Fear of Conspiracy in Charles Brockden Brown's Ormond*, Robert S. Levine directly addresses Brown's emphasis in *Ormond* on the fragile nature of the American republic and the novelist's

depiction of benevolence (*Early American Literature* 15, no. 2 [1980]: 124-140.) In light of Levine's argument, Jones and Allen's *Narrative* could be viewed as a critique of white fears that black benevolence threatens a fragile republic.

¹⁵ Susan E. Klepp, "Appendix I: 'How Many Precious Souls are Fled?': The Magnitude of the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic" in *A Melancholy Scene of Devastation*, eds. J. Worth Estes and Billy G. Smith (Canton, MA: Science History Publications, 1997), 173; Gould, *Barbaric Traffic*.

¹⁶ For example, Carey published his first pamphlet, a treatise on dueling, in 1777. In 1779 he wrote an address to Irish Catholics that was received as quite inflammatory. Even its title was provocative: "The Urgent Necessity of an Immediate Repeal of the Whole Penal Code against the Roman Catholics, Candidly Considered; to which is added an inquiry into the prejudices against them; being an appeal to the Roman Catholics of Ireland, exciting them to a just sense of their civil and religious rights as citizens of a free nation." To avoid prosecution, for this writing, he had fled to Paris from his native Ireland. Joseph M. Finotti, *Bibliographia Catholica Americana* (New York: Catholic Publication House, 1872), 273.

¹⁷ Joseph M. Finotti, *Bibliographia Catholica Americana* (New York: The Catholic Publication House, 1872), 268.

¹⁸ Joanna Brooks, *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African American and Native American Literatures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 173.

¹⁹ Although numerous firsthand accounts were published on the Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic in 1793 and 1794, only a few of them – both medical and non-

medical -- were published in Philadelphia: Benjamin Rush's "An Account of the Bilious Remitting Yellow Fever" (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1794); a book simply titled *Yellow Fever* by J. B. Bordley (Philadelphia: Charles Cist?, 1794); William Curries' two pamphlets, "A treatise on the synochus icteroides, or yellow fever" (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1794) and "An impartial review of. . . Dr. Rush's late publication. . ." (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1794); J. Henry C. Helmuth's *A Short Account of the Yellow Fever in Philadelphia: For the Reflecting Christian* (Philadelphia: Jones, Hoff & Derrick, 1794); *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Committee. . . to Attend to and Alleviate the Sufferings of the Afflicted with the Malignant Fever, Prevalent, in the City and Its Vicinity, With an Appendix* (Philadelphia: R. Aitken, 1794); and Elhanan Winchester's *Wisdom Taught by Man's Mortality; Or the Shortness and Uncertainty of Life: Adapted to the Awful Visitation of the City of Philadelphia, by the Yellow Fever, in the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: R. Folwell, 1795).

²⁰ Several scholars indirectly point to Carey's possible profit motives for his *Account*. Gould notes that Carey had incurred significant debt by the time the epidemic surfaced (*Barbaric Traffic*, 171). Waterman, too, provides evidence that Carey reasonably guessed that his account of the epidemic would sell because "the omnipresence of death created an industry for knowledge about the source, treatment, prevention and social effects of the fever" (194). Brooks indicates that Carey kept his profits from his *Account* for himself, rather than sharing any profits with victims of the yellow fever, for which he was publicly criticized. As Brooks also points out, the

publication of pamphlets was generally unprofitable at the time, thus ruling out financial motivations on the part of Jones and Allen (*American Lazarus*, 173).

²¹ See Rubincam's article on Thucydides and Defoe for a list of features common to plague narratives.

²² Mathew Carey, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia*, Philadelphia: printed by the author, Jan. 16, 1794 (4th edition), 13. Unless otherwise noted, the edition of Carey's account to which I refer is the 2nd edition (Nov. 23, 1793). The 2nd edition did not include a description of yellow fever symptoms; in the 4th edition he was responding to complaints that he was too harsh in his criticism of Philadelphians in earlier editions. Carey might have added this description as a concession to complaints that earlier editions failed to appreciate the extreme difficulties faced by black nurses as they interacted with their ill patients.

²³ Carey, *Account*, 92.

²⁴ Carey, *Account*, 26, 59.

²⁵ Carey, *Account*, 97, 77. In Carey's 4th edition, he did add a note saying that "the extortion here mentioned, was very far from being confined to the negroes: many of the white nurses behaved with equal rapacity," the addition of which may have been a result of complaints on the part of the black community. But as Jones and Allen point out in the *Narrative*, those who had already read the three previous versions would not have their impressions modified by even this note. At any rate, Rodreick identifies a letter from Rush to Carey indemnifying the black nurses' reputation. See BR to Mathew Carey (October 29, 1793), *Letters of Benjamin Rush*,

vol. I: 731, as quoted in Rodreick, 47-48. Such an endorsement from a prominent white citizen may have prompted the change in Carey's fourth edition.

²⁶ Rodreick, "A Shared Vision," 45.

²⁷ The belief in African American immunity to yellow fever could be a reflection of early scientific racism, finding a scientific rationale for differences between blacks and whites. Although scientific racism did not fully develop until the nineteenth century, one can see the beginnings of a scientific basis for racism when Linneaus founded modern biological taxonomy in the 1730s. In *Race, Racism and Psychology: Towards a Reflexive History* (New York: Routledge, 1997), Graham Richards states, "From the 1770s to the 1850s physiognomical and phrenological ideas enjoyed wide popularity and a degree of scientific acceptance" in England, which was undoubtedly also true for the United States (8).

²⁸ According to Rodreick ("A Shared Vision"), the effect of this scrutiny on Jones and Allen caused them to vigorously model virtuous behavior, emphatically encourage virtuous behavior in other free blacks, keep a close watch on the free black community, and exhort free blacks who failed to live up to their high moral standards.

²⁹ Rodreick, "A Shared Vision"; see also Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Free Black Community, 1760-1820* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³⁰ Other scholars discuss issues of supervision that surround the black nurses' assistance. Rodreick points out the supervisory role that Jones and Allen played in Philadelphia's free black community ("A Shared Vision," 31-35), and Brooks discusses how white flight from Philadelphia during the yellow fever epidemic left

African Americans to care for the ill and bury the dead without white supervision, perhaps accounting for the perceived threat black benevolence posed to Philadelphia's white citizens (*American Lazarus*, 163). No doubt Jones and Allen tried to balance the tension between overseeing the black community and yet not reinforcing white belief in black exceptionalism.

³¹ There is ample evidence that in the early Republic, members of the lower classes deployed sexuality as a form of class-based cultural expression. Although all classes and both races patronized taverns and bawdyhouses, the public became increasingly concerned about African American morality once the social controls offered by slavery were lifted. Early in the life of the nation, white Philadelphians almost automatically thought about sexuality when they thought about African-Americans and race relations, seeing the two as "inexorably intertwined," in Clare Lyons's words (*Sex Among the Rabble* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006], 230). Because attacks on the city's African-Americans often centered around morality and sexual behavior, responses by African-American leaders also focused on morality, especially sexual morality. According to Lyons, men such as Jones and Allen understood that sexual deportment would be "central to their struggle for racial justice" (357). Jones and Allen would have been concerned about persons such as John York, a free African American, who ran a "'negro' house for sexual adventure" in Philadelphia throughout the 1790s and appears in court records periodically from 1793 to 1805, suggesting that he, and perhaps his patrons, ran into trouble with the law. Such free black individuals indulging in vice and encouraging it in others would have reflected badly on the entire free African American community.

Comparing Newman's map (82) of where Allen lived with Lyons' map (282-283) of operating bawdyhouses, I found that seven of the sixteen bawdyhouses in Philadelphia between 1790 and 1799 were within a 2,000-foot radius of Allen's home. Surely Allen was aware of the sexual stumbling blocks abundantly available all around him and his community. He believed that leaders like Jones and himself needed to campaign against white perceptions of black immorality and not tolerate the slightest offense by blacks that could rationalize such white perceptions. See also Lyons, 193, 195, 210, and 355.

³² Jones, who by the time of the epidemic also owned his own sawmill, founded with Allen the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality in 1808. Jones served as Grand Master in the Black Masonic lodge in Philadelphia beginning in 1815. Long after the yellow fever epidemic, Allen went on to organize black volunteers in the war of 1812, facilitate a general conference for black churches in 1816, and form the first National Negro convention in 1830. Before, during, and after the yellow fever epidemic, Jones and Allen acted as civic and moral leaders of the free black community in Philadelphia.

³³ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 79.

³⁴ "Extract of a letter from Dr. Benjamin Rush, of Philadelphia, to Granville Sharp" (London: J. Phillips, 1792).

³⁵ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 64.

³⁶ Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 83-84.

³⁷ By "copyrighting" at this time, I mean that they registered the document with Samuel Caldwell, Clerk of the District of Pennsylvania, who verified that they

“deposited in this office, the title of a book, the right whereof they claim, as authors and proprietors.”

³⁸ Although the history of these pieces is unclear, at least one of them, “An Address to Those Who Keep Slaves,” was written solely by Allen.

³⁹ The *Narrative* had an initial printing of 250-500 copies (Newman, 102).

⁴⁰ Brooks, *American Lazarus*, 12. Brooks explicitly makes this point in reference to early American black and Indian literatures and other early American minority (her term) literatures.

⁴¹ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 3.

⁴² In *Freedom's Prophet* (123-125), for instance, Newman claims that Jones and Allen use a deferential style in their *Narrative* that he describes as “pervasive . . . among African Americans addressing white figures in the early republic.” I would instead characterize the text as considered and polite, but also bold. Benjamin Rush, who was undoubtedly one of the “respectable citizens” who urged Jones and Allen to write their account, maintained a religious commitment to black “uplift.” Rodreick details the relationship between Rush and Allen, characterizing them as “partners” in an “interracial joint venture” to secure freedom for black persons (14).

⁴³ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 8.

⁴⁴ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 14.

⁴⁵ Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), vii.

⁴⁶ According to Newman (111), little evidence that Jones or Allen ever voted or voted regularly exists. Although the law indicated that free blacks could vote,

custom often prevented African Americans from exercising the right, instead deferring to white sensitivities.

⁴⁷ Gould, *Barbaric Traffic*, 182.

⁴⁸ Carey, *Account*, vi.

⁴⁹ Carey, *Account*, 8.

⁵⁰ Jones and Allen employ the Enlightenment language of reason and knowledge of the scientific process in making their case.

⁵¹ Carey, *Account*, 77.

⁵² Gould, *Barbaric Traffic*, 152.

⁵³ Joanna Brooks, “The Early American Public Sphere, and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2005): 72.

⁵⁴ Carey, *Account*, 4th edition, 63, 94.

⁵⁵ Carey, *Account*, 4th edition, 63.

⁵⁶ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 7.

⁵⁷ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 4.

⁵⁸ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 7. Oddly, despite their connection to the mayor, Jones and Allen’s work was not supported by public funds, in contrast to members of the public committee appointed for relief of the sick, who each received an advance of fifty dollars “for current expenses” and could “continue to advance upon their drafts as often as they may require” as long as they accounted for their expenditures weekly. Also, the committee was “empowered to advance . . . sums of money to poor families” stricken with the fever. Notes from the proceedings of the committee include numerous references to significant donations made to the committee “for the

use of the sick and afflicted” and even to payments made to citizens like Cyrus Bustle who offered “the services of himself, his horse and cart in the employ of the committee.” See “Minutes of the Proceedings of the Committee,” 10, 13.

⁵⁹ Jones and Allen, 7.

⁶⁰ Jones and Allen, 6.

⁶¹ Jones and Allen, 4.

⁶² Jones and Allen, 7.

⁶³ Jones and Allen, 8.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Carey, *Account*, 84.

⁶⁶ Brooks, *American Lazarus*, 3.

⁶⁷ See Nancy Leys Stepan and Sander L. Gilman, “Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism,” in Sandra Harding, ed., *The “Racial” Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 170-199.

⁶⁸ The white bodies ill with yellow fever and nursed by blacks produced various kinds of filth such as vomit, blood, etc. that the black nurses cleaned up. As William A. Cohen writes in his introduction to *Filth: Dirt, Disgust and Modern Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), “Filth represents a cultural location at which the human body, social hierarchy, psychological subjectivity, and material objects converge” (viii). In the case of the *Narrative*, the filth produced by white bodies ill with yellow fever represented a cultural location where black bodies

and white bodies, full citizens and second-class citizens, had to confront self and other, that which they desired to claim and that which they desired to reject.

⁶⁹ Rodreick, “A Shared Vision”; Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*.

⁷⁰ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 7, 18. For this service, Jones and Allen received not as much as a dollar and a half in total, imitating Dr. Rush’s benevolence though they could less afford to do so.

⁷¹ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 8-9.

⁷² Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 8.

⁷³ Jones and Allen’s use of the term “scraps” echoes a term used by Carey in his book. In the 4th edition, Carey calls chapters 16 and 17 “Desultory Facts and Reflexions: A Collection of Scraps” and “Another Collection of Scraps,” respectively. (Although he did not use the term “scraps” to describe his writing in the 2nd edition, Carey must have used it in the 3rd edition, because Allen and Jones set off the term in quotation marks and make clear that they had read the 3rd edition. The 3rd edition was the most recent one published when Jones and Allen composed the *Narrative*.)

⁷⁴ Carey and other Philadelphia printers in a competitive market necessarily concerned themselves with sales and profits, and according to Newman in *Freedom’s Prophet*, “rarely missed an opportunity to make money” (101). Noting that fugitive-slave ads provided a steady revenue stream for printers at this time, he reports that Carey “published these ads well into the 1790s.” According to Remer in *Printers and Men of Capital*, “when Carey first thought to write and publish an account of the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, his hopes for its sales were grand. But by February

1794, he revised his opinion: ‘From the present state of the market, glutted as it is with a variety of productions on the same subject, I am convinced that my expectations will be miserably disappointed, and that the sale of the work will be extremely slow, and probably a large proportion will be totally unsold’” (52); Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). Nonetheless, the work was successful enough to warrant several editions, and in the fourth edition, Carey pronounced himself pleased with the interest of the reading public in it.

⁷⁵ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 10.

⁷⁶ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 18-19.

⁷⁷ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 19.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 15.

⁸² The ethic of care exhibited by the black nurses was not always reciprocated by white persons when the same black nurses became ill.

⁸³ Jones and Allen, 15.

⁸⁴ Jones and Allen, 16.

⁸⁵ Jones and Allen, 15.

⁸⁶ In the *Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations* (Annapolis, MD: US Naval Institute, 1966), editor Robert Debs Hines attributes a slightly different version of this poem to seventeenth-century English poet Francis Quarles (*Emblems*, 1635).

In a nineteenth-century work (*The Epigrammatists: A Selection for the Epigrammatic Literature of Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Times*, ed. Rev. Henry Philip Dodd [London: Bell and Doldy, 1870]), the editor attributes a slightly different version from Quarles' to Thomas Jordan, Poet to the City of London from 1671-1685, but because Jordan was known to "freely borrow" from others' work, and because the Quarles version is earlier, it is reasonable to assume that it originated with Quarles. Of note, however, is that Dodd cites the poem, which he titled "Ingratitude," as coming from Nichol's *Select Collection of Poems*, published in England in 1780, approximately a dozen years before Jones and Allen's *Narrative*. Furthermore, in 1770, twenty-four years prior to the *Narrative*'s publication, as part of the domestic turmoil that preceded the Revolutionary War, a closer version of the poem (called "an old rhyme") appeared as a broadside posted around New York City during a struggle between soldiers and "patriots" over a Liberty Pole set up as a political protest in the city, and was cited at least once in the opposition press—newspapers opposing ratification of the Constitution in the 1790s (Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* [Albany: SUNY Press, 1969]). The poem was in the air during the period and perhaps available to Jones and Allen from more than one source, and would serve as another allusion to the political discourse of the time.

⁸⁷ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 20.

⁸⁸ Carey, *Account*, 89-90.

⁸⁹ At least one of the appendices was a sermon written by Allen and republished in his autobiography. See Newman, 316n2. Nevertheless, Jones and Allen conceived and wrote the *Narrative* as citizens rather than as ministers, made civic and

political arguments in addition to moral ones, and appealed to a broader public than their own congregations.

⁹⁰ Rosalind Remer claims that “Mathew Carey was active in the debate over public education, on the side of expansion and greater access,” and Jones and Allen would have probably known this type of argument would appeal to him. See Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

⁹¹ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 24.

⁹² Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 24.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 27.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 26, 27.

⁹⁷ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 26.

⁹⁸ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 27. The gratitude expressed in this short address prefigures much of the language of gratitude seen in Absalom Jones’s Thanksgiving sermon preached on Jan. 1, 1808, the occasion on which the importation of slaves into the United States was outlawed. This date became an annual date of antislavery celebrations among free black communities in the North.

⁹⁹ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 28. This quote, which comes from Matthew 19:6, is used in the part of the Christian marriage ceremony that states God’s authority over humans. The full passage reads, “They are no longer two, but one. What God has joined, let no man put asunder.”

¹⁰⁰ Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 28.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Jones and Allen, *Narrative*, 28. Probably well-known in Allen and Jones' religious circles, the poem appears in an Episcopal book of daily devotions written in the twenty-first century, but the authorship of the poem is unclear.

¹⁰³ Brooks, *American Lazarus*, 154, 166, 171-72, 175.

¹⁰⁴ Katherine C. Bassard, *Spiritual Interrogation: Culture, Gender and Community in Early African-American Women's Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9.

¹⁰⁵ In *Freedom's Prophet* (83-84, 98-99), Richard Newman recounts that to realize his goal of opening a nail factory in the summer of 1793, Allen requested a fifty-pound loan from the whites-only Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) and put up his home as collateral. Plans for the business, co-owned by Jones, came to an abrupt halt because of the yellow fever epidemic. Jones and Allen later met with the PAS to explain how their service during the epidemic caused them financial hardship and yet the PAS still expected payment of the loan. Allen eventually paid it back and later purchased a country home outside of Philadelphia.

¹⁰⁶ In *American Lazarus* (165-166), Brooks identifies in Carey's *Account* a connection between blackness and white victimization and vulnerability, which she claims reflects less of Carey's apparent racism and more of post-emancipation anxieties about the meaning of race.

¹⁰⁷ In *Freedom's Prophet* (123-125), Newman claims that Jones and Allen use a deferential style in their *Narrative* and that this style was "pervasive . . . among

African Americans addressing white figures in the early republic.” I disagree with Newman’s reading of the *Narrative* as deferential and would instead characterize the text as considered and polite, but also bold.

Chapter 2

¹ I refer to Harriet Jacobs when discussing the historical figure and author; I refer to Linda Brent when discussing the main character in *Incidents*.

² As quoted in Chakkalakal, Tess. “To Make an Old Century New,” *American Quarterly* 62, No. 4 (Dec. 2010), 1001-1012. See p. 1010.

³ For example, see Frances Smith Foster’s *Love and Marriage in Early African America* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2008); Becky Rutberg’s *Mary Lincoln’s Dressmaker: Elizabeth Keckley’s Remarkable Rise from Slave to White House Confidante*. (New York: Walker and Company, 1995); and Jennifer Fleischner’s *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckley: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship Between a First Lady and a Former Slave* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003); Herb Boyd’s *Autobiography of a People: Three Centuries of African American History as Told by Those Who Lived It* (New York: Doubleday, 2000); Susan S. Williams’s *Reclaiming Authorship: Literary Women in America 1850-1900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). (Sources refer to both Keckley and Jacobs.)

⁴ Elizabeth Spelman, “The Heady Political Life of Compassion” 1997 as quoted in Foster’s introduction to 2001 edition of *Incidents*, xxi.

⁵ Andrea Stone, "Interracial Sexual Abuse and Legal Subjectivity in Antebellum Law and Literature," *American Literature* 81, no. 1 (2009): 65-92. See p. 71.

⁶ Stephanie Li, "Motherhood as Resistance in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*." *Legacy* 23, issue 1 (2006): 14.

⁷ Christina Accomando, "'The Laws were Laid Down to Me Anew': Harriet Jacobs and the Reframing of Legal Fictions," Nellie Y. McKay and Frances Smith Foster, eds. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2001), 365, 377-378.

⁸ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. 1861. Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 6, 10.

⁹ Jacobs, 7-8; Jean Fagan Yellin's *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2004. In 1981 Jean Fagan Yellin found Jacobs's correspondence with Child and Amy Post which finally helped establish Jacobs's authorship of *Incidents*, revealing it to be an autobiographical text, not a novel, as was previously thought. Once Yellin recovered its provenance, the text became a standard in women's studies and African American studies.

¹⁰ Aunt Marthy, the "plantation name" given to Linda Brent's grandmother, was called that name by blacks and whites alike, both while enslaved and after her freedom was bought.

¹¹ When Willis's sister, Sarah Willis Parton, requested his help with her publishing efforts, he refused. Nonetheless, she eventually published *Ruth Hall*, the work for which she is best known, and numerous other works.

¹² Child, one of the first American women to earn a living by writing, had published several popular historical novels, founded a bimonthly magazine for children, and published an advice book called *The Frugal Housewife* for the emerging American middle-class wife and mother. Most notably in this case, in 1833 she had also published *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, arguing for the integration of ex-slaves into American society, which, although it decreased her popularity with many, also influenced several prominent individuals to join the abolitionist cause.

¹³ Yellin, 2000, xxxv.

¹⁴ See Lydia Maria Child's letter dated April 4th, 1861 to John Greenleaf Whittier in vol. 1, p. 342 of Jean Fagan Yellin's *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, published in 2008 by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill.

¹⁵ [Jacobs], *The Deeper Wrong; or, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (London: W. Tweedie, 1862). Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Ed. Jean Fagan Yellin. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xxxv-xxxvi. In the United States, Jacobs's book was advertised in the *Liberator* and the *Christian Recorder* and reviewed by the *Weekly Anglo-African*, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, and the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* of Salem, Ohio.

¹⁶ Some contemporary readers believed Jacobs's book had actually been written by Child. Yellin, 2000, xxiv, xxv, 3. See Child's letter to Jacobs dated August 13, 1860, in which she says she had "very little occasion to alter the language" but did spend time "transposing sentences and pages, so as to bring the story into continuous order, and the remarks into appropriate places."

¹⁷ After the publication of the book, she began working to aid runaway slaves and poor blacks in Alexandria, Virginia and the Washington, D.C., area, where she in 1862 opened the Jacobs Free School. After the war she also helped newly freed African Americans in the area and in Savannah, Georgia, and published letters reporting on the conditions of the freed slaves in such newspapers as the *Liberator*, *Black Abolitionist Papers*, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, and *Freedman's Record*. When she died in Washington, DC in 1897, *Incidents* was already out of print. In a eulogy given by her friend Ednah Dow Cheney, the speaker remarks that Jacobs' book is "out of the market" and "should be carefully preserved in our libraries." Evidence for the connection of Harriet Jacobs with Linda Brent's identity in *Incidents* faded away. For about 100 years, few scholars remembered the book and even fewer remembered that it was authored by Jacobs. See vol. 2, p. 844 of Jean Fagan Yellin's *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, published in 2008 by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill.

¹⁸ Jacobs's point parallels Ira Berlin's observations about the difference between a "society with slaves" and a "slave society." In a slave society, the master-slave relationship provided the model for all social relations because slavery stood at the center of economic production. In a society with slaves, neither was true. The American nation changed from a society with slaves to a slave society by the mid-1800s. See Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 8.

¹⁹ Gregory Eiselein, *Literature and Humanitarian Reform in the Civil War Era* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 61. Jacobs does not address her

readers condescendingly, but clearly implies that the effectiveness of their help depends on their full understanding of the precarious position of the female slave.

²⁰ Accomando, 383.

²¹ Jacobs, 2.

²² This title is likely a reference to the famous abolitionist icon.

²³ Accomando locates the “dominant legal fictions” of slaveholding ideology which Jacobs works to counter in Thomas Cobb’s *An Inquiry into the Law of Negro Slavery in the United States of America; To Which is Prefixed, An Historical Sketch of Slavery*, published in 1858, the same year Jacobs completed her manuscript.

²⁴ As we shall see, Keckley’s text fits more within the third category, as did most slave narratives published after the Civil War and Emancipation. Men wrote the great majority of slave narratives and, because the laws of Southern states usually prohibited slaves from learning to read, many of these texts were “as told to” works compiled and distributed by abolitionists. Jacobs’s text differs from most of these in being written by the putative author and as a woman. That fewer female-authored slave narratives were generated than male-authored slave narratives may be because of the dilemma of how to handle a topic considered too sensitive or indelicate for readers of the time, women’s sexuality.

²⁵ See Lydia Maria Child’s letter dated April 4th, 1861 to John Greenleaf Whittier in vol. 1, p. 342 of Jean Fagan Yellin’s *The Harriet Jacobs Family Papers*, published in 2008 by the University of North Carolina Press at Chapel Hill.

²⁶ Jacobs does this both explicitly through direct address to the reader (“O, you happy free women, contrast *your* New Year’s Day with that of the poor bond-

woman!” p. 16) and implicitly, as in the passage in which Linda relates how, when a white mother gives birth to a child fathered by a black man, “In such cases the infant is smothered, or sent where it is never seen by any who know its history.” p. 52.

²⁷ Jacobs, 37.

²⁸ Jacobs, 42.

²⁹ Jacobs, 43.

³⁰ Jacobs, 89.

³¹ Jacobs, 88.

³² Goddu, Teresa A. *Gothic America: Narrative, History and Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 134.

³³ Although he eventually purchases her childrens’ freedom, even Linda’s white lover is not portrayed as the heroic and benevolent rescuer.

³⁴ Jacobs, 53.

³⁵ Flint here projects his own criminal behavior onto Linda, invoking a common association of blackness with criminality.

³⁶ Jacobs, 58.

³⁷ Jacobs, 61. Later she matter-of-factly states this discourse is one of “his usual themes” (76). Both in his early work, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, and his later work, *The Mind of the Master Class*, Eugene D. Genovese claimed that this fiction was necessary for slave owners to view themselves as more than brutes. See Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1974, pp. 144-147 for some explanation of the power relations of gratitude and see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master*

Class (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 337-382 for a discussion of slaveholders' view of themselves as chivalric gentlemen.

³⁸ Jacobs 59.

³⁹ Jacobs, 85. This serves as an example of how, as Stephanie Li has noted, "Jacobs resists prevailing beliefs concerning black women's indifference to their children while also establishing an important association between . . . Linda Brent and domestic ideologies." Li, 14.

⁴⁰ Ironically, counting slaves among one's relations, even in the frequent cases in which illicit sexual liaisons have led to unacknowledged blood relations, happens rarely in slaveholders' definition of family.

⁴¹ Jacobs 123-4.

⁴² Jacobs, 12.

⁴³ Jacobs, 73.

⁴⁴ Jacobs, 16.

⁴⁵ Jacobs, 8.

⁴⁶ Using the phrase "God-breathing machines" to convey the master's view of his slaves itself raises intriguing contradictions. Masters treat her children as disposable as "machines," denying their "God-breathing" humanity. Read differently, this wording could indicate a mother's view of her children as "God-breathing," in contrast to the master's view of her children as "machines." Such observations destabilize the rhetoric that benevolent masters take care of their slaves and together they constitute one big happy family.

⁴⁷ As we shall see in the next chapter, Charles Chesnutt employs similar rhetorical moves in *The Marrow of Tradition*.

⁴⁸ In studying the antebellum South, Kenneth S. Greenberg and other scholars such as Bertram Wyatt-Brown have focused on the close association between hospitality and violence. See Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting and Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1996), xi. See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace and War, 1760s to 1890s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Wyatt-Brown, *Hearts of Darkness: Wellsprings of a Southern Literary Tradition*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2003).

⁴⁹ Jacobs, 79.

⁵⁰ Greenberg xiii, 51.

⁵¹ Jacobs, 11. Emphasis in original.

⁵² Greenberg, 70.

⁵³ Aunt Marthy later owned her own home and lived as an economically self-sufficient free black woman. The reader learns elsewhere in the text that Miss Fanny bought Aunt Marthy's freedom.

⁵⁴ Jacobs, 6.

⁵⁵ Jacobs, 11.

⁵⁶ Flint's use of the law and convention to avoid responsibility parallels the actions of several white characters in Chesnut's *The Marrow of Tradition*, to be discussed in chapter three.

⁵⁷ At Christmas, some slaves have to resort to stealing a turkey or pig from a master, Linda tells the reader. In contrast, her grandmother, a free, enterprising black woman, raises turkeys and pigs for sale. She does not have to choose between one and the other; she simply cooks both, establishing her in a place higher in the social hierarchy than enslaved blacks, many free blacks, and possibly many white persons, too. As Harvey K. Newman has observed, "hospitality has been conditioned by race, gender, ethnicity, and class." See Newman's *Southern Hospitality: Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 9.

⁵⁸ Jacobs 65. This remark echoes the sentiment expressed in Jones and Allen's *Narrative* showing the pervasiveness of the theme of black criminality among whites and blacks' conditioned readiness to defend against such accusations.

⁵⁹ Jacobs 88.

⁶⁰ I include the slavecatcher in my discussion of Aunt Marthy's benevolence to white people even though he is not white. The fact that he has essentially bargained his blackness for the willingness to do slaveholders' most unpleasant work, and the fact that he ingratiates himself to white persons makes me conclude that Jacobs inscribes him as white.

⁶¹ Jacobs, 119.

⁶² Jacobs, 120.

⁶³ From Matthew 5:39 in the Christian Bible.

⁶⁴ Jacobs 118. It can be argued that Christmas itself is an inversion of traditionally hierarchical relationships because Jesus, a baby born in a humble manger, turns out to be God's son, the savior of the world, according to the Christian faith. See Luke 2:1-7.

⁶⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, New York: Vintage Books, 1976, pp. 580, 584; Peter Reed, "'There Was No Resisting John Canoe:' Circum-Atlantic Transracial Performance," *Theatre History Studies* 27 (2007): 65, 66.

⁶⁶ Jacobs 119.

⁶⁷ Peter Reed, "'There Was No Resisting John Canoe:' Circum-Atlantic Transracial Performance," *Theatre History Studies*, 27 (2007): 65. See 65-66.

⁶⁸ Jacobs did not want her employer's wife to buy her freedom so the transaction was completed without her permission. Although her St. Louis lady patrons raised funds to buy her freedom, Keckley paid them back, recasting their gift as a loan.

⁶⁹ She learned to sew from her mother, who sewed not only for her master's family, but also for his associates.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes* (1868; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 36.

⁷¹ See Rosemary E. Reed Miller, *Threads of Time, the Fabric of History: Profiles of Afro-American Dressmakers and Designers from 1850-200* (Washington, DC: Toast and Strawberries Press, 2003).

⁷² The term “contraband” refers to slaves who fled the South and flocked to Union army encampments. Keckley believed middle-class African Americans should support the newly freed, fearing that white philanthropists would underestimate and undercut the elevation of the freedmen.

⁷³ She later taught sewing at Wilberforce University in Ohio for six years. In 1907 she died in Washington, DC. When *Behind the Scenes* was published in 1868, her last name as it appeared on the book was Keckley. Jennifer Fleischner, however, found the author’s actual signatures and documented her finding that the name was originally spelled Keckly. See *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship Between a First Lady and a Former Slave* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 7. Keckley, xv.

⁷⁴ Keckley, 92.

⁷⁵ Carolyn Sorisio, "Unmasking the Genteel Performer: Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes* and the Politics of Public Wrath," *African American Review* 34 (Spring 2000): 19. Sorisio bases this claim on contemporary reviews and a “vicious” parody published anonymously in 1868. See also Keckley, p. xiii for references to “the people” judging Mrs. Lincoln harshly.

⁷⁶ Keckley admits on the first page of the preface that the book “invited criticism.”

⁷⁷ Jennifer Fleischner, *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship Between a First Lady and a Former Slave* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 316.

⁷⁸ Xiomara Santamarina, “Behind the Scenes of Black Labor: Elizabeth Keckley and the Scandal of Publicity,” *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 3 (fall 2002): 529.

⁷⁹ Fleischner, 317. The African American community feared a backlash after the book’s publication. If one black modiste would “betray” the first family, white persons feared that their own servants would betray them too. African Americans worried that whites might stop employing black persons or significantly withhold their trust from them. In fact, reviewers did ask questions about white persons’ ability to trust the African Americans with whom they had regular interactions. A Washington, DC reviewer posed the alarming questions, “What family of eminence that employs a negro is safe from such desecration?” and “What family that has a servant may not, in fact, have its peace and happiness destroyed by such treacherous creatures as the Keckley woman?”

⁸⁰ Fleischner, 318.

⁸¹ Fleischner, 323.

⁸² In *Unexpected Places*, Eric Gardner includes *Behind the Scenes* among several nineteenth-century texts he considers still too often ignored by literary scholars, finding only twenty-one entries for the book in a search of the 2008 MLA Index. Eric Gardner, *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 7. Keckley became one of the oft-quoted “characters” in a recent PBS series on the Lincolns. WGBH American Experience, Abraham and Mary Lincoln: A House Divided. Six-part television series on PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/transcript/lincolns-transcript/> accessed 7/27/11.

⁸³ John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 33.

⁸⁴ Keckley, xi. Keckley does not write to justify the debt Mrs. Lincoln incurred. Her indebtedness resulted largely from compulsive shopping and compulsive lying to cover up that fact. The agent Mrs. Lincoln hires to help sell the dresses and jewelry attempts to use extortionary methods to do so.

⁸⁵ See Lori Merish, "Representing the 'Deserving Poor': The 'Sentimental Seamstress' and the Feminization of Poverty in Antebellum America" in Bergman and Bernardi's *Our Sisters' Keepers*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2005, pp. 49-79.

⁸⁶ Michael Berthold, "Not 'Altogether' the 'History of Myself': Autobiographical Impersonality in Elizabeth Keckley's *Behind the Scenes*," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1999): 117; Steve Criniti, "Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years a Fairy Godmother: Dressmaking as Self-Making in Elizabeth Keckley's Autobiography," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (2008): 310. Berthold's article focuses chiefly on Keckley's autobiographical impersonality while Criniti's article expounds Keckley's self-fashioning as part of a rags-to-riches theme in which Keckley moves from being the Cinderella figure to the fairy godmother figure.

⁸⁷ Santamarina, 518.

⁸⁸ Sorisio, 20, 29.

⁸⁹ Keckley 48-49.

⁹⁰ Keckley 54.

⁹¹ Keckley 55.

⁹² Keckley 63.

⁹³ Keckley 53.

⁹⁴ Goddu has noted a similar pattern of remembrance with Jacobs, who she says “recognizes the uses and dangers of the gothic as a mode that can remember and combat, but can also erase, the horrors of a racial history” and works “within and against an antebellum discourse that gothicizes slavery.” Goddu, 132.

⁹⁵ Keckley, xi.

⁹⁶ Keckley, 74.

⁹⁷ Keckley, 73. Of Mr. Davis, Keckley states, “He always appeared to me as a thoughtful, considerate man in the domestic circle (69). Of Mrs. Davis, Keckley recalls that she decided to “give up expensive dressing for a while” since war was imminent and she “must learn to practice lessons of economy” with the rest of the Southerners (73).

⁹⁸ Keckley, xi, xii.

⁹⁹ Keckley, xv.

¹⁰⁰ Keckley 89.

¹⁰¹ Keckley 92, 94, 95.

¹⁰² Keckley 196.

¹⁰³ Keckley 201.

¹⁰⁴ Keckley, xi, 19-20, 30. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay called “Self-Reliance,” published in book form in 1841, enjoyed wide circulation and might have been familiar to Keckley. Emerson believed that the ultimate source of truth lies

within the self, allowing the self to be original rather than imitative. Keckley's text suggests that, in writing it, she took to heart Emerson's own words: "To believe your own thought, . . . that is genius." Similarly, Henry David Thoreau published his book, *Walden*, which details his experiment with self-reliance, in 1854, offering Keckley yet another opportunity to study contemporary intellectual thought and respond to it.

¹⁰⁵ Keckley xiii.

¹⁰⁶ Keckley 29, 30, 38.

¹⁰⁷ Keckley 19.

¹⁰⁸ Keckley 35.

¹⁰⁹ Keckley 140.

¹¹⁰ Keckley 92.

¹¹¹ Keckley 276.

¹¹² Keckley includes eight letters and several other documents (e.g., emancipation papers, newspaper article excerpt, invoice) in the body of her text. The Appendix consists of nearly two dozen letters which Mrs. Lincoln wrote to Keckley.

¹¹³ Keckley, 45.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Keckley 50.

¹¹⁶ Santamarina, 518.

¹¹⁷ Keckley 45.

¹¹⁸ Keckley 245-250.

¹¹⁹ Keckley 254.

¹²⁰ Keckley 41.

¹²¹ Keckley 250.

¹²² Keckley's attitude is consistent with Booker T. Washington's later comment in chapter one of *Up from Slavery*: "As a rule, not only did the members of my race entertain no feelings of bitterness against the whites before and during the war, but there are many instances of Negroes tenderly caring for their former masters and mistresses who for some reason have become poor and dependent since the war." See Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* for a discussion of the remarkable lack of bitterness or desire for revenge among most of the enslaved after the war.

¹²³ Keckley 352, 361.

¹²⁴ Keckley 252.

¹²⁵ Keckley, 111, 139.

¹²⁶ Keckley 112, 142.

¹²⁷ Carol Faulkner, *Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 82.

¹²⁸ Keckley 257.

¹²⁹ Faulkner 81. Keckley provides further evidence of this phenomenon elsewhere in the text. For example, in a letter from General Meem's wife to Keckley, the mistress of the household writes of her "very inefficient servants" and complains that in some areas, she has "*none at all*." (emphasis in original) As a result, the mistress has "had to be at times dining-room servant, house-maid, and the last and most difficult, dairy-maid." See Keckley 260. For white plantation mistresses seeking

cheap, efficient labor, the transition from antebellum times to the postbellum era was not easy.

¹³⁰ In chapter three, a similar black view of white dependency surfaces when Carteret, a powerful white character in Chesnut's *The Marrow of Tradition*, appears helpless in the face of his son's life-threatening condition if he cannot enlist Miller's help.

¹³¹ See William L. Andrews' "Reunion in the Postbellum Slave Narrative: Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Keckley" in *Black American Literature Forum* 23, No. 1, (Spring 1989), 5-16. Andrews cautions readers not to underestimate the "political significance of scenes of reconciliation" in the postbellum slave narrative: "The ex-slaves' quest for reunion prove them faithful and true to the national ideal, that of a united people in the states of America." p. 13. Specifically, in *Behind the Scenes*, the "postbellum slave narrator takes the moral as well as political lead in showing the necessity of reconciliation between the races, not just the sections, of the United States as the basis on which a true Union in freedom and opportunity had to be founded." 13.

¹³² William Andrews, "Dialogue in Antebellum Afro-American Autobiography," *Studies in Autobiography*. Ed. James Olney. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 91, 93.

¹³³ Keckley 255.

¹³⁴ Keckley 255-256.

¹³⁵ Mrs. Lincoln suffered emotionally and Keckley stood by her in extreme circumstances.

¹³⁶ Keckley 93, 95.

¹³⁷ Keckley 103.

¹³⁸ That Keckley's son fought for the Union even though he was not a full citizen gives her a special claim on citizenship. It also reflects badly on Mrs. Lincoln's initial refusal to let her own son Robert enlist in the war her husband declared; the two women espouse a very different sense of citizenship.

¹³⁹ Soon after Lincoln's election to the presidency, Mrs. Lincoln found herself subject to national criticism. Some critics saw her as an outsider and possible Southern sympathizer (her brothers died fighting for the Confederacy in the Civil War). Reporters deemed her shopping spree for furnishings to New York at the beginning of the war as tasteless extravagance. Compulsive shopping and keeping her obsessive habit secret from her husband seemed to be her strategy for coping with the intense stresses of those turbulent years.

¹⁴⁰ Keckley, 189.

¹⁴¹ Keckley 191-192.

¹⁴² Keckley 193, 196.

¹⁴³ Keckley 209-210.

¹⁴⁴ Keckley 326.

¹⁴⁵ Keckley 269, 317-319.

¹⁴⁶ Keckley treasures certain objects, which she refers to as "relics," that had belonged to Mr. Lincoln. For example, before his re-election, Keckley asks Mrs. Lincoln for the right-hand glove that he will wear at the reception after his second inaugural (153). When Mrs. Lincoln reminds Keckley that the glove will be filthy

from shaking so many hands, Keckley's rejoinder is "I shall keep the glove and hand it down to posterity." To Keckley, the glove is not dirty, but rather bears the "marks of the thousands of hands that grasped the honest hand of Mr. Lincoln on that eventful night." Black gratitude toward Lincoln for emancipation transforms the soiled glove into a cherished artifact in Keckley's eyes. Keckley's gratitude is not unusual but rather, indicative of the widespread gratitude among black people across the nation. Similarly, Keckley venerates the cloak worn by Mrs. Lincoln the night of the assassination, which holds the "life-blood" of Abraham Lincoln on it: "This cloak could not be purchased from me, though many have been the offers for it. I deemed it too *sacred* to sell, but donate it for the cause of educating the four millions of slaves liberated by our President, whose private character I revere" (367). Keckley subsequently donated these objects, given to her by Mrs. Lincoln after the assassination, to Wilberforce University.

¹⁴⁷ Keckley, 190.

¹⁴⁸ African Americans held President Lincoln in such high regard at this time, not simply because he wrote the Emancipation Proclamation, but because he had begun his presidency favoring colonization for blacks and gradually moved toward inclusion of blacks in American society. For him, the Civil War had started as a war for the containment of slavery, but evolved into a war for emancipation. WGBH American Experience, Abraham and Mary Lincoln: A House Divided. Six-part television series on PBS. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/transcript/lincolns-transcript/> accessed 7/27/11.

¹⁴⁹ Keckley 174. This is the first text of the four in my study that seems to refer even obliquely to black persons as active participants in national political life as that was not possible until then, and for women it was not possible for more than another fifty years.

¹⁵⁰ Keckley 104-5.

¹⁵¹ Keckley 191, 200-201.

¹⁵² Sorisio, 31. See also Mary Louise Kete's *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); ed. Lucy E. Frank's *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publications, 2007); Dana Luciano's *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Anissa Janine Wardi's *Death and the Arc of Mourning in African American Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Gail Holst-Warhaft's *The Cue for Passion: Grief and its Political Uses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Peter Balaam's *Misery's Mathematics: Mourning, Compensation and Reality in Antebellum American Literature* (New York: Rutledge, 2009).

¹⁵³ *Behind the Seams; by a Nigger Woman who took work in from Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Davis*. New York: The National News Company, 1868. I am grateful to the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, MA for access to an electronic copy of this text.

¹⁵⁴ Randall Kennedy, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 5.

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 143.

Chapter 3

¹ Several biographies of Chesnutt have been written, including Sylvia Lyons Render, *Charles W. Chesnutt* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980); Frances Richardson Keller, *An American Crusade: The Life of Charles Waddell Chesnutt* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978); and J. Noel Heermance, *Charles W. Chesnutt: America's First Great Black Novelist* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1974). More recent biographical sketches and assessments of Chesnutt's literary and social legacy can be found in Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds., *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2004) and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Gene Andrew Jarrett, eds. *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 9-10.

² Chesnutt published over 140 texts in his lifetime. Five of his novels and novel manuscripts were published posthumously between 1997 and 2005. See <http://www.chesnuttarchive.org/Works/works.html> accessed 4/24/12.

³ Richard H. Brodhead, ed., *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 139.

⁴ White authors, too, like Mark Twain, who concerned himself with benevolent imperialism in his novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and William Dean Howells, whose novel *Annie Kilburn* (1888) details the

process in which the title character becomes frustrated trying to translate philanthropic ideals into meaningful social action in her own village, struggled with issues of benevolence, whether attempted across class lines or other boundaries.

⁵ William Wells Brown added four chapters on the Civil War to earlier versions of *Clotel*. Influenced by this text, Harper reconstructed Brown's 1867 *Clotelle* ending in *Iola Leroy*. See Jennifer James, "'Civil' War Wounds: William Wells Brown, Violence and the Domestic Narrative," *African American Review* 39, no. ½: 39-54.

⁶ Pauline E. Hopkins, *Contending Forces*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 288.

⁷ Quoted in Jae H. Roe, "Keeping an 'Old Wound' Alive: *The Marrow of Tradition* and the Legacy of Wilmington," *African American Review* (Summer 1999).

⁸ Joseph R. McElrath, Jr., Robert C. Leitz III, and Jesse S. Crisler, eds., *Charles W. Chesnutt: Essays and Speeches* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁹ Susan Danielson, "Charles Chesnutt's Dilemma: Professional Ethics, Social Justice, and Domestic Feminism in *The Marrow of Tradition*," *The Southern Literary Journal* 41, no. 1 (2008): 73-92, 74.

¹⁰ Danielson 74.

¹¹ Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, ed. Robert M. Farnsworth (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001) 303.

¹² Chesnutt 326.

¹³ Chesnutt 116.

¹⁴ Anthony Szczesiul quotes an essay published in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1834 in which the writer suggests hospitality is a “cheap virtue” in the South. According to Szczesiul’s interpretation, “By linking southern hospitality directly to slavery, this passage also raises the fundamental ethical questions about what actually constitutes hospitality. If antebellum southern hospitality is an ‘easy virtue’, one that is contingent on slave labor, is it a virtue at all?” Szczesiul goes on to discuss the “violent ethical paradox inherent in the concept of hospitality itself” and asserts that the site of hospitality is always the “threshold between differences, the site at which boundaries are both crossed and maintained.” In order to explain how acts of hospitality can actually be acts of hostility, Szczesiul argues, “In short, the politics of hospitality is about determining who belongs, and, more importantly, who doesn’t.” See pp. 129, 138-139 in Anthony Szczesiul, “Re-mapping Southern Hospitality: Discourse, Ethics, Politics,” *European Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 2 (2007), pp. 127-141. Clearly, these concepts can also apply to Chesnut’s example. The Northern visitors to Wilmington “don’t belong,” but are interested in learning about the South. The white Wilmington residents can spend time showing the visitors around for two reasons: 1) their servants are taking care of their household business and 2) it is in their interest to maintain the status quo by showing evidence for the Southern viewpoint to these Northerners.

¹⁵ Chesnut 230.

¹⁶ Chesnut 232.

¹⁷ Chesnut 75.

¹⁸ Introduction to *The Marrow of Tradition*, xiv.

¹⁹ March 1902.

²⁰ Saturday, November 9, 1901 edition.

²¹ November 16, 1901 issue.

²² An unspecified edition in 1901.

²³ Sunday, November 3, 1901 edition. The Charles Chesnutt Digital Archive,

<http://faculty.berea.edu/browners/chesnutt/Reviews/Marrow>

[Reviews/marrow_reviews.html](http://faculty.berea.edu/browners/chesnutt/Reviews/marrow_reviews.html), accessed 10/13/10.

²⁴ 7 December 1901 issue.

²⁵ See “Black Southerners Appeal to President William McKinley for Federal Protection, 1898-1900,” in *Major Problems in African American History*, ed.

Thomas Holt and Elsa Barkley Brown. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000), 94-95.

²⁶ This question echoes Frederick Douglass’s 1852 speech “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”

²⁷ Wegener has argued that Chesnutt and other African Americans of the time recognized this connection. See Frederick Wegener, “Charles W. Chesnutt and the Anti-Imperialist Matrix of African-American Writing, 1898-1905,” *Criticism* 41, no. 4 (1999), 465-494.

²⁸ Belau and Cameron, “Charles W. Chesnutt, Jack Thorne and the African American Response to the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot,” *Charles Chesnutt Reappraised: Essays on the First Major African American Fiction Writer*, eds. David Garrett Izzo and Maria Orban, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009), 15. Although this observation only applies to one of the four texts in my study (because Chesnutt’s

is the only novel), it also points to the notion of chronicle—an attempt to correct the historical record--which does apply to all four of the texts in my study.

²⁹ Belau and Cameron, 16.

³⁰ Ryan Simmons, *Chesnutt and Realism: A Study of the Novels* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006): 106-108, 111.

³¹ Matthew Wilson, *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles Chesnutt* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 120.

³² Wilson 142.

³³ See www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/1900/peopleevents/pandeAMEX36.html and the U.S. Newspaper Directory, available through the Library of Congress and the National Endowment for the Humanities at www.chroniclingamerica.loc.gov, both accessed 5/20/12.

³⁴ Wilson 104.

³⁵ Chesnutt 314.

³⁶ Chesnutt 84.

³⁷ In a curious but perhaps coincidental fact, Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* appeared the same year that William Monroe Trotter and George Forbes founded the *Boston Guardian*, the first African American newspaper to represent organized opposition to the policy of accommodation espoused by Booker T. Washington. See www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/1900/peopleevents/pandeAMEX36.html, accessed 5/20/12.

³⁸ David Bryant Fulton published the second African-American authored account, which I do not address here, a fictional account called *Hanover: or, The*

Persecution of the Lowly, a Story of the Wilmington Massacre in 1901 under the pseudonym Jack Thorne. Fulton's account employs a more militant tone in contrast to Chesnut's approach.

³⁹ J. Allen Kirk, "A Statement of Facts Concerning the Bloody Riot in Wilmington, N.C. of Interest to Every Citizen of the United States." 1898.

⁴⁰ Kirk, 15-16.

⁴¹ Jerrold Packard, *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), 166.

⁴² Elizabeth N. Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond and the Creation of an American Profession* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2004), 2, 132, 134.

⁴³ Literary scholar Ryan Simmons notes that Chesnut was not abstract about segregation: "he refers not to concepts like justice or equality but to physical events; here, the removal by force and the abandonment of train passengers." See Simmons 90 and Chesnut 53-55, 58-61.

⁴⁴ Stephanie P. Browner, *Profound Science and Elegant Literature: Imagining Doctors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 198.

⁴⁵ Browner, 11. Victoria Earle Matthews's "Aunt Lindy" (1893) is another example of such works.

⁴⁶ Thomas Adams establishes philanthropy as a means of converting economic resources into social and cultural capital. See especially chapter 3, "How to Become a Gentleman: Philanthropy and Social Climbing," in Thomas Adams, *Buying*

Respectability: Philanthropy and Urban Society in Transnational Perspective, 1840s to 1930s (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009).

⁴⁷ Dean McWilliams, *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 201.

⁴⁸ Nancy Bentley notes that Chesnutt's depiction of Olivia Carteret's distress at discovering a family secret "illustrates the psychic and emotional resistance to any meaningful reinterpretation of history among white Americans." See Nancy Bentley, "The Fourth Dimension: Kinlessness and African American Narrative," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (winter 2009): 270-292.

⁴⁹ Chesnutt's concerns with kinship in *The Marrow of Tradition* pre-date Pauline Hopkins's last novel, *Of One Blood* (1903), whose title refers to the biological kinship of all human beings.

⁵⁰ Chesnutt, 44, 46.

⁵¹ Chesnutt, 46.

⁵² Chesnutt, 50.

⁵³ As Julia Lee has noted, "Americans tended to extol the democratic nature of the railroad because it enabled people to move across the country," but the train, in fact, "reflected and re-inscribed the racial, gender and class hierarchies of the day." (351) See Julia H. Lee, "Estrangement on a Train: Race and Narratives of American Identity," *English Literary History* 75, no. 2 (2008), 345-365.

⁵⁴ Lee, 346-347.

⁵⁵ Chesnutt 65.

⁵⁶ Chesnutt 64-65.

⁵⁷ Gregory E. Rutledge, “All Green with Epic Potential: Chesnutt Goes to the *Marrow of Tradition* to Re-construct America’s Epic Body, *Charles Chesnutt Reappraised: Essays on the First Major African American Fiction Writer*, eds. David Garrett Izzo and Maria Orban, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009), 136.

⁵⁸ Bryan Wagner, 313. “Charles Chesnutt and the Epistemology of Racial Violence.” *American Literature* 73, no. 2 (2001), 311-337.

⁵⁹ Population data comes from Reaves, *Strength through Struggle*, as quoted by Wagner 335.

⁶⁰ Leslie H. Hossfeld, *Narrative, Political Unconscious and Radical Violence in Wilmington, North Carolina* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 33, 53 and 100; Tetterton, Beverly, *Lost But Not Forgotten* (Wilmington: Dram Tree Books, 2005), 176-178. For more on the historical background of the Wilmington Riot of 1898, see Cecelski, David S., and Timothy B. Tyson, eds. *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁶¹ Chesnutt, 68.

⁶² Chesnutt, 69.

⁶³ Chesnutt, 68.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Chesnutt, 70-71.

⁶⁶ Chesnutt, 71.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Chesnutt, 71-72.

⁶⁹ Chesnutt, 72.

⁷⁰ Chesnutt, 73. At this point in the novel, Janet and the reader are aware of her biological relation to Olivia, but Olivia herself is not completely certain of this fact.

⁷¹ The train conductor, seeing Miller and Burns sitting together in the white car, asked Miller to move to the black car. Burns, calling this act “an outrage upon a citizen of a free country,” decided to move to the black car with Miller. When informed that white passengers could not ride in the “negro” car, Burns exclaims, “You are curtailing the rights, not only of colored people, but of white men as well. I shall sit where I please!” but relinquishes when Miller persuades him that they will meet at their destination just the same. Chesnutt, 54-55.

⁷² Danielson, 73-92.

⁷³ See Danielson 78. Chesnutt makes his main character a physician, when, in the postbellum South, communities faced a “health care crisis” in which “medical care for African Americans was becoming all but nonexistent,” with some areas in North Carolina, for example, operating with an unfathomably small doctor-to-patient ratio. Medical care for African Americans had been better right after the Civil War than in the decades following, because, from 1865 to 1869, the Freedman’s Bureau “treated over one million blacks and some whites in bureau-sponsored hospitals and dispensaries,” medical assistance that the federal government stopped “at the same time as the community hospital was established as a social institution (albeit one that did not admit blacks), among the white population north and south.”

⁷⁴ Simmons, 95.

⁷⁵ Smith's work on moral and political citizenship underscores the significance of the themes of these two final chapters: "First, moral citizenship shares with political citizenship the proposition of equivalence among individuals. But with moral citizenship, this equivalence is not primarily before or under the law" but rather "before and under the sentiment of self-recognition in others and self-identification with the needs of others. If the instrumental trajectory of political citizenship revolves around exercising the legal rights and duties of democratic processes, the instrumental trajectory of moral citizenship revolves around fulfilling the inclinations and obligations of the contents of care. . ." See David H. Smith, *Good Intentions: Moral Obstacles and Opportunities* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 159.

⁷⁶ Incidentally, Dr. Price, the family physician, was out of town checking on a patient, but his wife reported that "he had anticipated some kind of trouble in the town to-day, and had preferred to be where he could not be called upon to assume any responsibility." Chesnutt, 312.

⁷⁷ Chesnutt, 317.

⁷⁸ Chesnutt, 318.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Chesnutt 318, 319.

⁸² Chesnutt 320.

⁸³ During Dodie's earlier medical emergency, a servant named Sam told Dr. Miller about the conversation that had transpired among the white physicians before

his arrival, detailing the real reasons he was excluded from the consultation. See Chesnutt, 76.

⁸⁴ Chesnutt elegantly echoes the language of “imperative necessity” that he used during Dodie’s first medical emergency.

⁸⁵ Chesnutt 317.

⁸⁶ Chesnutt, 320.

⁸⁷ Chesnutt, 321.

⁸⁸ Chesnutt 324.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Smith, 160.

⁹² Chesnutt, 212.

⁹³ Chesnutt, 326.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Chesnutt, 328.

⁹⁷ Here Chesnutt reverses the white refrain that associates blackness with criminality generally. According to Matthew Wilson, the white townspeople and Chesnutt’s audience value “the preservation of a fiction: African Americans are always already the criminals, while the white aristocrats are always already innocent.” Wilson, 134.

⁹⁸ Chesnutt, 328.

⁹⁹ Julie Iromuanya, “Passing for What?: *The Marrow of Tradition*’s Minstrel Critique of the Unlawfulness of Law,” *Charles Chesnutt Reappraised: Essays on the*

First Major African American Fiction Writer, eds. David Garrett Izzo and Maria Orban, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2009), 201.

¹⁰⁰ Chesnutt 329.

¹⁰¹ Danielson 87.

¹⁰² Chesnutt, 329.

¹⁰³ Keller 77, Andrews 93 as quoted in Roe 232.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph R. McElrath, Jr. and Robert C. Leitz, III, eds. *To Be An Author: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt 1889-1905* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 36. With the benefit of hindsight, literary scholar Dean McWilliams noted that Chesnutt in fact “sought to create literary art that would reshape America’s discourse on race . . . at one of the least propitious moments in American history.” See *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 3.

¹⁰⁵ McElrath and Leitz, *Letters*, 40, letter dated May 24, 1889.

¹⁰⁶ McElrath, and Leitz, *Letters*, 81, letter on Nov. 27, 1893.

¹⁰⁷ McElrath, and Leitz, *Letters*, 171, letter to Houghton, Mifflin, & Co. dated Dec. 30, 1901.

¹⁰⁸ McElrath and Leitz, *Letters*, 172 n. 4.

¹⁰⁹ McElrath and Leitz, *Letters*, 214 n. 1.

¹¹⁰ Simmons 4.

¹¹¹ Brodhead, 140.

¹¹² Chesnutt 295.

¹¹³ Chesnutt 310.

¹¹⁴ At a time when white philanthropists were establishing black hospitals and medical schools in the South, Chesnutt chooses to construct Dr. Miller as having funded the new hospital from his own inheritance rather than from the generosity of white philanthropists. See Danielson 78, 81.

¹¹⁵ Rutledge, 141.

¹¹⁶ Susan Danielson's and Ryan Simmons's readings are exceptions. See Simmons's *Chesnutt and Realism: A Study of the Novels* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 15.

Epilogue

¹ See 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Home Page, Henry L. Melton, editor, 1898 Wilmington Institute for Education and Research at <http://www.1898wilmington.com/Home.shtml> accessed 10/12/10.

² See Harvard University Library Open Collections Program, Contagion: Historical Views of Diseases and Epidemics website at <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/contagion/> accessed 10/12/10.

³ <http://www.1898wilmington.com/OverviewoftheConflict.shtml>, accessed 5/26/12.

⁴ The movement has also been called “service learning” and “community service-learning.”

⁵ The following book and three articles recover Jane Addams and John Dewey as grandparent figures to today's CBL movement: Lee Benson, Ira Richard Harkavy, and John Puckett, *Dewey's Dream: Universities and Democracies in an Age of*

Education Reform: Civil Society, Public Schools and Democratic Citizenship (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007); Gary Daynes and Nicholas V. Longo, "Jane Addams and the Origins of Service-Learning Practice in the United States," *Michigan Journal for Community Service Learning* 11, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 5-13; Keith Morton and John Saltmarsh, "Addams, Day, and Dewey: The Emergence of Community Service in American Culture," *Michigan Journal for Community Service Learning* 4, no. 1 (1997): 137-149; John Saltmarsh, "Education for Critical Citizenship: John Dewey's Contribution to the Pedagogy of Community Service Learning," *Michigan Journal for Community Service Learning* 3, no. 1 (1996), 13-21.

⁶ In a more precursory way, the following article recovers Janie Porter Barrett, Jane Edna Hunter, Mary Church Terrell, Ana Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Sara Fleetwood, Victoria Earle Matthews, George Edmund Haynes, and W.E.B. DuBois as African American figures influencing today's CBL movement: Charles S. Stevens, "Unrecognized Roots of Service-Learning in African American Social Thought and Action, 1890-1930," *Michigan Journal for Community Service Learning* 9, no. 2 (Winter 2003), 25-34.

⁷ Catherine S. Manegold, *Ten Hills Farm: The Forgotten History of Slavery in the North* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 55.

⁸ Manegold, 31.

⁹ Francis Higginson, *New-Englands Plantation* (Salem, MA: Essex Book and Print Club, 1908).

¹⁰ Higginson, 104.

¹¹ Higginson. This line appears in a long section of unnumbered pages.

¹² Andrew Rice, "Misery Chic," *NY Times*, Dec. 10, 2006.

¹³ Susan Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 1.

¹⁴ "At a TABOO dialogue, every effort is made to make space so that all personal perspectives on a topic can be shared. We think of it as a 'discomfort zone/safe space.' This unique campus series offers dialog opportunities throughout the year. Students, staff, and faculty take time for conversations about taboo topics that often get ignored or avoided in day-to-day life. TABOO offers a healthy place to explore ideas and feelings while leaning into your own sometimes uncomfortable growing edges." See <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/studentprograms>, accessed 5/26/12. Using the TABOO dialogue as a foundation, one of the student leaders wrote a paper entitled "The Politics of Rescue" for her cross-listed Gender Studies/Anthropology course in the spring 2010 semester.

¹⁵ Not surprisingly, Czitrom has been "an active participant in the 'Texas textbook wars,' opposing the organized campaign mounted by extreme right-wing conservatives to 'revise' the writing and teaching of American history." See https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/facultyprofiles/daniel_czitrom accessed 5/2/12.

¹⁶ Disaster tourism is the act of traveling to a disaster area as a matter of curiosity. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disaster_tourism, accessed 5/26/12.

¹⁷ John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 8-10. James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Tom Gordon's men beat the black Fr. Dickson. Clayton rescues the clergyman and is himself beaten by Tom.

¹⁹ Chesnutt 51.

Appendix

African American Authors

Banneker, Benjamin. *Copy of a Letter from Benjamin Banneker to the Secretary of State* (1792)

Brown, William Wells. *Clotel; or the President's Daughter, A Narrative of Slave Life in the United States* (1853)

Chesnutt, Charles. *The Conjure Woman* (1899)

_____. *Essays and Speeches*

_____. *House Behind the Cedars* (1900)

_____. *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901)

Collins, Julia. *The Curse of Caste* (1865)

Cooper, Anna Julia. *A Voice from the South* (1892)

Crafts, Hannah. *The Bondwoman's Narrative* (c. 1850)

- Crummell, Alexander and J. R. Oldfield, ed. *Civilization and Black Progress*.
 Charlottesville: published for the Southern Texts Society by the University
 Press of Virginia, 1995.
- ____ and Wilson Jeremiah Moses, ed. *Destiny and Race*. Amherst: University of
 Massachusetts Press, 1992.
- Delany, Martin. *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (1859)
- ____. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of
 the United States* (1852)
- Douglass, Frederick. "The Heroic Slave" (1853)
- ____. *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855)
- ____. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written by
 Himself* (1845)
- ____. *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?* (1852)
- DuBois, W.E.B., *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903)
- Dunbar, Paul Laurence. *The Sport of the Gods* (1902)
- Equiano, Olaudah. *The Interesting Narrative* (1789)
- Garnet, Henry Highland. "An Address to the Slaves of the United States" (1843)
- George, David. "An Account of the Life of Mr. David George" (1793-1797)
- Griggs, Sutton. *Imperium in Imperio: A Study of the Negro Race Problem: A Novel*
 (1899)
- Grimke, Charlotte Forten. *The Journal of Charlotte Forten* (1864)
- Hall, Prince. "A Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge on the 25th of
 June, 1792" (1792)

____. "A Charge Delivered to the African Lodge, June 24, 1797, at Menotomy" (1797)

Hamilton, William. "An Oration, on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered in the Episcopal Asbury African Church, in Elizabeth St., New York, January 2, 1815" (1815)

____. "An Oration Delivered in the African Zion Church, on the Fourth of July, 1827, in Commemoration of the Abolition of Domestic Slavery in this State" (1827)

Harper, Frances. "Fancy Etchings" (1873)

____. "Fancy Sketches" (1859-60)

____. *Iola Leroy; or Shadows Uplifted* (1892)

____. *Minnie's Sacrifice* (1867-68)

____. *Sowing and Reaping* (1876-87)

____. *Trial and Triumph* (1888)

____. "The Two Offers" (1859)

____. "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Colored Woman" (1888)

Hopkins, Pauline. *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* (1900).

____. *Hagar's Daughter* (1900)

____. *Of One Blood* (1902-03)

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)

[Jacobs], *The Deeper Wrong; or, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (London: W. Tweedie, 1862)

- Jones, Absalom and Richard Allen. *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: William W. Woodward, 1794)
- Keckley, Elizabeth. *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years a Slave, Four Years at the White House* (1868)
- King, Boston. "Memoirs of the Life of Boston King" (1798)
- Lawrence, George. "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered on the First Day of January, 1813, in The African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1813" (1813)
- Liele, George. "An Account of Several Baptist Churches" (1793)
- Parrott, Russell. "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade Delivered on the First of January, 1814, at the African Church of St. Thomas" (1814)
- Paul, Susan. *Memoir of James Jackson* (1835)
- Sidney, Joseph. "An Oration Commemorative of the Abolition of the Slave Trade; Delivered Before the Wilberforce Philanthropic Association, in the City of New York, on the Second of January, 1809" (1809)
- Sipkins, Henry. "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; Delivered in The African Church, in the City of New York, January 2, 1809" (1809)
- Smith, Venture. *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures* (1798)
- Stewart, Maria. *An Address Delivered at the Masonic Hall in Boston on February 27, 1833*
 _____. *Farewell Address* (Sept. 21, 1833)
 _____. *Lecture, Delivered at the Franklin Hall, Boston, September 21, 1832*

_____. *Religion and the Pure Principles of Morality, The Sure Foundation on Which We Must Build* (1831)

Taylor, Susie King. *A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs* (1902)

Truth, Sojourner. *Address to the First Annual Meeting of the American Equal Rights Association, New York City, May 9, 1867*

_____. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850)

_____. *Speech at Akron Convention, Akron, Ohio, May 28-29, 1851*

_____. *Speech at New York City Convention* (May, 1867)

Walker, David. *Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and Very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America* (1829)

Washington, Booker T. ed. *The Negro Problem* (1903)

_____. *A New Negro for a New Century* (1900)

_____. *Up from Slavery* (1901)

Webb, Frank. *The Garies and their Friends* (1857)

Wells, Ida B. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings* (1892)

Williams, Peter. "An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Delivered in the African Church, in the City of New York, January 1, 1808" (1808)

Wilson, Harriet. *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, in a Two-Story House, North* (1859)

Other American Authors

Addams, Jane. "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements" and "The Objective Value of a Social Settlement," in *Philanthropy and Social Progress* (1893)

Alcott, Louisa May. *Hospital Sketches* (1863)

____. "Nelly's Hospital" (1865)

____. *Work* (1872)

Anthony, Susan B. "Social Purity" (1875)

____. "On Women's Right to Vote" (1873)

Brace, Charles Loring. *The Best Method of Disposing of our Pauper and Vagrant Children* (1859)

Brown, Charles Brockden. *Arthur Mervyn* (1793)

Child, Lydia Maria. *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (1833)

____. "The Quadroons" (1842)

Cooper, James Fenimore. *Last of the Mohicans* (1826)

Dixon, Thomas. *The Leopard's Spots* (1902)

Fern, Fanny. *Ruth Hall* (1855)

Foster, Hannah. *The Coquette* (1797)

Grimke, Angelina. *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (1836)

____. *Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States* (1837)

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *Blithedale Romance* (1852)

Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (1870)

Jefferson, Thomas. *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787)

Melville, Herman. *Bartleby* (1853)

____. "Benito Cereno" (1856)

Page, Thomas Nelson, "Marse Chan" (1887)

Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart. *The Silent Partner* (1871)

Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)

Rowson, Susanna. *Charlotte Temple* (1794)

Sedgwick, Catherine Maria. *Hope Leslie* (1827)

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. "Address Delivered at the Seneca Falls Convention" (1848)

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