ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	INSURRECTION IN BLACK: READING RACE AND REVOLT IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY Timothy William Bruno, Doctor of Philosophy, 2019
Dissertation directed by:	Distinguished University Professor Robert S. Levine, Department of English and Professor Edlie L. Wong, Department of English

"Insurrection in Black: Reading Race and Revolt in the Long Nineteenth Century" examines depictions of black rebellion in American and African American literature spanning from the 1830s to the early 1900s. From enslaved uprisings and black armies to worker strikes and insurgent plots, black rebellion appeared as a recurring image across the antebellum and postbellum periods. "Insurrection in Black" argues that these images of rebellious violence functioned speculatively, imagining for readers new identities, social movements, and communities. The dissertation explores black rebellion's cultural work in novels, speeches, newspapers, autobiographies, and polemics by Robert Montgomery Bird, Richard Hildreth, Jabez Delano Hammond, Gerrit Smith, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucy Parsons, Sutton E. Griggs, Thomas Dixon, and Pauline Hopkins. A comparative approach to these texts reveals that, far from representing a stable or straightforward politics, black rebellion in print often served competing ends not necessarily aligned with black freedom struggles. Ultimately, this dissertation does more than reveal the speculative power inhering in depictions of rebellious violence: "Insurrection in Black" brings black militancy to the center of the long nineteenth century's literary and cultural life.

INSURRECTION IN BLACK: READING RACE AND REVOLT IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memories of Richard Collins III and Jordan McNair, who were killed by the University of Maryland.

Acknowledgements

To me, the dissertation will always be a record of the people who've helped me. I wish there were pages enough to thank them all here. Bob Levine remains one of the most human and humane scholars I've met, and perhaps more than anyone, he's treated me like a writer. In ways both direct and indirect, Edlie Wong has shown me how to be a scholar and critic, as well as a lover of strange texts. It became clear early on that Bob and Edlie were an amazing team of readers who make my work immeasurably better; their feedback as co-directors will shape my writing for the rest of my life. Mary Helen Washington's ideas and career have influenced me more deeply than I can say, and so I'm honored that she's been one of my biggest champions. In an independent study, Julius Fleming witnessed the start of this project. He encouraged me then and ever since, taking it as his mission to help me achieve my goals. Through the Washington Early American Seminar, Rick Bell has included me in the intellectual life of his Department and shown me what rigorous history looks like. I'm grateful to him for bringing this rigor to my dissertation committee as the Dean's Representative.

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I am impossibly blessed to have the friends I do. Will Henry has been with me the whole time. I've learned just how deeply waging collective struggle changes you because Ajay Chandra, Emily Filler, and Laura Goldblatt have become my close friends and advocates long after the 2012 UVA Living Wage hunger strike ended. My graduate cohort provided me with my earliest and still lasting community here at the University of Maryland: Steve Beaulieu, Kayla Harr Doucette, Norrell Edwards, Carissa Halston, Jeff Griswold, Andrea Knowles, Amanda Kocis, Tamar Leroy, Molly Marotta, and Ruth Osorio. And in countless ways, I've been sustained by my friendships with Virginia Butler, John Macintosh, Abbey Morgan, Emily Perez, Nick Slaughter, Justin Thompson, and Jonathan Williams.

I'll never be able to thank my family enough. I'm a scholar because of my grandfather, William T. Wynne, and my mother, Karen Bruno. Thanks to them, I grew up in a house full of books and learned how to be curious and skeptical. My mom continues to be one of the smartest people I know. As I've grown older, I strive more and more to emulate my father, Albert Bruno, Jr., in his humor, endurance, and

unhesitating sacrifices for others. I learned love's offices from him. I know, too, how proud my grandfather, Albert Bruno, Sr., would be of me. My sister, Emily, is one of the bravest people I know, and I'm proud of her. Out of his love for paper and fountain pens, Tim Illingworth gave me the tools to literally write this dissertation. My partner, Olivia Cappello, showed me how to read for fun again. What more can I say, Olivia, than that I look forward to reading and writing with you for years to come?

I wrote this dissertation from 2016 to 2019. On a lower frequency, the dissertation has also been a record of my activism during these years. Perhaps it's unpopular to say now, but the struggle requires more than just our writing; I still believe, though, that the two can shape each other. I hope that happened here. From the Inauguration to Charlottesville and beyond, I've been honored to fight alongside people braver, smarter, and more just than I am. Thank you for everything you gave, comrades, especially when you gave everything.

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Introduction: Literary Insurrections

Introduction

"The slaves have risen," says a "black servant." He announces the news to the unnamed narrator of an 1831 sketch in *The Liberator*. Interrupted from his reading, the narrator rushes outside as "The words 'insurrection,' 'civil war,' 'carnage,' 'savage barbarity,' rang in [his] ears." Erupting seemingly from nowhere, "The rising was general throughout the country," and as white militias and black rebels wage war against each other, the newly freed black troops return centuries of violence to their oppressors. Led by a "second Lafayette" from Liberia, the insurrectionaries retaliate against whites by hanging prisoners, murdering the narrator's family, and pressing the narrator and others into labor for the war. Following a brutal siege, "The whites were for the most part gradually driven northward, and the blacks left in possession of the southern states." With the conflict over, "Independence, and equal rights, and no distinction of color" is declared.

Yet the new black nation faced a dilemma: what should it do with the remaining whites? The narrator witnesses a meeting of the rebels as they debate the whites' fate. Mirroring real debates about how to "solve" the problem of slavery, the leaders alternately consider "humanity" or reconciliation toward the whites, colonization in Portugal or Turkey, the death penalty, or perpetual and hereditary enslavement. As the narrator struggles to speak on behalf of his people, he awakens

from what he realizes was a dream: “Unspeakable was the relief of finding that all these things were but a dream. May no semblance to them ever be reality!”[1]

Signed only “T.T.,” “Another Dream” appeared in the April 30th, 1831 issue of William Lloyd Garrison's newly launched abolitionist newspaper. It actually served as a companion piece to “A Dream,” also by T.T., which appeared in the April 2nd issue. Unlike “Another Dream,” the earlier sketch depicted—again by way of the unnamed narrator's dreams—a future US in which civil rights, equality, and a black Presidency had all been achieved peacefully. The two sketches together pose an obvious dilemma: non-violent abolition or race war. However, the ending to “Another Dream” suggests something more than its obvious critique of slavery and white racism. Despite the bloodshed, the narrator's dream uprising remakes the country. Indeed, it makes a free black society. Perhaps unwittingly, the sketch ends not simply on the dilemma of what to do with the whites but on the possibilities and promise at follow from black rebellion. That is, the sketch ends on this figure's power to create.

Rebellious Speculation

From enslaved uprisings and liberation armies to worker strikes and insurgent conspiracies, black rebellion appeared as a recurring image in the nineteenth century and after. Functioning speculatively as a metaphor, concept, rhetorical tactic, and imagined scene, black rebellion performed cultural work for both black and white audiences in the US. Reading figurations of revolt for what they imagined or

1 T.T., “Another Dream,” *The Liberator*, April 30, 1831.

"created"— rather than just the fears they prompted or the radicalism they implied— reveals their power to (re)imagine alliances, political projects, justice movements, identities, and communities. Black militancy exploded in the US long nineteenth century, destroying racial slavery and challenging the Jim Crow regime. Inspired by and inspiring radical resistance, writers black, white, and brown took black political violence as their subject.

"Insurrection in Black" explores this textual life of black rebellion. Historian Kellie Carter Jackson has recently argued that "violence became a political language" for black activists.[2] If so, then critics must close read that language wherever "spoken"; that is, they must attend to depictions of such violence no less than its historical incidents. Taking black rebellion's historicity as a given, I examine its textual representations, thereby glimpsing the cultural work of force. To be sure, the discursive power of violence itself and the power of *depictions* of violence frequently blur together; a scene portraying enslaved insurrection resonates with readers because insurrection in reality has the power to move them. However, my immediate subject lives in print: I take seriously textual examples of rebellious violence in order to discern their fullest range of meanings and ultimately read them as a collective figure across texts and even periods. On the page no less than in person, black rebellion proved dangerous not just for how it threatened to destroy but for how it could create.

Of course *what* this figure could create was an open question that depended on its writers and readers. "Insurrection in Black" thus takes a comparative approach by

2 Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 4.

studying a range of authors, whether black or not. Roughly spanning from the 1820s to the 1900s, the project examines black rebellion's cultural work in discourses ranging from memories of the Haitian Revolution to turn of the century anticolonial resistance in Ethiopia.[3] I turn to novels, speeches, newspaper and magazine articles, autobiographies, and polemics by Robert Montgomery Bird, Richard Hildreth, Jabez Delano Hammond, Gerrit Smith, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lucy Parsons, Sutton E. Griggs, Thomas Dixon, and Pauline Hopkins. My comparative approach is a novel one within the scholarship on black militancy. Indeed, an interracial archive reveals a remarkable and under-appreciated truth: far from a stable idea, figurations of black revolt served sometimes competing political projects. These figures proved powerful yet flexible, and thus their uses did not always align with the project of black freedom. Often depictions actually serve a more moderate racial politics—or even an oppressive one.

Like T.T.'s dreamer, a range of authors tapped into textual black rebellion's imaginative power. These writers engaged in *rebellious speculation*, using race and revolt as an occasion for authorial creativity.[4] By depicting black rebellion, they fashioned textual alternatives to what they perceived to be the country's racial status

3 My project draws on work by literary scholars who have sought to reperiodize the nineteenth century. But rather than asserting a definitive periodization, my approach simply means to reveal new aspects of black militancy and American literatures. On the nineteenth century's long durée, see Cody Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War,* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Michael T. Gilmore, *The War on Words: Slavery, Race, and Free Speech in American Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

4 Here I follow Michelle Commander's theorization of "Afro-Atlantic speculation." Looking at depictions of flight in black diasporic culture, Commander discerns a speculative "series of imaginings, including literary texts, films, and geographic sites, that envision return flights back to Africa," ultimately allowing writers and readers to "attend to the dispossession caused by the slave trade." See Michelle Commander, *Afro-Atlantic Flight: Speculative Returns and the Black Fantastic*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 3, 4.

quo. On the page, these authors devised other identities for themselves, or they conceived of new racial collectivities or movements. But rebellious speculation could just as easily enable racist caricatures or advance Southern reaction against emancipation and black men's civil rights. After all, what constituted the racial status quo was by no means agreed upon. In this way my approach to "speculation" differs from the work of scholars like Michelle Commander, who find in the speculative a subversive cultural mode and source of identity for people of African descent.[5]

On the contrary, black rebellion's speculative capacity made this figure available to writers who were not necessarily black rebels—or even black at all. In using racial violence to imagine other acts, identities, and relationships, writers potentially stepped outside their own subjective selves and experiences in authorial acts of "appropriation." I do not mean that there existed an "authentic" black rebellion that some—especially white—writers might falsely claim or possess. Rather, through rebellious speculation authors took on an identity for themselves, their characters, or even their readers. At times these were actually collective rather than individual identities, ways for writers and readers to understand themselves in relation to each other as racial communities or movements. For some black writers, "appropriating" black rebel identities or discourses let them move their audiences to ends other than violence. For some white authors, such appropriation facilitated something like radical empathy, helping them and even their readers to see themselves as part of black freedom struggles. But for still other whites, "claiming" black selves monetized

5 Ibid., 6.

or degraded black life. As a discursive strategy, rebellious speculation contained all of these possibilities and more.

Regardless of authorial identity, though, the very nature of black rebellion on the page lent itself to imaginative acts of "appropriation." In this sense, then, my dissertation seeks to explore the distance and even slippage between ideas and action, texts and identities: it represents a study of the figural rather than the bodily. "Insurrection in Black" thus goes against the grain of the corporeal turn in much contemporary criticism. In the chapters that follow, I explore how authors abstract from the material world. From embodied acts of black militancy throughout the long nineteenth century, authors derive discursive, speculative scenes. They let violence mean more than just the material. More than embodied experiences of revolt, my project attends to how such experiences find new expression and ends in print.

By emphasizing the textual, "Insurrection in Black" places militancy closer to the center of the long nineteenth century's cultural life. My project thus belongs to a growing wave of scholarship studying the period's black radicalism. Literary critics such as Celeste-Marie Bernier, Lori Leavell, and Grégory Pierrot, along with historians such as Manisha Sinha and Kellie Carter Jackson, have all explored how black militancy erupted in reality or circulated in print.[6] Their work is crucial in the present moment because forms of black militancy, including violence, remain largely

6 Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2012); Lori Leavell, "Recirculating Black Militancy in Word and Image: Henry Highland Garnet's 'Volume of Fire," *Book History* 20 (2017); Grégory Pierrot, *The Black Avenger in Atlantic Culture*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016); Jackson, *Force and Freedom*.

under-studied and under-theorized.[7] Radicalism was indeed central to the period's history, as these scholars show, but the texts that I scrutinize further demonstrate just how discursively complex and culturally generative depictions of black rebellion really were. In this way, my project reveals the *literariness* of such depictions.

The nineteenth century constituted a period of intense struggle for black liberation and equality, and for that reason a truly comprehensive study of "black rebellion" might never end. Thus I make no claims to completeness in this project; instead my chosen texts and authors are illustrative, revealing neglected aspects of black militancy and American literatures in the period. By "rebellion," for instance, I mean real or imagined acts of black political violence against regimes of oppression.[8] I especially focus on racialized chattel slavery and Jim Crow in the US, but in some chapters I also study intersections with capitalism or European colonial projects. My guiding attention to images of liberatory violence is deliberate and extends beyond redressing critical neglect. Throughout the latter twentieth century scholars debated how oppressed peoples, particularly the enslaved, struggled against domination. This ranging debate over "resistance" usefully moved scholars to take seriously varieties of everyday struggle, but it perhaps also prompted a reaction against emphasizing violence.[9] In addition, the term "resistance" arguably lends itself to abstraction and

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7 Leavell, Recirculating 152; Jackson, *Force and Freedom,* 2.

8 Throughout the project I use several terms more or less interchangeably: "rebellion," "revolt," "insurrection," and "uprising." One may argue that there are differences among these terms; however, they and others were also deployed interchangeably in the period. In chapter four, I make a case for the more particular "insurgency" for descriptive purposes. I use terms like "violence" and "militancy" as larger descriptive categories that include "rebellion." Finally, I have usually chosen to avoid the term "revolution," except when discussing the Haitian Revolution or Marxist and anarchist political projects, or when describing rebellion on a vast scale.

9 For key texts in this debate over "resistance," see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made, (*New York: Vintage Books, 1976); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes*

too-wide application. As a corrective to this long critical trend and in an effort to home in on tangible and specific acts, I focus my analysis on depictions of organized black political violence.

Further, I limit my chapters' objects of study primarily to fictional or "prospective" depictions of rebellion so as to highlight this figure's speculative power. "Insurrection in Black" is not a study of the "afterlives" or cultural memories of historical rebellions.[10] For this reason, I do not analyze texts like Frederick Douglass's novella, *The Heroic Slave* (1852), which fictionalizes Madison Washington's revolt aboard the slaveship *The Creole*.[11] Distinguishing between fictional and historical texts is practical rather than definitive: no portrayal of Washington, for instance, will be strictly "true," while many of the fictional examples in my project drew inspiration, influence, or, in the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Dred*, even material, from historical events. I also examine texts that raise the urgent prospect of insurrection not in fictional worlds but in the real one. "Prospective" depictions of rebellion appear in non-fiction texts like speeches or polemics; they are not fictional, but in raising the idea of rebellion they engage in a similar speculative work as do the novels I examine.

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*of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America, (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 113-24.

10 On the concept of afterlives, see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996), 253–63 as well as Bernier, *Characters of Blood.*

11 On Douglass's novella, see Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*, ed. Robert S Levine, John Stauffer, and John R McKivigan, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). On shipboard rebellions, see Maggie Montesinos Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

Other scholars have explored the afterlives of real figures who waged righteous violence against oppression.[12] Often such studies have been dominated by heroic men who have significant presences in historical archives and thus exert an oversized influence on the conversations about black rebellions that do occur.[13] But their presence is itself a gendered phenomenon, as whites perceived and inscribed rebellion into colonial, slaveholding, and Jim Crow records ideologically. Writing of an apparent enslaved conspiracy in South Carolina, 1749, Jennifer Morgan suggests that "perhaps [women's] relative absence from the records of this and other revolt attempts has more to do with the eyes and ears of magistrates and less to do with an intentional withdrawal of enslaved women from the conversations about resistance and revolt that clearly permeated the landscape."[14] Scholars have subsequently reinscribed male-centric recountings of rebellion, even to the exclusion of women rebels we know about, including Nanny of the Maroons and the enslaved woman named Lucy who joined Nat Turner's uprising. An afterlives project risks similarly overemphasizing men, exceptional leadership, and romantic individualism.[15] My own experience writing a Master's thesis and subsequent article on the afterlife of Nat Turner made this challenge clear to me.[16] In turning to fictional and prospective

12 See Bernier, *Characters of Blood* and Scot French, *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

13 Bernier, *Characters of Blood* represents an impressive exception, as Bernier studies the afterlives of other heroic rebels, including Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman.

14 Jennifer Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 193-4.

15 Pierrot's forthcoming book, *The Black Avenger in the Atlantic Worl*d (2019), promises a compelling literary study about depictions of black violence, yet risks replicating the preoccupations with men's exceptional leadership that I note here.

16 Tim Bruno, "The Afterlives of Nat Turner," MA thesis, University of Virginia, 2013; Tim Bruno, "Nat Turner after 9/11: Kyle Baker's *Nat Turner*," *Journal of American Studies* 50, no. 4 (2016): 923–51. doi:10.1017/S0021875815001243.

portrayals of black rebellion, I seek to escape the gendered and individualist logics of the archive, while also delimiting a potentially overwhelming topic. In their speculative capacities, fictional and prospective rebellions allow us to think more capaciously about collectivity, race, gender, class, and movements so as to discern the unexpected cultural work of black violence: imagining building something new, not just burning down the old.

Similarly, I avoid depictions of black self-defense so as to further narrow my object of study while also emphasizing more provocative and speculative depictions of offensive attacks against oppression. Some scholars have identified a widespread strategy of "practical abolitionism" in the 1840s and '50s that blended non-violent civil disobedience with a willingness to use defensive violence, exemplified in events like the Christiana Resistance in which free blacks and fugitive slaves successfully fought off capture.[17] Likewise, the early Jim Crow period contains many instances in which black people used violence to defend themselves from whites, leading the anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett to remark that "the Winchester rifle should have a place of honor in every black home."[18] But offensive violence was another story, and it represented a more drastic and, for some, unthinkable step toward liberation.

17 Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, 35.

18 Ida B. Wells, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases," (New York: The New York Age Print, 1892), 23. For examples of black self-defense against Klan attacks, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 436-7. For a study of examples of black use of firearms, often in self-defense, see Nicholas Johnson, *Negroes and the Gun: The Black Tradition of Arms*, (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2014).

But for the authors I examine, such violence *was* thinkable—in fact, it was speculative, allowing them and perhaps even their readers to think more expansively about identity, community, and movements. In "Insurrection in Black," I discern this cultural work in unexpected texts and moments, thereby pushing the scholarship beyond its current default approaches to black rebellion's literary depictions.

Beyond Benito Cereno and Blake

By attending to the alliances, projects, or communities that figurations of black rebellion imagine or even create, "Insurrection in Black" escapes a conceptual binary that has come to limit what comparatively little scholarship has been done on representations of black militancy in the nineteenth century. Scholars tend to interpret depictions of rebellion either as symptoms of white fear about black violence or else as traces of a lost black radicalism that needs recovering. Both approaches, while often apt, nonetheless constrain how we might understand the textual power of black violence. Preoccupied by what texts tell us about white anxieties or black politics, we risk overlooking what texts tell us about the often complex, nuanced meanings that black violence carried for diverse readers and writers. Scholars' binary approach limits, too, what objects we might examine because it continually points us to a limited collection of literary texts. Two canonical novels usefully, although not definitively, illustrate the critical dilemma at hand: Herman Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855) and Martin Delany's *Blake; Or the Huts of America* (1859–62).

Perhaps now the most canonical portrayal of a black uprising in American literature, Melville's serialized novella also easily stands in for the interpretive

problems presented by black violence: simply put, how does one "read" black rebellion? This is unsurprising given that the text unfolds through the perspective of the white ship captain, Amasa Delano. Delano and his crew happen upon a slaving vessel in disarray, the *San Dominick*, captained by the eponymous Benito Cereno. Despite being constantly faced with clues, Delano is always just on the verge of realizing that the ship's African captives have staged a rebellion and that their leader, Babo, has orchestrated an elaborate display of submission and orderliness in hopes of warding off detection. Critics including Carolyn Karcher, Eric Sundquist, Sterling Stuckey, and Greg Grandin have taken white fear in *Benito Cereno* as a knowing critique on Melville's part, instead reading his novella as performing the power struggle between enslaver and enslaved, or as celebrating black revolutionism, or as suggesting African cultural transmissions to the so-called New World.[19] In contrast, Robert S. Levine identifies Delano as an avatar for Melville's (and his readers') sincere anxieties about threats to the established social order, threats Levine dubs "subversive insurrectionism."[20] These competing interpretations all have merits, but those merits are perhaps besides the point: just how we understand white fear in *Benito Cereno*—whether ironic or earnest—does not displace white fear's centrality to the text.

19 Carolyn L. Karcher, *Shadow Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race, and Violence in Melville's America*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980); Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1993); Sterling Stuckey, *African Culture and Melville's Art: The Creative Process in Benito Cereno and Moby-Dick*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Greg Grandin, *The Empire of Necessity: Slavery, Freedom, and Deception in the New World*, (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Company, 2014).

20 Robert S. Levine *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 168.

Scholarship on the nineteenth century mirrors *Benito Cereno*'s emphasis on whites' feelings about the threat of violent upheaval. Anxiety, fear, or paranoia have become a default approach for critics reading rebellion in the period's historical as well as literary texts. Put differently, interpreting whites' negative affects allows scholars to discuss the existing racial order that informs the texts at hand.[21] Of course such an approach centers whiteness. But perhaps less obviously, it also allows us to understand only one dimension of black violence: its capacity to terrorize. While often true and enlightening, I find this frequent coupling of black rebellion with whites' negative affects to be limiting. “Insurrection in Black” asks, then, what else this figure might produce besides fear, even among white readers.

When scholars approach nineteenth century black militancy differently, they usually do so in the interest of radical recovery. Martin Delany's serial novel, *Blake*, represents both a now canonical text depicting black rebellion as well as an example of the recovery work I have in mind. *Blake*'s ending remains lost, as far as critics know; in its available form, the novel depicts a revolutionary conspiracy to overthrow slavery that spans the US, Canada, Cuba, and the western coast of Africa. Its eponymous hero travels to plantations and Native tribes in each state, organizing enslaved and free blacks as well as Native Americans into a secret coalition; after relocating his friends and family to a fugitive community in Canada, Blake searches for his wife in Cuba, where he also collaborates with other revolutionaries to accumulate resources and infrastructure for their growing insurrection. The novel as

21 For example, see Duncan Faherty, "The Mischief That Awaits Us': Revolution, Rumor, and Serial Unrest in the Early Republic,” in *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies,* edited by Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 58-79.

we have it ends with the conspiracy poised to retaliate against whites for a brutal attack against one of the novel's black characters.

Blake has emerged from critical obscurity to become, along with *The Heroic Slave* and *Benito Cereno,* a canonical text depicting black rebellion, but also one that hints at cultures of black radicalism in the 1850s and '60s. According to Benjamin Fagan, "Delany's novel focuses on the work that precedes an uprising—on the preparations necessary for a successful revolution." *Blake* is important for more than just the uprising it (almost) depicts, Fagan argues; it offered black readers something like a guide to revolutionary change. *Blake* was serialized in the *Weekly Anglo-African* at a moment when the paper advocated for enslaved insurrection and for free black readers to support such an uprising instead of trusting Northern whites.[22] In this reading the novel provides an avenue for recovering militancy in the *Weekly Anglo-African*'s pages. Efforts like Fagan's to better identify and understand the period's black radical cultures are vital and advance our scholarship.[23] But I want to suggest that critics can read rebellion in a wider array of texts and as less straightforwardly indicative of black (or white) politics.

"Insurrection in Black" shows us that figurations of black rebellion are indeed textually rich, representing more than just white fear or calls for black revolution. My approach has the added benefit of forcing us to seek out other examples of this trope besides the now canonical *The Heroic Slave*, *Benito Cereno,* or *Blake*. Important,

22 Benjamin Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation.* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2016), 135, 137.

23 I consider scholarship by Sinha, Jackson, and Leavell, cited elsewhere in this introduction, to exemplify this tendency. "Insurrection in Black" should be seen as influenced by and complementing their work while also attempting to expand on it.

compelling, and complex as these three texts are, I want to push literary critics in particular to say more about the speculative power of their shared subject. Doing so will no doubt shed new light on the three works just as much as on neglected ones. Textual black rebellion, though, needs to be understood in historical context. If the idea of black violence in white supremacist societies carries symbolic weight across periods, then its specific registers, references, or meanings derive from particular conditions. A series of events—literary no less than militant—sets the stage for figurations of black rebellion throughout the nineteenth century. "Insurrection in Black" begins in their wake.

1828 to 1831: Insurrectionary (and Literary) Years

By briefly turning to the short period from 1828 to 1831, I hope to delineate the "prehistory" to my project, the confluence of black militancy and textual production that precipitated, enabled, prompted, or influenced many of the texts that I examine in the following chapters. These four years offer a useful point of departure rather than a definitive periodization. Because of militant eruptions, they gave urgency, form, and reference to discussions and depictions of black revolt for decades to come. But such events were also fundamentally discursive, taking place through or inspiring subsequent texts. If, as I argue, a discernable trope of black rebellion emerges across the nineteenth century, then 1828 through 1831 represents a key source for the language, feelings, and histories that gave that trope meaningful shape.

No single event did more to shape ideas about black liberatory violence than the Haitian Revolution, and far from diminishing in importance over time, the

Revolution reemerged by the 1820s in the racial imaginaries of the US and Caribbean.[24] If Haiti inspired white panic about black violence and a racial order turned upside down, then for black people in the US Haiti inspired early forms of nationalism, including "demonstrations, speeches, parades . . . the naming of institutions, and, ultimately . . . the mass emigration movement to the island."[25] Such feelings were not static but took new forms over time, partly in response to events in Haiti itself. Edlie Wong explains that, "In the 1820s, the consolidation of a long-divided Haiti and the conquest of Spanish Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic) under the leadership of Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer reignited fears of slave revolt in the U.S. South. However, many black Americans welcomed these same events as a powerful portent of black political progress and possibility in the Atlantic."[26] Black writers cannily "readapted" white fears about black revolution into a progressive, egalitarian vision for equality in the US, Wong argues.[27]

Early black literary nationalism gave shape to hopes about Haiti and offered black writers a conceptual language rooted in liberation struggle. The first black US

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24 On the Haitian Revolution, see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution,* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2004); Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, eds., *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents,* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J Drexler, eds., *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016),

25 Sara C. Fanning, "The Roots of Early Black Nationalism: Northern African Americans' Invocations of Haiti in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents,* edited by Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 39.

26 Edlie Wong, "In the Shadow of Haiti: the Negro Seaman Act, Counter-Revolutionary St. Domingue, and Black Emigration," *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies, e*dited by Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J Drexler, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 183. On "Theresa," see also Frances Smith Foster, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Theresa?" in *African American Review* 40.4 (2006): 631-45.

27 Ibid., 164.

newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, published the anonymous short story "Theresa—A Haytien Tale" (1828), which "figur(ed) the promise and possibilities for black social reproduction in Boyer's unified Haiti."[28] Signed only "S.," the story depicts Theresa as she avoids capture by the French in order to warn Toussaint L'Ouverture of the invading European force, before finally reuniting her with her mother and sister. Setting a domestic plot during the Revolution's upheaval, as Wong asserts, unfolds a vision for readers of what black struggle could actually produce. Familial bonds come to stand in for the promises of Haiti's new national order.[29] If the narrative depicts the new affiliations that black violence could create, then "Theresa" itself further exemplifies this creative power: critics consider the short story to be perhaps the earliest black authored fiction in the US.

Only a year after *Freedom's Journal* published "Theresa," a pamphlet appeared that spread an incendiary message of black resistance throughout the country. Written as a fiery polemic and send-up of the US Constitution, David Walker's *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829-30) sought "to awaken in the hearts of [Walker's] afflicted, degraded, and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry and investigation respecting our miseries and wretchedness in this Republican Land of Liberty!!!!!!"[30] The pamphlet posed a damning indictment of slavery, racism, and white hypocrisy, openly arguing for militant and perhaps even violent resistance to oppression.

28 Wong, "In the Shadow of Haiti," 163.
29 Wong, "In the Shadow of Haiti," 182.
30 David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World,* edited by Peter Hinks, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 65.

Walker, a free black activist and agent for *Freedom's Journal*, wrote a text to be shared—read aloud in meetings, spread from hand to hand, or mailed across the country.[31] Yet even as black abolitionists circulated the *Appeal* or its message, others recirculated the text in print, as Lori Leavell has shown. In their panic over the militant pamphlet, white newspapers quoted or reprinted the *Appeal* in a way that inadvertently disseminated its incendiary ideas. Over time, other black radicals like Henry Highland Garnet would turn to the (in)famous *Appeal* as a way to "authorize" their own fiery messages.[32] Perhaps nothing proved more threatening than the text's mere ability to circulate: a wave of laws followed the *Appeal*'s publication that sought to limit enslaved people's literacy and access to print.

Many would implicate Walker's *Appeal* as an influence for Nat Turner's rebellion, one of the most daring enslaved uprisings in US history; regardless of its inspirations, though, the rebellion would take on a discursive life of its own. Initially planned for the Fourth of July, 1831, Turner's insurrection erupted several weeks later, killing approximately 60 whites and resulting in the deaths of many more local blacks, enslaved or free. Some allege that the rebels ultimately planned to seize the nearby town of Jerusalem or to escape to marronage in Virginia's Great Dismal Swamp. No wonder that the uprising inspired such fear and fascination: inlaid with its violence was a set of national, religious, and racial symbols. Depictions of the rebel

31 On the radical typography of the *Appeal* and its purpose in prompting readers, see Marcy J. Dinius, "Look!! Look!!! At This!!!!": The Radical Typography of David Walker's *Appeal*," *PMLA* 126, no. 1 (2011): 55-72. On the famous story of black sailors spreading copies of the *Appeal* throughout the country, see Hinks's introduction to Walker, *Appeal*, xi.

32 On newspapers reprinting the *Appeal*, see Lori Leavell, "'Not Intended Exclusively for the Slave States': Antebellum Recirculation of David Walker's *Appeal*," *Callaloo* 38, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 679—695. On other radicals' use of the text, see Leavell, "Recirculating."

leader emphasize this, often portraying him (sometimes in his own words) as an interpreter of miraculous hieroglyphs written in blood on leaves or of cosmic events like lunar eclipses.[33] In short, Turner manipulated cultural symbolism to great effect. As Eric Sundquist and William Andrews argue in classic studies, Nat Turner's *Confessions* (1831), written in collaboration with a white lawyer while Turner awaited execution, perpetuated Turner's mission by textualizing it, enabling it to (re)circulate in print and thereby continue to threaten chattel slavery's racial order.[34]

However material, and sometimes deadly, these three touchstones were, they were also fundamentally discursive: they gave black rebellion textual life. The Haitian Revolution, Walker's *Appeal*, and Nat Turner's revolt became intertexts for subsequent figurations of black violence, particularly during the antebellum period. They do not exhaust the contexts, sources, or influences for the texts I examine in the following chapters, nor do they definitively list the rebellious events and texts from even just 1828 to 1831. After all, William Lloyd Garrison's radical abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*, also began publication in 1831. But these three touchstones compose a moment of uniquely insurrectionary and black-authored discourse. They cast into relief the figures of black rebellion that follow. In short, they offer a beginning.

33 On Nat Turner as an interpreter of cosmic signs, see Zach Marshall, "Signs in the Heavens and the Distress of Nations," *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 6, no. 2 (2018): 285-306.

34 Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*; William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story:The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

Dissertation Overview

Of course T.T.'s "Another Dream" also appeared in 1831. Although the sketch was published before Nat Turner's uprising took place in August of that year, it drew inspiration from the radical events and texts of the preceding few years. The sketch itself signals as much. At one point in his dream, T.T.'s narrator witnesses the rebels celebrating the arrival of reinforcements: "And I found myself in one of the southern cities, chained to another prisoner, and surrounded by negroes, whose countenances expressed the joy and triumph occasioned by the arrival of aid from Hayti." All around him, rebels triumphantly cried, "The Haytien fleet!" The vision of black rebellion that T.T. summons was inseparable from memories of the Haitian Revolution.[35]

The sketch never explains what started the racial cataclysm; instead the violence erupts spontaneously and simultaneously around the US. But within the context of *The Liberator*'s April 30th, 1831 issue, David Walker's *Appeal* catalyzes T.T.'s imagined insurrection. "Another Dream" appears on the issue's second page, following a review of the *Appeal* on the first. Signed only "V.," the review favorably summarizes and expands on the *Appeal* from the perspective of a white "gentleman of talents." Furthermore, it reprints a portion of Walker's pamphlet at length, as other newspapers sometimes did.[36] Throughout the review, presumably Garrison himself offers editorializing notes; the review thus ends not with V.'s words but with a note

35 T.T., "Another Dream." In addition to the cultural memory of the Haitian Revolution, this passage seems to recall Denmark Vesey's promise to his co-conspirators that Haiti would send reinforcements. See Robert S. Levine, *Dislocating Race & Nation: Episodes in Nineteenth-Century American Literary Nationalism,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 84.

36 Leavell, "Not Intended."

rebutting V.'s pessimism that racial equality would be achieved in his lifetime. The note reads, “On this point, our doubts are at rest. *The revolution will take place*—nay, it has begun. The 'pyramid of prejudice' is crumbling, and Truth, Religion, Reason and Justice are sapping its foundations.”[37] Perhaps “*revolution*” implied a peaceful process, yet given the placement of T.T.'s sketch in relation to Walker's pamphlet, perhaps not. Within this issue of *The Liberator*, the incendiary *Appeal* precedes a race war that violently frees the enslaved and establishes a black nation. Readers are left to speculate what black rebellion might make—and what their new society would look like.

With its movement from insurrection to the possibilities that result, T.T.'s “Another Dream” frames “Insurrection in Black.” In the project's four chapters, I examine depictions of black rebellion and what they speculatively create or what cultural work they perform across the long nineteenth century. The first two chapters open in the wake of Haiti, Walker, and Nat Turner, tracing the figure of black rebellion in the form of enslaved uprisings and liberation armies. But despite widespread insurrection anxiety after 1831, some whites responded to the idea of black violence with interracial solidarity. In chapter one, I turn to a cluster of texts by five white, male, Northern authors holding a range of antislavery politics: Robert Montgomery Bird's satirical novel *Sheppard Lee* (1836), the counterfeit slave narratives *The Slave* (1836) and *The Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn* (1847) by Richard Hildreth and Jabez D. Hammond, John Brown's “Sambo's Mistakes” (1847), and Gerrit Smith's “A Letter to the American Slaves” (1850). In each, the author

37 V., “Walker's Appeal No. 1.” *The Liberator*, April 30, 1831.

poses a scene or scenes of rebellion in which they imagine connections or even political alliances with militants across the color line. In order to make these textual responses possible during these anxious years, however, all five authors engaged in forms of racial performance that drew on the concurrent conventions and logics of minstrelsy. That is, they wrote insurrections in blackface. In this chapter, we can discern both the breadth of black rebellion's uses—from racist mockery to vicarious fulfillment, from financial gain to radical empathy—and speculation's troubling possibilities for appropriating black selves and struggle.

Black rebellion clearly took on a textual life of its own. As militant discourses proliferated in the face of the slavery crisis, black rebellion came to serve as a conceptual frame or language for advancing sometimes competing ideas about racial justice as well as for prominent author-activists to assert leadership claims within liberation movements. Chapter two explores this phenomenon by recovering a ranging debate about black violence among Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Beecher Stowe. Beginning with a personal encounter between Douglass and Truth at an abolitionist convention in 1852, this debate eventually transformed into a literary exchange spanning decades and outlasting slavery. The chapter follows this debate through Stowe's *Dred: A Tale of a Great Dismal Swamp* (1856) and magazine writing of the 1860s, Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1875/1884), and Douglass's *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881/1892). These authors held differing opinions about violence, yet in their intertextual “conversation” all three utilized images of insurrection to enlist their readers in the work of racial justice even as they used such images to assert their own claims of representative leadership.

Following the long afterlife of their debate creates a representative case study in how black rebellion could figure conflicting ideas through a shared language of violence.

Chapter three picks up by tracing the durability of the language of slave revolt beyond Emancipation. After the Civil War, the indigenous Afro-Mexican anarchist and labor organizer Lucy Parsons used images of revolt to transmute rebellion against chattel slavery into rebellion against wage slavery. In newspapers, pamphlets, broadsides, and speeches, Parsons depicts working class resistance as slave rebellion not simply by identifying capitalism as a new Slave Power but by reclaiming the image of the slave rebel as the fundamental subject of freedom struggle. In doing so, Parsons foreshadows W. E. B. Du Bois in rethinking who has agency. While Parsons remains an under-recognized figure in literary studies and is often dismissed as denying her black identity, I recover her newspaper and pamphlet writings as African American literary texts. In the process, I reveal how her depiction of black rebellion speculatively bridges not simply the antebellum and postbellum periods but activist movements with differing investments in race and class identities.

Whatever else had changed as the long nineteenth century unfolded, black rebellion's cultural power persisted; but the meaning and uses of that power remained open questions. Thus the dissertation ends with chapter four, in which I explore contradictory depictions of state “insurgencies” in Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* (1899), Thomas R. Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), and Pauline E. Hopkins's *Of One Blood* (1902-3). After chattel slavery gave way to the Jim Crow regime, these novelists imagined insurgencies against state power as a literary means to redefine racial identities and, ultimately, communities. Griggs and Hopkins, based

as they were in the period's vibrant black print culture, used their insurgent scenes to prompt readers to fashion activist and diasporic identities for the sake of racial justice. But using images of *white* rebellion, Dixon worked to consolidate white identity and entitlement against the racial (re)formations brought by Reconstruction. For all three authors, writing revolt bridged the aesthetic and the political, art and activism, text and action.

Like T.T.'s dreamer, the writers examined in this dissertation speculated about what depicting black rebellion might create. Within a violently white supremacist society, the idea of black violence contained such surprising power that it could summon new alliances, projects, movements, and even communities. This was true on the page and perhaps in person as well. Whether taking the form of enslaved uprisings, black armies, worker strikes, or state insurgencies, the figure of black rebellion proved creative, but not always toward liberatory ends. Chapter one takes us to a cohort of white writers who, in their ideological disparity, perhaps most starkly reveal the surprising possibilities and limitations of textual black rebellion. "Insurrection in Black" argues that we need to read this trope's language to make sense of what they made.

Chapter One: Insurrection in Blackface: White Militancy, Solidarity, and Performance in the Antebellum US

Introduction

As I discussed in the introduction, the years 1828 to 1831 were an insurrectionary time, with renewed memories of the Haitian Revolution, David Walker's *Appeal,* and Nat Turner's uprising threatening the racial order. Black radicalism and white fear circulated in print and in practice. But these years produced something unexpected. A range of white male writers responded to the idea of slave rebellion with interracial "solidarity." In fact, textual scenes of revolt offered Robert Montgomery Bird, Richard Hildreth, Jabez Delano Hammond, Gerrit Smith, and John Brown a vehicle for imagining and expressing that solidarity. For some of these authors, solidarity meant a true coalition building across the color line; for some, it meant speculating about being black. It might even mean experimenting in antislavery militancy. But others were less committed to antislavery than to deflating white pretensions: for them, "solidarity" meant showing how blacks and whites were similar in the worst ways. Despite differing ends—and often racist ideologies—each of these white writers posed an unexpected textual response to the idea of black insurrection. And in the process they revealed the era's possibilities for imagining other lives.

In order to make their textual responses possible, though, all five authors engaged in some form of racial performance—impersonation, mimicry, masking, or ventriloquism—that drew on the concurrent conventions and logics of blackface

minstrelsy. Expressing such dangerous solidarities required protective cover from the public; more importantly, it required speculation. Blackface was a cultural form that provided both: its interplay of racial categories enabled a degree of social transgression, while its appropriative power created an opportunity for whites to think beyond their immediate identities, even if in troubled ways. Surprisingly, blackface-adjacent performances actually made interracial solidarity *thinkable*. But when Bird, Hildreth, Hammond, Smith, and Brown conceived of solidarity, they envisioned not ordinary enslaved people but black militants and insurgents. Building off of these initial insights, chapter one tells a story of the strange possibility and speculative power inhering in black violence and blackface.

It does so by examining five white figures ranging across the antislavery spectrum, all of whom textually experiment with depicting militancy and black impersonation in ways relevant to blackface. All five use their racial performance for different ends related to establishing commonality across the color line, what I refer to here as "solidarity." For Bird in his novel *Sheppard Lee; Written by Himself* (1836), this means writing a white character who actually comes to inhabit a black body. Over the course of the novel, the reader learns that blacks and whites have something in common: their vices. I begin with Bird as one of the earliest of these writers but also as a limit case for my notion of solidarity: Bird makes his critique of whites' faults legible by using minstrelsy's racist imagery. In two subsequent fake slave narratives, *The Slave: Or Memoirs of Archy Moore* (1836) and *The Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn* (1847), Hildreth and Hammond, respectively, blur the line between themselves and their black characters as a way to safely picture slave

revolt. But the difference between novel and (fake) autobiography becomes unclear when both men recant their militancy after being exposed as authors. Novels offer a special opportunity for these writers to discursively experiment with other identities—and, like minstrel performers, to try to turn a profit. But I will also turn to other genres to discuss two committed abolitionist militants who did not seek to monetize their depictions of black bodies. In Smith's "A Letter to the American Slaves" and Brown's "Sambo's Mistakes," both authors adopt black personae in order to make radical antislavery appeals. What unites the formally and politically disparate works that I will discuss in this chapter is that they speculatively depict slave rebellion while establishing cross-racial commonalities or concerns through acts of textual performance—sometimes in spite of the racism of the text's author.

However far from the minstrel stage they might seem, these texts both belong to and complicate the culture of racial performance developing during this period, a practice best exemplified by blackface. As scholars of minstrelsy have shown, the early period of blackface in the 1830s and '40s offered a site for white working class men of the urban North to critique the conditions of wage labor.[1] There was a political flexibility to this early cultural project. Yet this fluid early period gave way to more standardized genre conventions, when "a more nostalgic, bourgeois sentimentalism concerned with (white) racial consolidation above all became minstrelsy's organizing ethic."[2] A range of cultural texts and objects emerged from these years, drawing on the representations of black bodies in minstrel shows, with

1 Douglas A. Jones, "American; Or, the Emergence of Audiences and Their Blackface Salve," *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 6, no. 2 (2018): 407-8.

2 Jones, "American," 408.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) being a notable example.[3] The texts by Bird, Hildreth, Hammond, Smith, and Brown that I examine here belong to this cohort of blackface-inspired texts, albeit in different ways, and most of them without the familiar references to minstrel shows that a text like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* contains.

These five authors used racial performance to forge connections with rebels across the color line, an interracial logic that ran counter to much of blackface's development. According to Douglas Jones, "whenever American audiences found themselves at odds over national or global matters, they could rely on the salve of performed blackness, ersatz or otherwise, to palliate the alienation and anguish their discord caused."[4] That is, performed blackness offered a way to unify white publics around their shared racial identity. Whereas blackface became about healing intraracial divisions at the expense of black life, the texts I study in this chapter sought forms of interracial commonality, leveling, or shared struggle. They thus run strangely counter to minstrelsy's emerging trajectory, even when the texts themselves exemplify the white supremacist logics of the period.

Herein lies these texts' shared significance. This chapter recovers a historically contingent sense of how textual forms of black rebellion and appropriative racial "masking" could forge militant cross-racial solidarity rather than only feed white fear-mongering or racist degradation. At stake in the five writers examined here is the speculative capacity of writing, but also the possibility to imagine an ethics against

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 409.

the grain of the moment. For some of them, performing a black identity constituted a radical, laudable act in the face of white racism and slavery's growing dominance; for a writer like Bird, though, the aim was far more politically or ethically ambiguous. Yet these writers all diverged from the anxious white-authored depictions of rebellious violence that proliferated after David Walker and Nat Turner. Taken together, Bird, Hildreth, Hammond, Smith, and Brown reveal that the cultural meaning of black revolt as well as black performance was unsettled and open for debate even during the 1830s and '40s. They break up any easy consensus about white fears of black violence or the simplicity of cross-racial performances.

Collectively, the texts examined in this chapter represent the possibility of radical, liberatory visions of black life and struggle in the antebellum period, but they also maintain murky relationships to antislavery or racial equality. The chapter begins by exploring a cautionary example of the connection between racial performance and black revolt. Published in 1836, during minstrelsy's early fluid period, Robert Montgomery Bird's satirical novel *Sheppard Lee* signals its debt to blackface more clearly than any other text discussed in this chapter. At the same time, Bird's novel is the least invested in racial equality, and it does not envision political solidarity with militants. *Sheppard Lee* contains passages that forward some of the period's most vicious stereotypes about black people, regardless of the satirical ends to which Bird puts his depictions; moreover the text depicts the appropriation of black bodies with the same casualness and monetizing logic as minstrel performances. However, Bird does bring together minstrelsy and slave revolt in a way that critiques racial

hierarchies in one important sense: blacks and whites, according to Bird, share in common their worst faults.

Sheppard Lee's Blacking

There were many Robert Montgomery Birds: Bird the Philadelphia physician existed alongside Bird the novelist, the playwright, the experimenter in early photography and the sketch-artist. But no version of Bird was an abolitionist. In *Sheppard Lee; Written by Himself* (1836), however, Bird does create an eponymous narrator who joins a slave revolt after *becoming* black. In this strange, recently rediscovered novel, Bird imagines a white man whose soul can travel from body to body. Framed as Sheppard Lee's memoirs, the novel recounts the hapless Lee's experience as he moves up and down the Jacksonian social ladder—albeit always in a man's body—becoming by turns a wealthy brewer, a down-on-his-luck fop, a caricatured Jewish miser, and a Quaker "philanthropist." After Lee escapes being lynched in his Quaker body for being an abolitionist, he enters the body of a Virginia slave named Tom. Bird initially portrays Lee's life under slavery by drawing on the racist stereotype of the "contented slave," but Lee quickly transforms into a different caricature: a Nat Turner-style insurrectionary.

For Bird, this slave revolt episode does not serve an antislavery end. Rather, like the novel's other episodes, the insurgency stages Bird's biting social satire. Instead of establishing interracial political solidarity, Bird establishes shared vices between the white Lee and the other slave rebels in order to lampoon white pretensions of superiority. This is a satirist's approach to racial difference, humorous,

caustic, and in its own way leveling hierarchies. Lee may be white, Bird suggests, but his character is actually little different from the slave whose body he inhabits. Bird delivers this satire, however, through the racist tropes of the minstrel shows.

Critics of the novel have only begun to read it in terms of blackface, but the text actually advertises its investment in racial caricature from the start.[5] "Let these shine now that never shone before, / And those that always shone now shine the more," reads *Sheppard Lee*'s epigraph, cited as "*Advertisement to* Hunt's Blacking."[6] This Henry "Orator" Hunt was a contemporary London blacking merchant as well as a labor firebrand and popular punchline for contemporary satirists. In the material register of Hunt's blacking, caricature, class, and critique all come together to set the tone for the novel as a humorous social satire as well as to establish its primary device of switching bodies. After all, products like Hunt's constituted a technology for the explosively popular medium of minstrelsy. Designed to blacken shoes, blacking like Hunt's could be used, like burnt cork, as part of the costume for blackface performances.[7] From its first page, then, Bird's novel hails the minstrel form, its conceit of changing identities, and its satirical potential.

5 See Benjamin J. Doty "Satire, Minstrelsy, and Embodiment in *Sheppard Lee*," *Early American Literature* 51, no. 1 (2016): 131-56. Doty also makes an argument for reading the novel in terms of blackface.

6 Robert Montgomery Bird, *Sheppard Lee, Written by Himself*, ed. Christopher Looby, (New York: New York Review Books, 2008): 3. In his reading of the novel in terms of minstrelsy, Doty notes the epigraph but does not connect it to the technology of blackface.

7 John Strachan, *Advertising and Satirical Culture in the Romantic Period*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 10, 146-54. On Hunt, see also John Belchem, *"Orator" Hunt: Henry Hunt and English Working-Class Radicalism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). On minstrelsy as a working class phenomenon, see Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

The novel's close relationship to blackface makes sense: its publication coincided with minstrelsy's explosive popularity in the urban North, and Bird himself likely encountered the minstrel stage professionally as a playwright. Despite Christopher Looby's recent critical recovery of Bird's curious novel, Bird's writing for the stage remains arguably more historically significant than his prose. Bird's play *The Gladiator* (1831) was the first English-language play performed more than a thousand times during the life of its author.[8] *The Gladiator* was also the play to make a sensation out of Edwin Forrest, regarded as the first celebrity of US American theater. In 1828, Bird wrote a play for a contest held by Forrest in order to solicit new material for the actor. The result was *The Gladiator*, a nearly decade-long partnership between the two men, and finally their bitter falling out over a financial dispute. Bird's longtime collaborator was also one of minstrelsy's earliest stars. In 1823, in a play titled "Tailor in Distress," Forrest played a "Kentucky Negro" and "imitated the black man in dress, accent, gait, dialect and manner; and was said to be the first actor to do so."[9] Given his theatrical career, Bird would have been steeped in the minstrel form—and perhaps keenly aware of how lucrative it could be.

But the meaning or cultural work performed by blackface minstrelsy during this early period was still an open question, one with bearing not just on Bird's novel but on the representational possibilities available to the other authors in this chapter. Hildreth, Hammond, Smith, and Brown do not summon images of minstrelsy the way Bird does; indeed, as I will show, these other authors largely avoid blackface while

8 Looby, "Introduction," xxiii. See also Richard Moody, *Edwin Forrest, First Star of the American Stage*, (New York: Knopf, 1960): 170.

9 Lott, *Love and Theft*, 251n5.

Bird overtly references it. Yet in imagining interracial solidarities and black identities, these Northern white men nonetheless find themselves involved in discourses informed by or adjacent to blackface. Just as these authors all do something surprising with the image of black insurrection at a time of white panic (and a time of black radicalism as well), so too do they use the performative logics of blackface in ways that are, if not liberatory, then at least outside of minstrelsy's racist caricature. So before examining Bird's deployment of slave revolt and racial masking in *Sheppard Lee,* we should ask: what were the oppressive dimensions of minstrelsy's racial imposture? What were its imaginative, even liberatory, possibilities, and for whom?

Minstrelsy's possibilities have been vexed from the start. Arising in the 1820s and '30s as performances of discrete song or caricature routines, the minstrel shows transformed by the 1840s and '50s into highly structured, conventionalized variety shows featuring musical acts, skits, and generic expectations.[10] Consistent throughout this development was the act of "blacking up" as a form of racial impersonation. Critics frequently refer to Frederick Douglass's review of Gavitt's Original Ethiopian Serenaders in the *North Star* for a contemporary example of a black writer theorizing blackface. Douglass writes of the minstrel troupe,

> It is something gained when the colored man in any form can appear before a white audience; and we think that even this company, with

10 Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America, (*New York: Oxford University Press, 1974): 51-2. Eric Lott offers a succinct working definition of minstrelsy when he writes that "Blackface minstrelsy was an established nineteenth-century theatrical practice, principally of the urban North, in which white men caricatured blacks for sport and profit." Lott, *Love and Theft,* 3.

> industry, application, and a proper cultivation of their taste, may yet be instrumental in removing the prejudice against our race. But they must cease to exaggerate the exaggerations of our enemies; and represent the colored man rather as he is, than as Ethiopian Minstrels usually represent him to be.[11]

Douglass's words in the *North Star* convey a tension within blackface between its violently oppressive register and its potential for agency and resistance, an ambivalence that continues to manifest in more contemporary criticism.[12]

Some blackface performances were less about pretending to accurately depict black bodies and culture than about making use of whites' idea of them. Bearing this in mind actually helps us to interpret how whites like Bird, Hildreth, Hammond, Smith, and Brown utilized racial performance and black insurrection to make interracial "solidarity" with rebels imaginable. W.T. Lhamon, Jr.'s *Raising Cain* (1998) offers an example of how to discern blackface's subversive power. Like other critics, Lhamon does not read blackface as engaging or mimicking black culture so much as signaling cross-racial identification and working class or youth opposition to bourgeois authority.[13] This is blackface as critique, according to Lhamon. He explains that

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11 Frederick Douglass, "Gavitts Original Ethiopian Serenaders," *The North Star*, 29 June 1849.

12 Toll's *Blacking Up* exemplifies the critical emphasis on minstrelsy's racist dimension. In his seminal book on the subject, *Love and Theft,* Eric Lott instead asserts minstrelsy's negotiation between white working class fascination with and desire for black culture, on the one hand, and whites' cooptation of that culture on the other. However, Bird, Hildreth, and Hammond at least have little interest in mimetic depictions of black culture, real or imagined. Indeed critics have pointed out how unconvincing their portrayals of black life are. See Lara Langer Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012): 108, 110.

13 See also Lott, *Love and Theft*.

> To North America's earliest urban youth culture, burnt cork provided protective camouflage. It ensured they would be two-faced. With their masks they could hide in plain view what was politically aggressive toward authority. They could fob off on "Ethiopian" agents their own anger and need to break out of their assigned lot. With their masks, minstrels signaled to congenial publics their mutual identification with valuable attributes perceived to be black. Conversely, when performing before hostile publics, the masked minstrels could disavow their barbs by appearing to belittle their subject.[14]

For Lhamon, the burnt cork mask was a mask that hid transgression. By putting multiple racial personae into play, performers enacted a kind of double-speak for the purposes of satire, criticism, and subversion.

In Sheppard Lee's case, his "blacking" grants him cover in order to participate in a slave insurrection without suffering scorn from the readers of his (fictional) memoir. By alternating bodies, Lee can shirk responsibility for and avoid the consequences of his actions, which is to say, he can act in ways he otherwise would not for fear of social reprisal. After inhabiting a series of white bodies of various social classes, Lee next takes over the body of the enslaved Tom. What follows draws explicitly on the conventions of the minstrel show. Bird places Lee in a caricatured black body and even structures this fanciful plantation episode like a minstrel show

14 W. T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998): 136.

by interspersing musical interludes and popular minstrel airs with impersonations and malapropisms.[15] Within the novel itself we witness something like a minstrel show.

And like a minstrel act, the revolt section immerses readers in a series of racist black stereotypes. Lee begins his new life as a "contented slave," a familiar figure to minstrelsy's audiences, enjoying the luxury and ease that supposedly came from slaveholders' paternalism. Lee has spent the novel seeking the easiest life possible, and he believes he has finally discovered it under slavery. He tells his readers, "I found myself, for the first time in my life, content, or very nearly so, with my condition, free from cares, far removed from disquiet, and, if not actually in love with my lot, so far from being dissatisfied, that I had not the least desire to exchange it with another."[16] Of course, the novel here draws from a fundamentally pro-slavery discourse that portrayed enslaved life as easy and the enslaved as wards of their benevolent masters. The idyllic Southern scene is disrupted when Lee and his fellow slaves discover an abolitionist pamphlet, which Lee reads to the others, inspiring them to revolt against their master. As Lori Leavell has shown, the novel here summons the memory of David Walker's *Appeal*, which had circulated widely—and, in slave states, illicitly—causing white panic over its ability to inspire slave violence.[17] Lee insists to his readers that he is a reluctant participant in the ensuing insurrection. Although he admits "That fatal book infected my own spirit as deeply as it did those of the others, and made me as sour and discontented as they," he also

15 For key moments, see Bird, *Sheppard Lee*, 331-2; 339; 344-50.
16 Ibid., 341.
17 See Lori Leavell, "'Not intended exclusively for the slave states': Antebellum Recirculation of David Walker's *Appeal,*" *Callaloo* 38, no. 3 (2015). On Walker's pamphlet, see Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance,* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1997).

claims to reconsider after the conspirators plot the slaughter and rape of their master's family. Lee assures readers that "the idea of seeing those innocent, helpless maidens made the prey of brutal murderers, was so shocking to my spirit that I lost speech." Lee portrays himself as horrified and reluctant even as he becomes swept along with "brutal murderers" suggestive of Nat Turner.[18]

But why trust his own portrayal? In a novel "Written by Himself," such protests from the narrator should give readers pause. Presumably Lee the memoirist wants to earn and keep his readers' good will; after all, he did read the incendiary pamphlet to his fellow slaves. Moreover, Lee needs to account for his behavior during the insurrection. Tommy, the young child of Lee's master, begs for Lee's protection from the insurgents. Lee insists he would have helped the boy if he could: "Poor child! I would have defended him at that moment with my life, for my heart bled for what had already been done; but he was snatched out of my hands, and I saw no more of him." Lee claims he would have defended Tommy, but he does not, nor does he do anything to help his master's daughters: "I witnessed their fate with my own eyes; and it was the suddenness and horror of it that, by unmanning me entirely, prevented my giving aid to the boy when he was torn from my arms."[19] Suspiciously, Lee makes much out of doing little to save this white family from black violence.

If readers take seriously the novel's own allusions to blackface—as seen in the epigraph as well as the depiction of plantation life—then Lee's (in)actions make sense in light of the transgressive work that blackface performs. Critics, including Bird's

18 Bird, *Sheppard Lee*, 357, 362.
19 Ibid., 366, 367.

contemporary Poe, have argued that Lee truly becomes the people whose bodies he inhabits, losing himself along the way in a novelistic account of Hume's theory of unstable identity.[20] But according to the novel's blackface motif established by the epigraph and other allusions to minstrelsy, Lee wears all of his bodies like blackface masks, and then he attempts to absolve himself of the actions he takes under their cover. As Benjamin Doty argues, when a chapter title tells us that "Sheppard Lee finds everything black about him," it refers to Lee's discovery of his own unwanted behaviors, which he passes off as belonging to Tom's black body rather than his own white self.[21] This is blackface's "protective camouflage" that Lhamon theorizes. The black stereotypes operating in *Sheppard Lee*'s slavery section—the indolent slave and the violent rebel—actually characterize the white Lee, not (or rather in addition to) the black Tom. To be clear, the novel's slavery scenes traffic in some of the period's most vicious white supremacist caricatures. Even if Bird levels his satire at Lee and perhaps other whites, the novel never offers a plausible indictment of the racist ideologies that it deploys.

Indeed, stereotyped images of black life enable Lee's masking. Bird's device of body-snatching means that Lee can behave with impunity because all of Lee's worst actions can be ascribed to a body that is not his own. His sudden turn toward violence suggests as much. Although Lee portrays himself as being led to rebel by Tom's supposedly impressionable mind—a claim belonging to a paternalistic discourse on black inferiority—there are hints of other motives behind Lee's rebellion

20 Christopher Looby, "Introduction," xv-xxii.

21 Bird, *Sheppard Lee*, 331. On Lee exhibiting his own characteristics when in Tom's body, then displacing those characteristics as "black," see Doty, "Satire, Minstrelsy, and Embodiment," 144.

that he would wish to obscure. Perhaps Lee was never inclined to protect young Tommy, despite his protests to the contrary. As Lee himself admits, the son of his master used to ride him like a horse and, "it is true, used to fall into a passion and thump me now and then. . ." Lee may even have lusted after, in his own words, his master's "uncommonly handsome" daughter. Although these are only suppositions, they suggest that Lee's avowed love for his masters may not be so sincere after all. This undercurrent of ill feeling would certainly give Lee a motive for violence that he would want to hide under the cover of his new black face. Lee the memoirist needs to disarm his readers' suspicions that he acted no differently in this black body than he would have in his own white one.[22]

Lee's transgression is not Bird's, however. Lee wants to obscure his participation in the revolt, but Bird wants to draw attention to his character's charade: the novel's satire only works if readers are in on the joke. For this reason, the epigraph signals the technology of blackface, and the slave revolt section alludes to minstrelsy's imagery. The blackface motif that emerges contributes to Bird's overarching satirical project. His novel lampoons the highly stratified Jacksonian social landscape, depicting the era's social ills and inequality through a range of (male) social positions: rich, poor, bourgeois, "philanthropic," master, slave. Sheppard Lee himself is not immune from critique though; Bird mocks his protagonist too. The hapless Lee always grasps at a life of ease and luxury, using each new identity to act on his fantasies of idleness—and, as I suggest, other vices such as revenge. In lampooning Lee no less than the rampant elitism around him, Bird does

22 Ibid., 343.

not make an antislavery critique per se, and certainly not an antiracist one. Rather, Bird shows himself to be an egalitarian satirist: in his darkly comic novel, he deflates all pretensions and snobbery, including the white Lee's attempts to pass off his vices onto the stereotyped black body of Tom. For Bird, comedy makes for a ridiculous interracial "solidarity" or similarity.

Lee's foray across the color line to become a black revolutionary does not last. Local whites rout the insurgents and hang them all, giving Lee an opportunity to escape. He abandons Tom's black body, becomes white again, and by the end of the novel becomes Sheppard Lee again. Giving up body-snatching, he tell his readers, "My estate is small, and it may be that it will never increase. I am, however, content with it; and content is the secret of all enjoyment."[23] Lee's final return to whiteness completes the logic of disavowal that characterizes minstrelsy. He "blacks up" as Tom the Virginia slave, raises rebellion against the whites, and escapes into a white body when the slaves are routed. Once Lee casts aside his black face to later write a narrative "Written by Himself," he disavows his participation in the deadly uprising.

Rebellious speculation, after all, does not guarantee rebellious action. In his novel, Bird reveals the potential limitations of textual black rebellion: the author speculates—but all returns to normal. *Sheppard Lee*'s plantation interlude envisions life and revolt in a black body, almost like a thought experiment: what if the white Sheppard Lee became an enslaved rebel? Limited by racist tropes and Bird's close indebtedness to minstrelsy, though, the novel answers in a way that does not advance black freedom, instead allowing Lee to return to his life in a white body without

23 Ibid., 424.

confronting the consequences of insurrection. In this way, Bird's novel also stands out as a limit case in this chapter: most clearly indebted to blackface while also illustrating its logic of avowal and disavowal, *Sheppard Lee* takes no interest in antislavery alliances. Its "solidarity" comes in the form of racial sameness. No one, for Bird, is above committing the basest violence and no one is above ridicule, not even whites. But as a limit case, *Sheppard Lee* allows us to pivot to texts that *do* imagine actual—if vexed—solidarities with slave rebels. That these novels would do so during the anxious years following David Walker and Nat Turner testifies to their surprising militancy.

Writing within a decade of Bird, Richard Hildreth and Jabez Delano Hammond both author texts that speculate about militant interracial solidarity while still replicating blackface's logic of alternating avowal and disavowal. Hildreth publishes *The Slave* (1836), and Hammond, *The Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn* (1847), as purported ex-slave autobiographies. Actually novels, these two texts first posed as black-authored works depicting—and even arguing for—slave insurrection. Yet, for different reasons, both Hildreth and Hammond revise and republish their novels, acknowledging their authorship: that is, they drop their initial facades, but with them, their texts' commitment to rebellion. These disavowals constitute the prerogative of whiteness, even as Hildreth and Hammond envision surprising solidarities through slave insurrection. Like blackface performers or the body-snatching Sheppard Lee, Hildreth and Hammond assume or reject black male authorial identities at will without having to face the consequences of life in a black body. Remarkably, their textual facades are what make it possible for Hildreth and

Hammond to conceive of and express solidarity. If Bird's *Sheppard Lee* exemplifies the close connection to blackface among the five authors in this chapter, then Hildreth and Hammond illustrate how writing lets them all imagine connections across the color line with slave rebels.

Hildreth's Slaves

Published in 1836, the same year as *Sheppard Lee*, Richard Hildreth's *The Slave: Or Memoirs of Archy Moore*, seems acutely aware of the insurrectionary eruptions that Bird lampoons. Yet when *The Slave* depicts maroon-guerrillas attacking slavery, it depicts them as sympathetic heroes. This is not an interracial "solidarity" of vices. Rather, Hildreth's novel expresses sincere political sympathy for his characters' insurrectionary acts. The text's surprising show of solidarity in a period of white insurrection anxiety depends on Hildreth's dissembling as author or editor. He initially published *The Slave* as a found manuscript, ostensibly authored by its ex-slave protagonist Archy Moore and seemingly edited by Hildreth. Simultaneously a novel and fake slave narrative, *The Slave* thus plays with notions of authorship. When able to deflect the dangers of advocating antislavery violence onto "THE EDITOR" or Archy Moore, Hildreth gave freer rein to a heroic vision of slave rebellion. But as he clarifies his authorial and editorial covers, the text's radical solidarity softens and Hildreth undercuts its depictions of slave insurgency. Very different from blackface, Hildreth's revisions of *The Slave* nonetheless enter into a logic of avowal and disavowal that also structured blackface performances.

Critics have typically regarded *The Slave* as the first piece of antislavery fiction.[24] Hildreth had high hopes for his literary effort. Anticipating success, he sold his stake in the Boston newspaper at which he served as editor. Literary success never quite materialized, however, and he continued life as an editor, journalist, lawyer, historian, and political theorist. He wrote several histories and political treatises, including his multi-volume *History of the United States of America*. Near the end of Hildreth's life, Lincoln had appointed him US Consul at Trieste, and Hildreth's death in 1865 was considered a loss to the country.[25] Literary studies has mostly neglected his writings, though.[26] But *The Slave*, its subsequent editions, and Hildreth's abolitionism warrant further attention as early experiments in the rhetoric of militant antislavery.

Unable to find a publisher amid a wave of anti-abolitionist sentiment, Hildreth published *The Slave* at his own expense in Boston in 1836.[27] The text is part sentimental novel, part adventure tale, part survey of slavery in the South. In telling the purportedly true story of Archy Moore, *The Slave* deploys a number of devices that became commonplace abolitionist rhetoric: slavery's incestuous genealogies; the legal precarity of slaves and the futility of relying on the "good master"; the

24 See Evan Brandstadter, "Uncle Tom and Archy Moore: The Antislavery Novel As Ideological Symbol," *American Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1974): 160 or Stephen Railton, "Hidreth's Slave," *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/hildrethhp.html, (accessed 30 May 2017), for example.

25 W. Hunter, "Death of Richard Hildreth," *The New York Times*, 2 August 1865.

26 When critics have studied *The Slave,* they have usually focused on the relationship of influence between Hildreth's novel and Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Several critics have argued that *The Slav*e served as a source text for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. See Charles Nichols, "The Origins of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," *The Phylon Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1958): 330; Brandstadter, "Uncle Tom and Archy Moore," 165, 167; Railton, "Hildreth's *Slave*."

27 Donald E. Emerson, *Richard Hildreth,* The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Ser. 64, No. 2. Baltimore (1947): 78.

separation of slave families; the horrific spectacles of the auction block, the field, and the lash; and black Anglophilia.[28] Born to an aristocratic master by a slave mistress, Archy finds some early happiness in a love affair with his enslaved half-sister, Cassy, but the pair flees the plantation as their father incestuously lusts after his enslaved daughter.[29] Archy gets separated from Cassy and their child before being forced to serve a series of masters. From there, Archy flees again, becoming first a maroon in Virginia and then a British sailor, before finally planning to travel back to the US in the hopes of reuniting with Cassy and their child.

More than just an early antislavery novel, Hildreth's *The Slave* participates in a wider cultural project linking blackness and performance, one that found obvious expression on the minstrel stage. This is not to say that *The Slave* exemplified the same type of racial caricature as did the minstrel shows. But Hildreth's novel did experiment with identity and identification by blurring the lines of author, editor, and narrator. Such experimentation may be a commonplace of fiction, but Hildreth's novel happened to coincide with a period in which race and literary fakes collided, offering a textual analogue to minstrelsy's racial performance. Because Hildreth at first obscured his authorship, *The Slave* has sometimes been considered a "pseudo-slave narrative," a subgenre in which authors—mostly white but sometimes black—portrayed themselves as ex-slaves. Many of these texts constitute actual forgeries or

28 On black Anglophilia, see Elisa Tamarkin, "Black Anglophilia; Or, the Sociability of Antislavery," *American Literary History* 14, no. 3 (2002).

29 More famously, Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* also features a mulatta character named Cassy, who is similarly confronted with slavery's sexual violence. Hildreth's earlier use of the name for a similar character, along with *The Slave*'s sentimental tropes and plot elements, lead scholars to posit Hildreth's novel as a source text for Stowe.

hoaxes.[30] Hildreth's *The Slave* is less of a serious counterfeit than a creative experiment in framing a novel.

If Hildreth is not passing off the novel as a hoax, he is using differences among author, editor, and character to alternately avow and disavow aspects of his novel in ways reminiscent of blackface. The line between author, editor, and Archy Moore first blurs on the title page of *The Slave*'s 1836 edition. The page includes no author, only the suggestive subtitle "Memoirs of Archy Moore."[31] In this opening moment, Hildreth introduces confusion between his authorship (which, to his first readers, was anonymous) and his character, Archy Moore. This initial convergence between actually existing author and Archy is what draws the text into the orbit of counterfeits like the pseudo-slave narratives and performances like blackface. For early readers, the title page does nothing to distinguish Richard Hildreth and Archy Moore, but rather conflates the two. What results is a form of cover for Hildreth; he can hide behind his protagonist. Archy may not be a simple alter-ego for Hildreth, but the two share a close connection as "authors" of *The Slave*.[32] Hildreth further complicates the apparent authorial voice of the text by also introducing an editorial

30 For an extended discussion of pseudo-slave narratives and racial counterfeiting, with special emphasis on Hildreth, see Cohen, *Fabrication*, chapter 3, especially 102-12. Other examples of the subgenre include Peter Neilson's *Life and Adventures of Zamba, an African Negro King* (1847), Emily Catherine Pierson's *Jamie Parker, the Fugitive* (1856), and Mattie Griffith's *Autobiography of a Female Slave* (1856). James Williams's *Narrative of James Williams* (1838) was long considered a fake until Hank Trent's reassessment in 2013; see Hank Trent, *Narrative of James Williams, an American Slave: Annotated Edition*, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2013): 8-52. See also William Andrews's list of "Fictionalized Slave Narratives" at *Documenting the American South*: http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/alphafiction.html. Jabez Delano Hammond's *The Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn* represents an actual pseudo-slave narrative, as I will discuss below.

31 Some readers suspected the author to be Lydia Maria Child or the English sociologist Harriet Martineau. See Emerson, *Richard Hildreth*, 78.

32 Richard Hildreth, *The Slave: Or Memoirs of Archy Moore*, Volume I, (Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1836): Title page, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/moore1/moore1.html.

"character." In an introductory "Advertisement" signed only as "THE EDITOR," Hildreth adopts the found manuscript trope for the novel, hinting at "the somewhat singular manner in which the MS of the following Memoirs came into my possession. It is sufficient for me to say, that I received it, with an injunction to make it public.--an injunction which I have not felt myself at liberty to disobey." Here, Hildreth introduces another character: not quite Hildreth himself because Hildreth did not find any manuscript, yet more clearly a white authorial voice that should recognizably belong to the writer Richard Hildreth.[33]

Alternately avowing and disavowing the content of the novel, Hildreth's authorial/editorial voices allow him to distance himself from the stain of Archy Moore's actions while also elevating or authenticating some of Archy's ideas. Hildreth the editor cautions readers that "I would not be understood, however, as implicitly adopting all the author's feelings and sentiments; for it must be confessed that he sometimes expresses himself with a force and a freedom, which by many will be thought extravagant." At the same time, the editorial voice qualifies his disavowal of Archy's militancy, explaining that "I do not know how it is possible to be over zealous in a cause so just as that in which he [Archy Moore] pleads."[34]

Hildreth is thus free to speculate about the righteousness of rebellious violence. Layered under fictional authors and editors, Hildreth's *The Slave* represents a dense piece of authorial ventriloquism that functions in W. T. Lhamon's terms like blackface-as-critique, granting Hildreth cover for his militant antislavery and the

33 In writing this editorial voice, Hildreth has created a novelistic version of the white authentication that preceded many genuine slave narratives.

34 Ibid.,i.

incendiary depictions of slave insurrection throughout the novel.[35] Hildreth does not reference the conventions of the minstrel shows, as Bird does. But *The Slave*'s multiple authorial voices replicate a logic of dissembling avowal/disavowal and even "masking" that defines blackface performance in Lhamon's view.

Hildreth's views on slavery were provocative, after all. In his other writings, Hildreth utilizes a commonplace of abolitionism: slavery is a state of war. If Africans were captured in war to be sold into slavery, according to Hildreth, "Slavery then is a continuation of the state of war. It is true that one of the combatants is subdued and bound; but the war is not terminated."[36] Hildreth delivers a full-throated condemnation of slavery, and elsewhere he locates the violence of chattel slavery within a wider system of "social slavery," existing on a spectrum of unfreedom along with exploitative labor and dominating technocrats.[37] Hildreth does not argue for antislavery war, but his antislavery rhetoric is rousing and, at times, even militant. Posing these ideas in his novel required Hildreth to be savvy as to how readers understood its authorship.

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35 Still, early reviews correctly identified it as fiction. The *Emancipator* condemned Hildreth's deception as a threat to the credibility of antislavery efforts, but the novel continued to receive good reviews and ran through seven more editions, eventually winning over some critics. See Cohen, *Fabrication*, 111. Like Hildreth himself, Emerson reads the reception of *The Slave* as being unfavorable or indifferent. See Emerson, *Richard Hildreth*, 78-80. On the connection between *The Slave* and minstrelsy, see Koenig, "Romantic Racialism."

36 Hildreth, *Despotism in America*, 35-6; see also Merton Dillon, *Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and Their Allies, 1619-1865,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990): 230. The "state of war" argument touches upon what Orlando Patterson calls warfare as "an original means of enslavement"; see Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982): 106-15. Hildreth argues against slavery by extending this originating warfare into the present.

37 Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Problem of Richard Hildreth," *The New England Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1940): 235-7.

The novel's introductory pages provide necessary deflection for Hildreth, as much of *The Slave*'s subsequent plot serves to "teach" its narrator, and readers, about the justice of antislavery violence. Even with Hildreth's dissembling, it would be too much perhaps for the novel's hero to simply begin as an antislavery militant. Instead, Hildreth gradually radicalizes his black protagonist through the character of Thomas. A sensitive, peaceful, Christian slave on the same plantation as Archy, Thomas enters the text as a proto-Uncle Tom character. However, Thomas drastically changes when he witnesses his wife's brutal and ultimately fatal beating at the hands of a cruel overseer. This gendered violence makes Thomas rebellious. Mourning at his wife's grave with Archy, Thomas asks, "blood for blood;—is it not so, Archy?" In this moment, Thomas becomes the text's avatar of slave insurrection. He forms a band of slave conspirators, holding meetings and committing arson before Thomas executes his wife's murderer. Having fled, Thomas and Archy become maroons, raiding white planters for supplies as part of a "swamp-encircled commonwealth," a dream of freedom often believed to have been Nat Turner's ultimate goal. Archy eventually gives up the maroon-life, leaving Thomas to continue his campaign of harrying Southern whites.[38] In *The Slave*'s first edition, readers last see Thomas as a representative Nat Turner figure and the novel's living embodiment of insurrectionary black freedom.

Throughout, *The Slave* casts Thomas as a heroic slave rebel, a representative of the kind of "zealous" antislavery that "THE EDITOR" cautiously praises at the

38 Richard Hildreth, *The Slave: Or Memoirs of Archy Moore,* Volume II, (Boston*:* John H. Eastburn, 1836)*:* 98-100; 122, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/moore2/moore2.html.

novel's beginning. While Archy initially recoils at Thomas's vengeance against his wife's murderer, Archy the memoirist notes that he also feels "slavish fear and servile timidity, which the bolder spirit of Thomas had wholly shaken off." Using gendered language, the text suggests that Thomas's reaction is the freer of the two. Following the murder, the friends "resumed our flight,—not as some may perhaps suppose, with the frightened and conscience-stricken haste of murderers, but with that lofty feeling of manhood vindicated, and tyranny visited with a just retribution" Hildreth—or Archy the memoirist—again casts Thomas's revenge in heroic, masculinist terms: the two fugitives have nothing to feel guilty for. This praise for Thomas reaches its height when Archy separates from his friend, leaving Thomas to his marronage while Archy continues North: "A nobler spirit never breathed;—I was not worthy to call myself his friend," Archy writes. Even more pointedly, Archy tells us that leaving Thomas "was a base desertion, which not even the love of liberty could excuse." When Archy concludes his memoir by remembering those he loved, he recalls Thomas, "the friend to whom I owe so much."[39]

Hildreth and Archy share a close, albeit vexed relationship as the "authors" of *The Slave*; for that reason, it is striking that Thomas's rebelliousness influences Archy so deeply. Archy the memoirist becomes militant like Thomas. Enlisting as a British sailor, Archy raids pirate ships and slavers. He and his crew eventually attack the ship of Jonathan Osborne, the captain of a slave ship who once abandoned a coffle of slaves, including Archy, at sea. Engaging Osborne in a duel, Archy tells his enemy, "'Then die;--a wretch like you deserves no mercy!' and as I spoke I plunged the

39 Hildreth, *The Slave*, Vol II, 114, 118, 138, 155.

weapon to his heart, and felt thrilling to the very elbow-joint, the pleasurable sense of doing justice on a tyrant!" The language here closely reflects the novel's vindication of Thomas's vengeance earlier, in which "tyranny [was]visited with a just retribution" against the murderer of Thomas's wife. Archy has become just like his friend, even fantasizing about further attacks on slaveholders. As Archy describes his adventures along the Virginia coast, he "never saw it without feeling a strong inclination to send a boat's crew ashore, and to kidnap from their beds, such of the nearest planters as I could lay my hands upon. But I did not think it prudent to attempt the carrying into execution, this piece of experimental instruction, of which the Virginians stand so much in need." What would Archy have done to "instruct" the kidnapped? Maimed them? Murdered them? The text only takes issue with the plan's "prudence," not its suggested violence.[40] Despite Archy's occasional protests, by the end of the novel he has grown into a character no less "bold" than Thomas.

The Slave depicts incendiary antislavery under the distancing cover of authorial and editorial characters; but Hildreth puts further distance between himself and the burning plantations, maroon-guerrillas, and kidnapped planters that he imagines. Thomas acts as the originating source for black militancy in the text, not Archy himself. Archy only eventually adopts Thomas's revolutionary impulses, and then only in the subtle ways discussed above. The result is a surprisingly militant antislavery novel that plays cannily, as do the minstrel shows in W. T. Lhamon's account, with transgressive elements while dissembling its interest in antislavery violence. Hildreth was not a John Brown-style insurrectionist, however. Although he

40 Hildreth, *The Slave*, Vol. II, 153, 154-5.

organized against the Fugitive Slave Law, he never acted out the militancy he depicts in *The Slave*.[41]

That he experimented and imagined in this way in 1836 is remarkable. *The Slave* followed the incendiary years of 1828 to 1831, but it also coincided with a growing black radical culture that I will discuss in chapter two. To so dramatically avow black violence during this period constituted a dangerous leap for a white writer of Hildreth's comparative prominence. More than an author's disinterested portrayal of characters, *The Slave*'s depictions of militancy represent Hildreth's affinity with slave rebels—or, rather, his speculative solidarity with them. Such dangerous sympathy required an act of dissembling reminiscent of blackface, although Hildreth does not draw explicitly on the form as Bird does. To be sure, Hildreth no less than Bird attempted to monetize his use of blackness in a further correspondence with the minstrel shows: Hildreth did anticipate literary success. Nonetheless, *The Slave* moves beyond the conventions of minstrelsy that Bird draws on while also taking black freedom seriously.

The novel's subsequent publication history suggests just how closely Hildreth's experimentation with rebellion depended on his authorial dissembling: a later edition highlights Hildreth as the author while downplaying the novel's militancy. Retitled *The White Slave*, the 1852 edition was as much a sequel to *The Slave* as a revision. *The White Slave* reprints the original novel mostly verbatim, but it continues Archy Moore's story roughly twenty years after the original ends. Archy—

41 See Cohen, *Fabrication*, 109.

now Archer—returns to the US in search of his wife Cassy and son Montgomery.[42] Moderating the text's incendiary ideas actually runs counter to the tendency of the other authors that follow in this chapter. As the 1840s and '50s unfolded, Jabez Delano Hammond, Gerrit Smith, and John Brown all experimented with textual forms of blackface performance in tandem with depictions of slave revolt. As these authors began envisioning solidarity through blackface insurrections, Hildreth's revised edition of *The Slave* seemingly disavowed its most militant imagery.

Hildreth introduces *The White Slave* to readers differently than he does *The Slave,* and in this difference Hildreth signals a change in the novel's political project and depiction of violence. One of the only revisions to the original novel that Hildreth makes in 1852 is to the opening "Advertisement." Whereas the 1836 text includes an "Advertisement" that frames the novel as a found manuscript, with Hildreth as the implied editor, the 1852 text cuts this original framing device and replaces it with a new one. The 1852 "Advertisement" is shorter, makes no explicit mention of Archy Moore or "THE EDITOR," and only implies a memoiristic frame rather than explicitly providing one to the reader.[43] While this new edition still leaves Hildreth's name off the title page, its "Advertisement" makes the question of authorship clearer; Gerrit Smith's 1853 review readily identifies Hildreth as the author.[44] As Hildreth stops dissembling his authorship, he presents a vision of the slave South that is less

42 According to Nichols, seven editions were printed by 1848, followed by the sequel edition in 1852 and further editions in '53, '55, and '57. See Nichols, "The Origins of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*," 330. I have chosen to compare the 1836 and 1852 editions because of the way the 1852 edition alters the meaning of the original through the extended story and the revised title page.

43 Hildreth, *White Slave*, (Boston: Tappan and Whittemore, 1853): 3, https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/hildreth/hildreth.html.

44 Gerrit Smith, "The White Slave; Or, Memoirs of a Fugitive," *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (January 28, 1853).

rebellious than before. Slave insurrection now becomes a white bogeyman, representatives of black militancy become less vociferous and effectual, and the greater danger to the slavery regime becomes antislavery sentiment.

Hildreth more starkly signals the novel's moderated approach to antislavery by depicting the death of the text's source for black militancy. During Archer's travels, he discovers a successful party of slave-catchers, whose captive is none other than "Wild Tom," Archer's former friend, Thomas. Since escaping from slavery, Wild Tom has continued harrying slaveholders as a maroon. If his spirit remained unconquered in the years since Archer left for England, then his body at least had weakened with age. Subdued at last by the slave-owners he had harried for years, Wild Tom is lynched. Archer looks on as "the indignant culprit" tells his murderers, "I defy and would whip the whole of you, but the whole dozen, mounted and armed, with dogs to boot, were too much for one poor black man, with nothing but his feet, his hands, and his knife. They have not always been too much; but I am getting old. Better die now, while I have strength and courage to defy your worst, than fall into your hands a broken-down old man." As the flames consume him, Tom, still undaunted, "looked round on his shouting tormentors with a smile of contemptuous defiance."[45]

The spirit of slave rebellion is no longer alive and free in the Virginia wilderness. By changing Tom's fate from the 1836 edition, Hildreth renders less active and less effective the animating spirit of slave resistance. Gone is Tom's surprising militancy, replaced now with an affecting spectacle of slavery's' violence. Tom dies as a vision of defiant black martyrdom reminiscent of Stowe's Uncle Tom.

45 Ibid., 303-5.

The revised “Wild Tom” certainly has more in common with Stowe's suffering protagonist than with Hildreth's 1836 Thomas. In a further attempt to imitate Stowe's success and moderate Thomas's rebelliousness, the illustrated 1852 edition depicts Thomas/Tom twice: in both illustrations, the novel's most militant character appears meek, angelic, and bound with his hands behind his back.[46] Paired with Tom's death, it appears that the new edition is unable to visualize a free, active maroon rebel. Weakened and captured, Hildreth's representative of slave rebellion now transforms into an object of both white violence and white sympathy rather than admiration or unity. The novel quells his rebelliousness now that it more clearly highlights Hildreth's authorship.

Initially Hildreth imagines solidarity through slaves' rebellious actions; his depiction of black militancy begins to close the gap between him and his characters. At the same time, *The Slave* represents a case study in blackface's logics of racial masking and avowal/disavowal that made sympathetic solidarity with slave rebels possible in the 1830s. Readers can best witness these logics unfolding across the novel's editions. At least in 1836, when Nat Turner's uprising was still recent and when Bird drew on minstrelsy's conventions to ridicule the shared vices of blacks and whites alike, Hildreth's text posed incendiary images of slave violence. Perhaps the possibilities for rebellious speculation, for imagining through and printing scenes of black uprising, were expanding. As time passed, other white writers would engage in forms of racial performance to imagine solidarity with rebels, even as Hildreth gave up this project.

46 Hildreth, *White Slave*, 304; 305; 218 and 291.

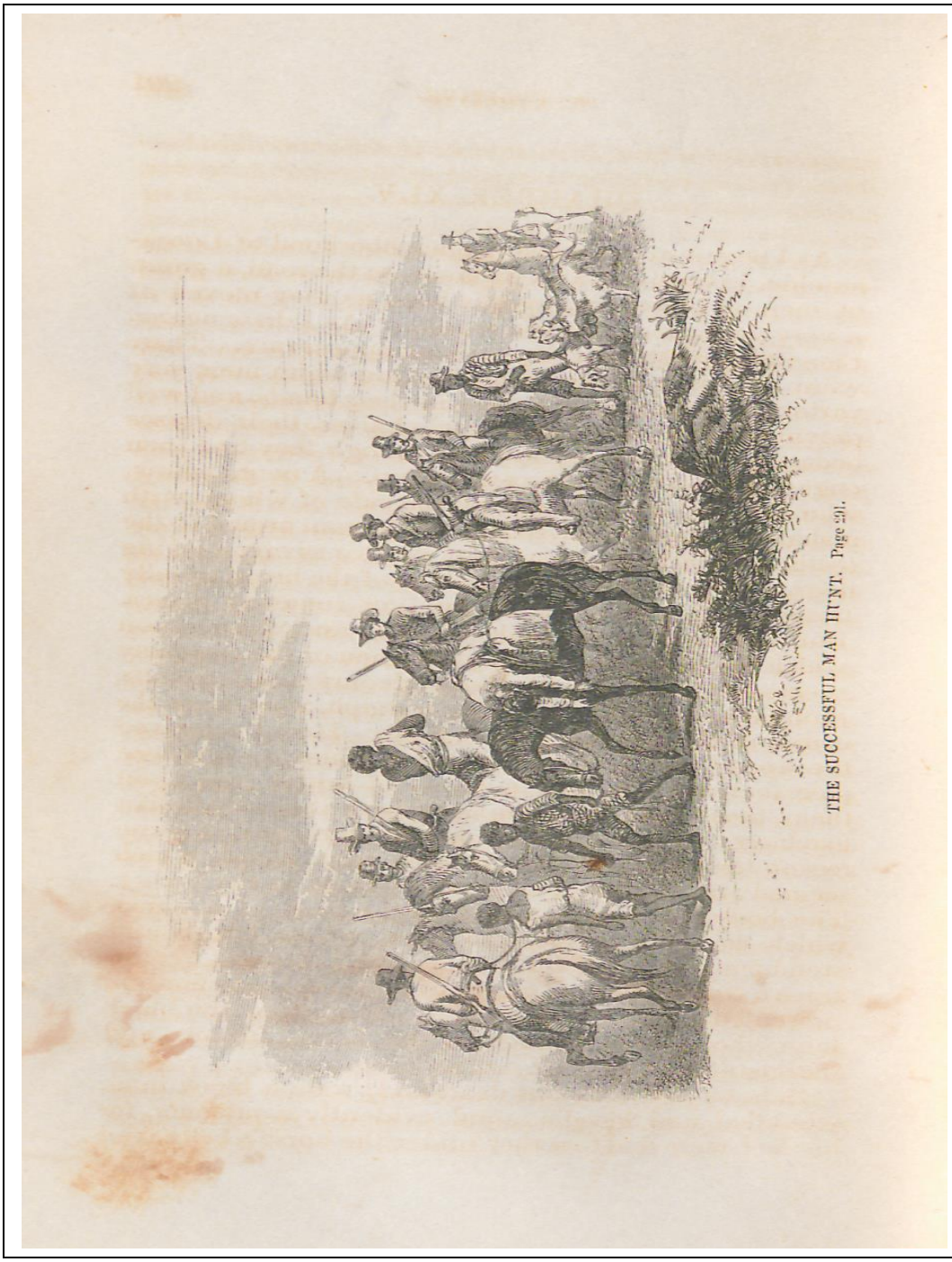


Figure 1: “The Successful Man Hunt”;

Tom as depicted in *The White Slave*.

Writing a decade after *The Slave* first appeared, Jabez Delano Hammond would take the notion of racial impersonation more seriously with his novel, *The Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn* (1847), until now only an obscure footnote among historians of revolutionary abolitionism and enslaved insurrection. I first discovered Hammond when reading Merton Dillon's work on antislavery militancy, in which he briefly cites Hammond as "one of the earliest white advocates of deliberately fomenting slave rebellion as an antislavery device."[47] Such a precursor to John Brown, especially one who wrote a novel, warranted further study, I thought. As I investigated Hammond's text, I learned that it was a pseudo-slave narrative, a strange, frustrating novel that displayed similar interests in "masking" and insurrection as did *Sheppard Lee* and *The Slave*. Hammond's *Julius Melbourn* has a close historical as well as textual counterpart: Hammond's friend, the radical abolitionist Gerrit Smith, wrote "A Letter to the Fugitive Slaves" (1850) in which he posed as an ex-slave fomenting slave resistance. These two texts share a project. Whereas Bird and Hildreth play with novelistic possibilities to imagine connections with slave rebels, Hammond and Smith write black authorial masks so as to personally advocate for revolution against slavery.

Hammond and Smith's Antislavery War

As the nation's slavery crisis worsened in the late 1840s and 1850s, radicals drew on slaves' experiences to creatively imagine escalating the struggle for freedom.

47 Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 205.

Jabez Delano Hammond and Gerrit Smith actually drew on slaves' *identities* by writing black authorial personae or masks. Although distant from the conventions of minstrelsy, they nonetheless utilized its fundamental logic. In their texts, the two crafted fictive black identities that authorized them to speak from deep within the antislavery effort in an act of solidarity: they sought to take up slaves' positions themselves. More so than either Bird or Hildreth, Hammond and Smith speculated not only about the interiority of the oppressed but about radical new possibilities for militating against slavery. Steeped in ideas of fugitivity, utopian community, and militant struggle, these two powerful New Yorkers—both white, men, and politicians—used their imagined alterity as cover to pose incendiary plots for antislavery war.

Like Richard Hildreth, Jabez Delano Hammond regarded slavery as a state of "never-ending war"; Hammond, however, wanted to actually join that war as a general leading the charge against slavery.[48] About seventy when he wrote *Julius Melbourn*, Hammond had already lived a life distinguished by his proximity to political power. He had worked at every level of government in the early US. He served terms in the US House of Representatives and the New York Senate, acted as a judge and school superintendent in Otsego County, New York, and wrote a political history of the state that is still read today. But he turned increasingly toward abolition over the course of his life, hardening his antislavery politics by the end of the 1830s especially in response to the crisis over Texas annexation. Writing to Gerrit Smith

48 Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 228.

about slavery's threatening expansion, Hammond asserted that “The project ought to be resisted unto blood.” Here, the politician showed hints of the antislavery militant.[49]

Hammond's radical ideas would intensify until he began planning full-scale attacks on the South that presaged John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. In letters to Smith, Hammond outlines concrete visions for raising slave rebellion to overthrow the South's regime of slavery. Nearly a decade before masking himself as Melbourn, Hammond envisions creating “seminaries” for blacks outside the US that would actually function as schools for guerrilla warfare, creating an army of black insurgents to infiltrate plantations and destabilize the South. Hammond “would cheerfully contribute to raise funds to establish two seminaries, the exercises to be the same as in West Point Academy, for the education of Negro boys one in upper Canada and the other at Metamora in Mexico. I believe that young men thus educated . . . would be the most successful Southern Missionaries” (sic).[50] Perhaps Hammond, in imagining external sources of slave insurrection to the north and south of the nation, looks back to the long history of colonial neighbors such as French or British Canada, Spanish Florida, and the Caribbean fomenting slave restlessness and even rebellion.[51] In another letter dated 1852, three years before his death, Hammond writes again to Smith about revolution, explaining that “An organized Army of 10,000 men with an able Commander and arms munitions of war and provisions for 50,000 men would march through the Southern States and liberate every slave there

49 Nicholas P Wood, "Jefferson’s Legacy, Race Science, and Righteous Violence in Jabez Hammond’s Abolitionist Fiction," *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14, no. 3 (2016): 576. See Wood and Dillon for Hammond's biography.

50 Quoted in Wood, “Jefferson's Legacy,” 601; see also Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 205-6.

51 See Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America*, (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

in six months" (sic).[52] Hammond initially shared his ideas in private letters, but if he could find a suitable medium for his revolutionary antislavery, perhaps he could put these plans into action.

Hammond's novel takes his political life as its raw materials, blends it with his growing militancy and schemes for slave insurrection, and voices it all through a black authorial persona. More than either Bird or Hildreth, then, Hammond attempts to mask his identity and ideas. First published in Syracuse in 1847, *The Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn; with Sketches of the Lives and Characters of Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, John Randolph, and Several Other Eminent American Statesmen* poses as a slave narrative. The text's title page announces that it was "Edited By A Late Member of Congress," and like Hildreth's 1836 *The Slave*, it opens with an authenticating preface "By the Editor."[53] What follows is a hybrid text. Part "life," it tells a romantic, sentimental story in which the light-skinned Julius Melbourn rises out of slavery, struggles to save his enslaved wife Maria from the sexual predations of their master (Julius's father), seemingly loses her to suicide, and finally reunites with her in their old age. After this reunion plot, the text shifts to Melbourn's "opinions," a series of loosely connected scenes in which he discusses current events and matters of governance ranging from abolition and Northern racism to tariffs and the annexation of Texas. Melbourn also describes his encounters with political figures like Jefferson, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun; sometimes these

52 Quoted in Wood, "Jefferson's Legacy," 601; see also Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 227-8.

53 Jabez Delano Hammond, *Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn; with Sketches of the Lives and Characters of Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, John Randolph, and Several Other Eminent American Statesmen*, (Syracuse: Hall and Dickson, 1847), https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/hammond/hammond.html: 3.

are Hammond's own memories, and sometimes they are invented scenes based on Hammond's ideas about US politics and history.

Black responses to *Julius Melbourn* remain lost to the archive, but skeptical Southern readers quickly discovered Hammond's ruse. It is unclear if Hammond hoped to monetize his deployment of black identity in the way that Hildreth did; but according to Hammond, his novel did not sell well. But one of its passages received a much wider circulation in contemporary newspapers, actually leading to Hammond's unmasking. In that passage, Melbourn recounts a fictional dinner with Thomas Jefferson and "other eminent American statesmen" at Jefferson's Monticello estate in which the President holds forth on the evils of slavery and race prejudice. Jefferson was a particular hero of Hammond's (the text features a frontispiece with Jefferson's likeness, his signature, and the words, taken from the *Declaration of Independence*, "all men are created equal"), and Hammond dwells on the scene at length.[54] Jefferson's purported opinions must have been of great interest to the public, as newspapers excerpted the scene. The editor of the *Richmond Whig*, however, recognized the unlikeliness or even impossibility that Jefferson and his famous guests would gather together in the year that the narrative claimed. The paper publicly denounced *Julius Melbourn* as a fraud. The *Raleigh Register* followed suit, disputing that some of the text's characters had ever lived in their city. Ironically, *Julius Melbourn* would later be "remasked." Historians and Jefferson biographers, reading the text as an authentic slave narrative, would periodically cite the same Monticello

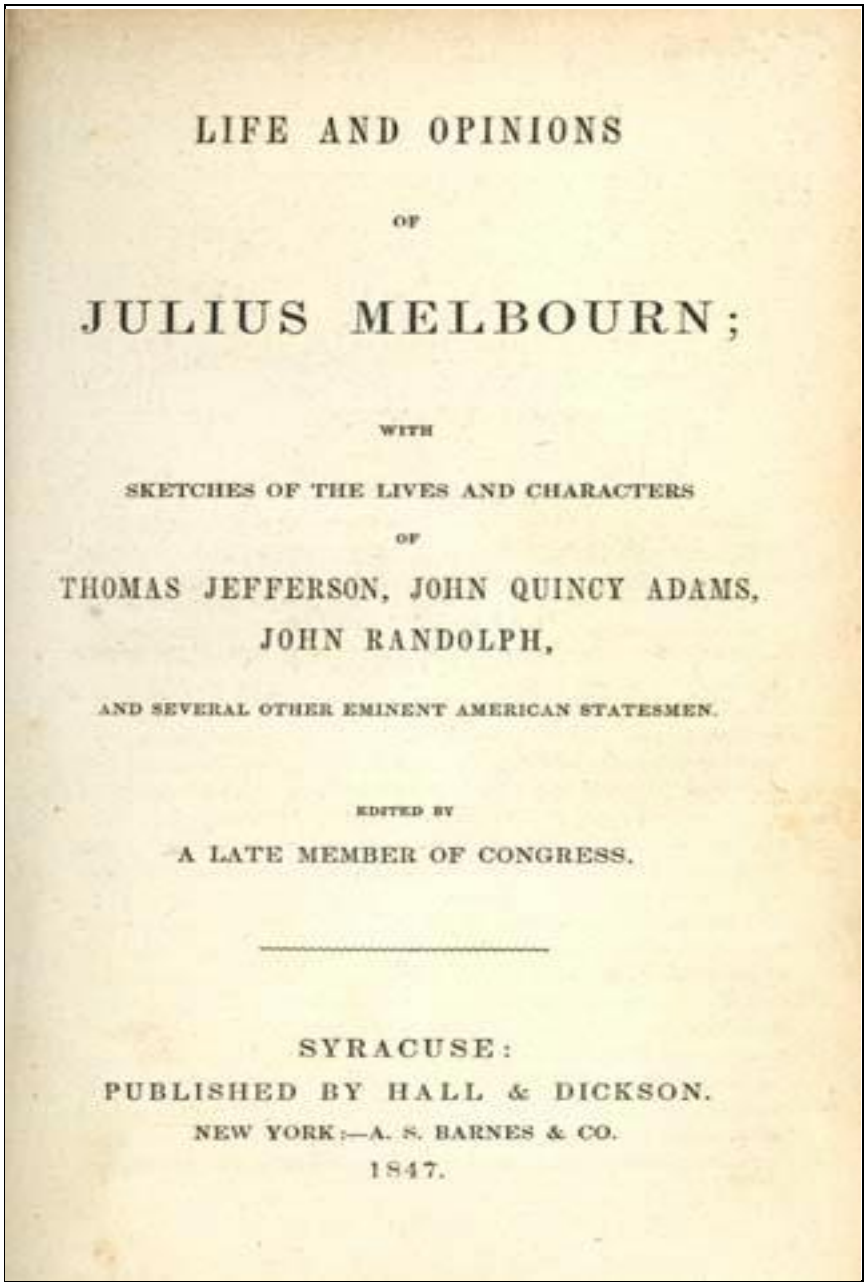
54 Wood, "Jefferson's Legacy," 589, 586.

scene that ultimately exposed the text's authorship as evidence for Jefferson's allegedly progressive racial views.[55]

Although readers quickly saw through Hammond's racial masking in *Julius Melbourn*, the novel's initial purpose was to disseminate his insurrectionary plots. Hammond suggests as much in his letters. He tells Smith that "I have long been of the opinion that Slavery will never be abolished by moral suasion alone. I intimated as much in more than one paragraph in my Julius Melbourn."[56] Hammond actually refers to two moments in the novel. Both appear in the novel's second half, which details the "opinions" of Hammond's black persona. This section comprises Melbourn's fictional encounters and Hammond's authentic recollections of political figures, along with meditations on US politics, history, economics, and culture. It is also the text's most didactic section; by placing his plans for antislavery revolution there, Hammond works to radicalize his readers.

Hammond first uses Julius Melbourn to ventriloquize his thoughts on guerrilla warfare in the South almost exactly as they appeared in his 1839 letter to Gerrit Smith. Chapter IV begins by detailing the history of the 1820 Missouri Compromise and the complicity of Northern dough faces, both of which radicalize Melbourn (and Hammond). Melbourn explains, "The result of the final vote on this question [the Missouri Compromise] induced me to form the opinion, an opinion which subsequent observation and events have tended to confirm, that the poor slave has little to hope from the northern politicians." Adopting the same language used by Hildreth and

55 Ibid., 587-8, 570.
56 Quoted in ibid., 601.



LIFE AND OPINIONS

OF

JULIUS MELBOURN;

WITH

SKETCHES OF THE LIVES AND CHARACTERS

OF

THOMAS JEFFERSON, JOHN QUINCY ADAMS,
JOHN RANDOLPH,

AND SEVERAL OTHER EMINENT AMERICAN STATESMEN.

EDITED BY

A LATE MEMBER OF CONGRESS.

SYRACUSE:
PUBLISHED BY HALL & DICKSON.
NEW YORK:—A. S. BARNES & CO.
1847.

Figure 2: Title page to the first edition of *Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn*.

others, Melbourn declares, “The relation between master and slave is necessarily a state of war,” and “Is it not, therefore, war, never-ending war by the master upon the slave? The one maintains, and the other yields to authority by physical force alone. Can the master complain if he is foiled in a contest which he himself has voluntarily chosen?” Immediately following his disillusionment with Northern politicians and this indictment of slavery, Melbourn speculates on the revolutionary possibility of disunion and slave revolt:

> I say then, if the slave states were severed from the free, and if a well-organized army of 10,000 men were to land in a slaveholding state, protected by a competent naval force, with provisions, and arms, and munitions of war sufficient for an army of 60,000 men, the slaveholding states would be subdued in less than six months. How could it be otherwise? The slaves in some of those states outnumber the free whites. How many then of the whites could be spared from the defence of their own firesides? I know that the southern men are as brave as any people on earth. No man doubts their personal courage. But, alas, what could they do to repel an invading force, when each man has a deadly enemy in his own house?

Melbourn quickly passes over this thought, however, leading into historical examples of black courage. The chapter headnote helps mask his sedition by eliding his idea for a black fifth column in the South; it reads, “The question respecting a Division of the Union discussed--Personal Courage of Negroes.” The overall effect of this first scene is to subtly instill in Hammond's readers an experience of legislative disillusionment

like Melbourn's, leading readers to at least imagine an alternative, insurrectionary solution to the slavery crisis.[57]

Julius Melbourn may function to disseminate Hammond's politics, and Melbourn may grant Hammond an authorial mask, but no single character serves as the author's mouthpiece. Rather, like Hildreth's Archy Moore, Hammond's Julius Melbourn also learns antislavery militancy from other characters in didactic scenes. In these moments, Melbourn becomes a witness to insurrectionary plans rather than their advocate. One of the longest sequences of the novel's opinion section depicts two fictional encounters between Melbourn, Benjamin Lundy—the abolitionist editor and mentor to William Lloyd Garrison—and the fictional, polymathic Tobias Thornton.[58] Meeting at the office for *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, a precursor to Garrison's *Liberator*, the three men debate abolitionism's prospects and tactics. Lundy, of course, argues for moral suasion, but Thornton recommends one of Hammond's own plans for antislavery insurgency, triangulating Melbourn as a point-of-view character for the reader.[59] Thornton tells Lundy,

> Instead of raising funds to pay abolition lecturers, I would raise a fund for the establishment and endowment of an academy for the instruction of colored youth, similar in all respects to that at West Point. The pupils should be selected from the most promising lads of the colored

57 Hammond, *Julius Melbourn*, 104, 104-5, 105, 99.

58 Nicholas Wood argues that Thornton's persona and arguments make him Hammond's representative in the text. But considering how many characters voice Hammond's ideas, from Melbourn to Thornton to Thomas Jefferson, critics should instead read Thornton as one among many of Hammond's vehicles for his beliefs, sometimes in the same passage. In this scene, the interplay among Thornton, Melbourn, and Lundy serves to highlight the radical ideas that Hammond seeks to advance.

59 Wood, “Jefferson's Legacy,” 600.

> race. There let them not only be taught military and natural science, but let them be taught self-respect, that they belong to the great family of man; and inspire them with a high, a noble, and exalted ambition. Young men thus educated will be the best lecturers and missionaries to effect the abolition of slavery, because in their own persons they will afford a demonstration of what the African race may be when equal competition is allowed them.[60]

He speaks euphemistically here. His plan resembles Hammond's in all of its elements, but Thornton only implies insurgent violence, never names it. The language of respectability in this passage covers over the militancy Thornton actually advocates.

Hammond's radicalism included more than mere violence, and he has Thornton again put forward one of his own plans for building black power. Thornton argues that the US should "let an establishment be provided, west of the Rocky Mountains, and north of Mr. Clay's Compromise Line, where those free blacks who choose to live separate from the whites may be settled; let the territory be sufficiently large for the creation of some three or four states, and let them there organize governments, either as states of this Union, or as an independent nation."[61] One of the most ambitious experiments in egalitarianism of the period was a black "colony" in North Elba, NY, which was established in the late 1840s by Gerrit Smith as a haven for black settlers in the North, who dubbed the land Timbucto after the African cosmopolis and cultural hub. They would eventually count John Brown himself as a

60 Hammond, *Julius Melbourn*, 139.
61 Ibid., 139-40.

member. Though the black commune ultimately foundered, it proved a powerful experiment in racial equality. Contemporaneously with Timbucto, the black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet came to advocate for black colonization *internally* within the US, along the same lines as Smith.[62] Hammond's scheme for a black "establishment" in the Rockies may well have been inspired by Smith's grand design for Timbucto. Hammond's proposal was at least of a piece with these contemporaneous visions for self-sufficient black communities within the US.

Hammond inserts his radical plots into didactic scenes, but those plots remain challenging for most readers to accept; Hammond would have to do more to persuade his audience. Hammond has Benjamin Lundy agree with Thornton that "there is too much truth to what thee has said" about the failure of moral suasion, although Lundy's Quaker pacifism prevents him from supporting any gesture toward violence. Lundy, as part of a pantheon of antislavery figures, thus legitimizes Hammond's ideas, as other fictionalized historical figures do throughout *Julius Melbourn*. The next chapter begins with Melbourn meditating on Thornton's antislavery radicalism. Recalling their conversation with Lundy, Melbourn mentally chides Thornton for being too "illiberal" in his cynical view of moral suasion's potential to abolish slavery. However, Melbourn admits that "the history of the opposition in the free states of America for several years now past, to the abolitionists, seems to prove his [Thornton's] opinions in the main correct." If Hammond appears to have Melbourn

62 John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 135, 141.

hedge in this moment, he ultimately wants readers to side with his radical plots for slave insurgency and black independence.[63]

Hammond's novel is a truly speculative one, seeking to expand the possibilities for antislavery struggle. Above all, *Julius Melbourn* staged Hammond's own ideas about the slavery crisis, US politics, and national history. The text perhaps best illustrates novels' potential for using the performative (and monetizing) logics of blackface to envision militant solidarity. More so than Bird or Hildreth, Hammond created a fictional authorial self, a black mask or disguise. "Julius Melbourn," in tandem with other characters in didactic exchanges, allowed Hammond to safely ventriloquize his most radical ideas, from guerrilla warfare to independent black states. His authorial masking placed him and his plots *within* slaves' struggle, at least discursively. Perhaps this was as close to identifying with slaves as Hammond could ever get.

His antislavery militancy did not last, however. Hammond explicitly recanted violence at the end of his life. According to Wood, Northerners' resistance to slavery as the sectional crisis worsened renewed Hammond's hope for abolition through formal political means.[64] It was a sharp reversal for the militant Hammond. Although he does not explicitly revise his beliefs in *Julius Melbourn*, the text's second edition contains an imprint of Hammond's belated shift away from antislavery militancy. Following the controversy in the *Richmond Whig*, the novel's subsequent edition clearly signals Hammond's authorship and the text's fictionality. Published in 1851,

63 Hammond, *Julius Melbourn,* 141.
64 Wood, "Jefferson's Legacy," 569, 606-8.

this second edition makes no significant changes to the content of Melbourn's life or opinions; even its pagination remains unchanged from 1847. But the title page of the second edition does read "By Jabez D. Hammond," and the text includes a "Preface to the Second Edition" and "Appendix" with explanatory notes. No longer "Edited by a Late Member of Congress," the novel announces its true authorship. Hammond justifies his old anonymity in the new "Preface," writing, "It was not because I was unwilling to assume the responsibility of writing and publishing the opinions expressed in the following work, so far as those opinions may be fairly charged as the Author's, that I did not affix my name to the first edition." Hammond claims he remained anonymous because he "was fully aware that the book advocated some doctrines decidedly unpopular. . . ." Perhaps this was "moral cowardice," he admits.[65] In naming these "unpopular doctrines" later in the text, though, he never mentions any of his incendiary ideas, whether guerrilla warfare against slavery or free black communities. Hammond simply leaves it to his reader to forgive his old radicalism or to entirely pass over it. What solidarity he had fashioned with his authorial masking had been abandoned with his militancy.

At the same moment that Hammond—and Richard Hildreth—disavowed their textual black rebellions, other abolitionists intensified their rhetoric and agitation against slavery. Gerrit Smith, at least, also wrote a black persona as a cover for his ideas. Hammond and Gerrit Smith's acquaintance may well have been radicalizing for one or both men, although the exact nature of their influence on each other remains to

65 Jabez Delano Hammond, *Life and Opinions of Julius Melbourn; with Sketches of the Lives and Characters of Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, John Randolph, and Several Other Eminent American Statesmen*, (Syracuse: L.W. Hall, 1851): ix-x.

be studied.[66] Smith shared with Hammond not only a similar trajectory toward militancy but also a broadly similar biography. Like Hammond, Smith was a white New York philanthropist and sometime Congressman. Independently wealthy, Smith would devote himself and his resources increasingly to social reform, particularly to abolitionism. He helped found and fund Timbucto, the black utopian community, was a key figure in the Liberty and Radical Abolitionist Parties, and eventually forged close ties with Frederick Douglass and John Brown. Indeed, Smith would become one of the Secret Six, the secret financiers of Brown's attempted insurrection at Harpers Ferry.[67] By the time of Brown's attack, Smith would be one of the most revolutionary voices in the US and one of the most important organizers for abolitionism's radical wing.

Smith was less of a writer than either Hildreth or Hammond; still, he did pen two significant but understudied abolitionist texts that capture his radical thinking. Both texts, like the novels of Hildreth and Hammond, play with authorial personae as a way to speculate on black violence. The first, "Address of the Anti-Slavery Convention OF THE STATE OF NEW-YORK Held in Peterboro', January 19th, 1842, TO THE SLAVES IN THE U. STATES OF AMERICA," fits into a genre of antislavery "address" that takes as its audience, real or imagined, slaves in the South. Smith's own "Address" was first delivered at the New York convention and

66 The connection between Hammond's correspondence and the content of *Julius Melbourn* is the basis for readings by Merton Dillon and Nicholas Wood. Until Wood's 2016 articles, Dillon's brief treatment was the only serious critical engagement with Hammond's novel. See Dillon, *Slavery Attacked* and Wood, "Jefferson's Legacy."

67 On Smith's life and relationships, see Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves,* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004) and Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men.*

subsequently published in the February 11th, 1842 issue of the *Liberator*. According to Stanley Harrold, the "Addresses" by Smith, the militant black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet, and William Lloyd Garrison "each glorify slave rebelliousness. Yet the Addresses are irresolute concerning appropriate means to be used against slavery and unclear concerning the abolitionists' relationship to slaves. They call on slaves to act *and* rely on northerners. They raise the prospect of slave revolt *but* counsel slaves against initiating violence." They indicate, too, "declining abolitionist commitment to peaceful persuasion directed at whites and expanding abolitionist involvement in slavery escapes. They anticipate later examples of abolitionist interaction with slaves and aggressive antislavery action in the South." Writing as "the Friend of Man," Smith's "Address" shifts antislavery's focus from slaveholders to slaves. "Why do abolitionists concede, that their labors for the slave must be expended directly upon his master; and that they are to seek to improve the condition of the one, only through favorable changes wrought in the mind of the other," Smith asks. Here he offers not only a critique of antislavery tactics but an important recentering of abolitionist priorities from slaveholders' internal states to the experiences, material conditions, and even power-building among the oppressed. Do not legitimize the oppressors' crime by appealing to them, Smith suggests. But as Harrold has noted, Smith stops short of advocating violence, instead settling for encouraging flight and theft.[68]

By 1850, though, Smith explicitly advocates violence in a text that complements Hammond's *Julius Melbourn*. True, Smith does not write a counterfeit autobiography, but in "A Letter to the American Slaves from those who have fled

68 Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism*, 9, 2, 153, 157-8.

from American Slavery," he does pose as a fugitive slave. And like Hammond, Smith here seriously considers revolutionary action against slavery—specifically calls for it, in fact. The "Letter" comes out of the Fugitive Slave Law Convention of 1850 that was held in Cazenovia, NY. Smith himself organized the meeting; his friend Frederick Douglass presided over the proceedings; and a large number of blacks, including many fugitive slaves, attended. For the gathering, Smith wrote the "Letter" in the persona of a runaway slave, exhorting his "Afflicted and Beloved Brothers" to struggle for their freedom and to be hopeful that their friends in the North will help them to effect their deliverance. But at Douglass's behest, the "Letter" was put to the actual fugitives in attendance for their approval before the document was officially adopted by the convention. Douglass, who had also approved of its message, later published the "Letter" in the North Star to the chagrin of slaveholders and moral suasionists alike.[69]

In the guise of his black authorial persona, Smith puts forward a baldly revolutionary antislavery. There is an equivalence between white revolutionary violence and the potentially violent actions taken by slaves in pursuit of freedom, Smith argues: "If the American revolutionists had excuse for shedding but one drop of blood, then have the American slaves for making blood to flow 'even to the horse-bridles.'" Enslavement represents a fully revolutionary situation for Smith. But he goes further still. Arguing like Hildreth and Hammond that slavery is a state of warfare, Smith asserts that slaves are entirely justified in responding with total war against their captors. He writes to his imagined slave audience, "if your oppressors

69 Stauffer, *Black Hearts*, 163-4.

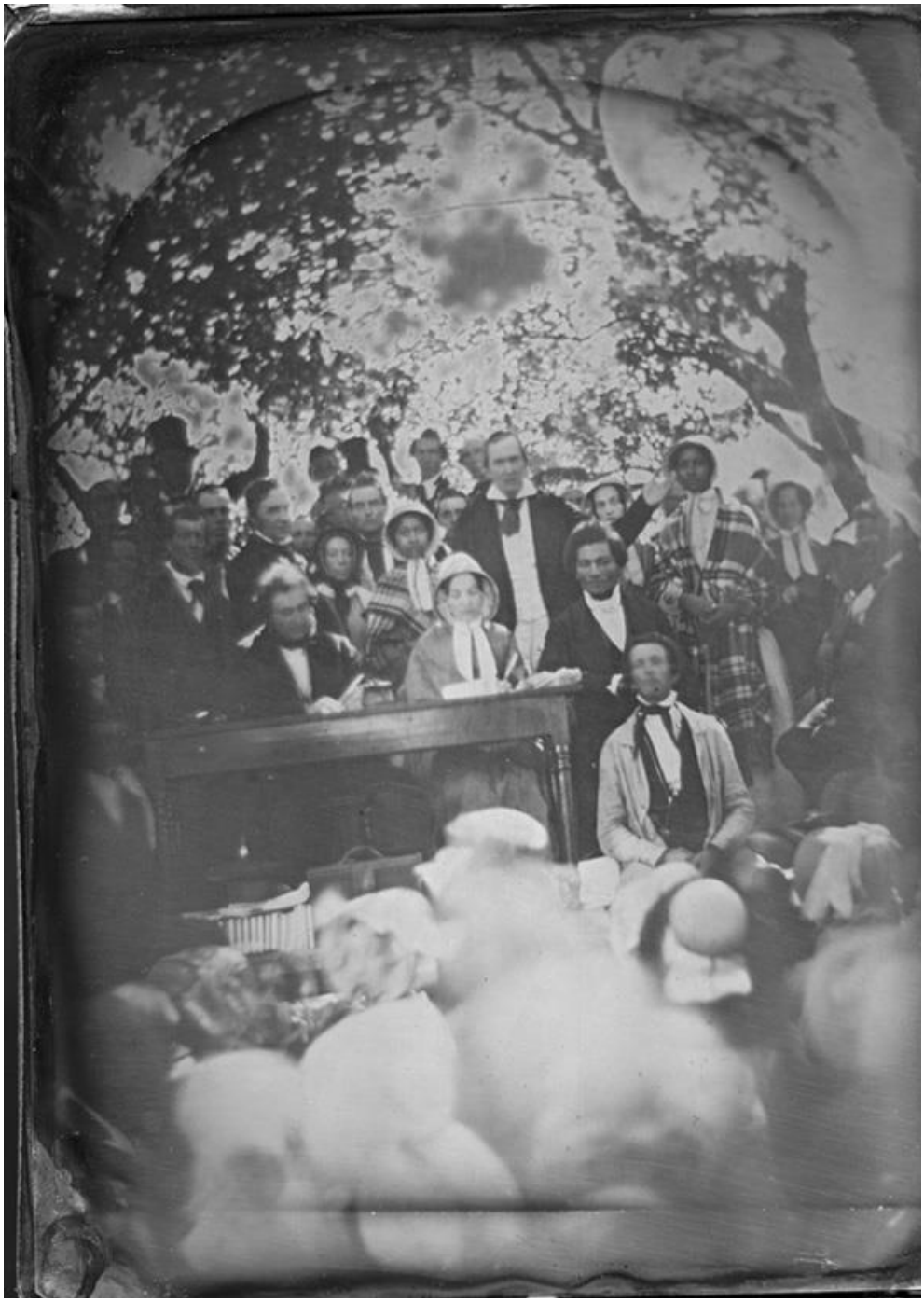


Figure 3: Daguerrotype of the Fugitive Slave Law Convention, 1850.
(Smith center with Douglass)

have rights of property, you at least, are exempt from all obligation to respect them. For you are prisoners of war, in an enemy's country—of war, too, that is unrivaled for its injustice, cruelty, meanness—and therefore, by all the rules of war, you have the fullest liberty to plunder, burn, and kill, as you may have occasion to promote your escape."[70] These are uncompromising words voiced through a black persona.

Despite its own conceit, Smith's anonymous "Letter" aimed for a larger audience than just the slaves it addressed. Read within the context not just of the Cazenovia convention but of the wider slavery crisis in 1850, the "Letter" tries to intensify antislavery militancy both rhetorically and materially. It implicitly spoke to abolitionists and Northerners wary of the South's growing national dominance. Like Hammond's authorial mask and the didactic dialogues in *Julius Melbourn,* Smith's anonymous ex-slave persona allowed him to safely disseminate and argue for black rebellion in the hopes of influencing readers.

Black authorial masks provided these powerful Northern white men a cover for their radical—and speculative—antislavery ideas, but those masks granted them something like belonging as well. Hammond fantasized about an antislavery army, and Julius Melbourn and other characters let him come as close as he could to raising and leading such an army. For his part, the white Smith found himself a white abolitionist among fugitive slaves like his friend Douglass. His performance in his "Letter" placed him discursively within the slaves' cause. Solidarity for both of these white writers meant textually standing with slaves as part of their escalating struggle. Their black authorial personae formalized that desire and attempt. For Smith, at least,

70 Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism,* 192.

he would continue trying to practice such radical solidarity as the antebellum came to a close and the promise of civil war grew.

Conclusion: John Brown's Black Face

Despite white anxiety about black rebellion, Bird, Hildreth, Hammond, and Smith found in writing, particularly writing novels, a way to speculatively depict slave rebels and slave rebellion. Coinciding with blackface's explosive rise and commodification of blackness, these authors wrote texts featuring racial ventriloquism, mimicry, or masking. From black body-snatching in Bird's *Sheppard Lee* to Hildreth's authorial dissembling in *The Slave* to Hammond's pseudo-slave narrative and Smith's rallying "Letter," these cross-racial textual performances offer some of the most explicit white-authored narratives about slave insurrection in the antebellum. Black-authored texts like David Walker's *Appeal* and Nat Turner's *Confessions* precipitated the period's black radicalism with complex, decisive, and urgent visions for black liberation. Bird, Hildreth, Hammond, and Smith perhaps foreground scenes of rebellion like Walker or Turner do, but collectively these white authors maintained a vexed relationship with black freedom and equality. If they all established "solidarity" across the color line, the meaning of that solidarity differs in each text. Bird's satire may level white pretensions, but it does not uplift black people. Hildreth's novel pictures solidarity in the sense of a common commitment to a struggle, while Hammond and Smith both assume black authorial position in order to escalate the fight against slavery. These authors all share an interest in cross-racial performance, but they nonetheless produced a range of conflicting ideas.

I conclude this chapter with a final example, similar to the others in its racial performance but going further in its identification not simply with militants but with black people. This example suggests that textual performances of black identity did not have to lead to disavowal—that they could even lead to antislavery rebellion in reality. In 1859, John Brown led his famed raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, seeking to initiate a widespread insurrection against slavery. He had preceded this attack three years earlier when he led a guerrilla expedition that killed several pro-slavery settlers, part of a series of conflicts known as "Bleeding Kansas."

But years before Brown had become a widely known abolitionist militant, he wrote a series of essays in which he portrayed himself as a free black man. In 1848 in *The Ram's Horn,* a black newspaper edited by Brown's friend and fellow Timbucto settler, Willis Hodges, Brown published three essays collectively titled "Sambo's Mistakes."[71] "Sambo" describes his life's missteps as a lesson to *The Ram's Horn*'s black readers, often relying on common racialist stereotypes. Brown blurs the line between his own self-criticism and critiques of the black community, however; at times Brown really seems to refer to his own faults.

Like Hammond or Brown's friend Smith, Brown assumes his black persona to radicalize his readers. Taking himself as representative of the race, Sambo explains that he had neglected practicing self-improvement such as reading. Instead he imitated the low behaviors of whites, squandered money on frivolities, and

71 John Brown, "Sambo's Mistakes," in Louis Ruchames, *A John Brown Reader: The Story of John Brown in His Own Words, in the Words of Those Who Knew Him, and in the Poetry and Prose of the Literary Heritage,* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1959): 69-72. On *The Ram's Horn,* see Ibid., 69, John Stauffer and Zoe Trodd, *The Tribunal: Responses to John Brown and the Harpers Ferry Raid,* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2012): 3, and Stauffer, *Black Hearts,* 173.

succumbed to petty in-fighting against "the general welfare." But behind this chiding, Sambo hints at growing militancy. In his final essay, Sambo especially laments having curried white favor through "submission":

> Another trifling error of my life has been that I have always expected to secure the favour of the whites by tamely submitting to every species of indignity contempt & wrong instead of nobly resisting their brutual aggressions from principle & taking my place as a man & assuming the responsibilities of a man a citizen, a husband, a father, a brother, a neighbour, a friend as God requires of every one (if his neighbour will allow him to do it:) but I find that I get for all my submission about the same reward that the Southern Slaveocrats render to the Dough faced Statesmen of the North for being bribed & browbeat, & fooled & cheated, as the Whigs & Democrats love to be. & think themselves highly honored if they may be allowed to lick up the spittle of a Southerner. (sic)[72]

Sambo dwells at length on the lowness of his submission in order to emphasize its remedy, a "manly" refusal to submit to whites.

In fact, Sambo ends his essays on Haiti and the specter of black revolution. Confessing his final "blunder," Sambo admits that "I have been constantly at war with my friends about certain religious tenets." For the younger Sambo, doctrine trumped black unity and maybe even interracial coalitions. But since his conversion to abolitionism, "I have been spending all my force on my friends who love the

72 Brown, "Sambo's Mistakes," 70, 71-2.

Sabbath & have felt that all was at stake on that point just as it has proved to be of late in France in the abolition of Slavery in the colonies." In the final moments of the essay, Sambo urges blacks to put aside divisive religious orthodoxies—an error that the zealous Brown would be prone to—when such doctrinalism interferes with the work of radical antislavery. "[A]ll was at stake on" this ability to rally around the cause of abolitionism rather than succumb to in-fighting. If Sambo and his audience could correct this final error, then they too might achieve abolition as did France's "colonies." John Brown has donned the guise of the black "Sambo" to hint at Haiti.[73]

"Sambo's Mistakes" testifies to the surprising power of the textual performances described in this chapter. Very different from Bird's satire, Brown's essays better resemble the maskings of Hammond and Smith. Brown actually sits at the far end of a spectrum of racial performance from Bird: Brown's essays reveal and perhaps produce something like radical empathy. Read as part of Brown's journey to revolutionary antislavery, "Sambo's Mistakes" encapsulates a moment when Brown tried to imagine black life in a deep way. "Sambo's Mistakes" certainly did not lead to Brown's militant acts. But situated alongside Bird, Hildreth, Hammond, and Smith, Brown best suggests the contingency or possibility inhering in racial performances. All of these texts were more than just blackface's racist caricature yet were still related to its transgressive play with identity. Their forays across the color line could speculate, but did not necessarily create, an open, affirming solidarity between black and white lives. In a moment before blackface performances solidified into

73 Brown, "Sambo's Mistakes," 72. Sambo credits Garrison and Abby Kelley with his conversion.

minstrelsy's more familiar racist caricatures, these pieces of writing represented something remarkably different, even promising.

They represent, too, a white reaction to black violence beyond merely fear. In a period when insurrection anxiety saturated the public discourse about slavery, these white authors imagined solidarity with slave rebels. Black rebellion's figure, for them, could be a source of connection across the color line. For some of these writers, speculating about other identities could even produce powerfully liberatory relationships, discourses, or acts. In the early 1850s, author-activists elsewhere were putting the image of black rebellion to use as a language for their own political projects and for guiding the abolitionist movement. If this figure could imagine solidarities between people, then perhaps it could also move those people toward shared goals for racial justice.

Chapter Two: Rewriting Rebellion: Stowe and the Douglass-Truth Debate

Introduction

In 1852, a crowd packed Boston's Faneuil Hall. Frederick Douglass, at the height of his oratorical power, denounced "the wrongs [done to] . . . the black race."[1] Douglass's passion elicited not frenzied enthusiasm but entranced quiet—a "hush of deep feeling." Slaves—no, all black people—he told his audience, had "no hope of justice from the whites, no possible hope except in their own right arms." Slavery, and racism too, he seemed to say, would never end without rebellion. Blacks, he argued, "must fight for themselves, and redeem themselves," or they would never be free: "It must come to blood. . . ." In awe and ready to war against slavery, the crowd sat silently. Breaking the quiet, Sojourner Truth responded to Douglass with a single question that was both a rejoinder and a rebuke: "'Frederick, *is God dead*?'" The question, "changing as by a flash the whole feeling of the audience," turned the listeners from bloodshed to forgiveness. Truth had persuaded the entire hall to forebear against the whites and abolish slavery through Christian charity. There would be no black insurrection. At least that is how Harriet Beecher Stowe tells the story.[2]

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1 An article version of this chapter appears in *ESQ*, Vol 65.1, April 2019.

2 Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl," *Atlantic Monthly* 11 (April 1863): 480.

Far from being a mimetic depiction, Stowe's 1863 account belongs to a collection of texts that retell the real-life debate between Douglass and Truth to contest the ideas and leadership of Douglass, Truth, and even Stowe herself within the nineteenth century's black freedom struggles. Each of these texts purposefully rewrites the 1852 encounter, but the threat of black insurrection offers the key narrative strategy enabling Douglass, Truth, and Stowe to make their claims about themselves and their politics. As the slavery crisis worsened, the black violence that writers like Robert Montgomery Bird, Richard Hildreth, and Jabez Delano Hammond depicted became not only more thinkable but a way to actually think through racial justice projects. According to Lori Leavell, "black militancy could function as a sought-after source of cultural cachet employed to legitimize other political ideas concerning African descendants in the US."[3]

Elaborating on Leavell's insight into nineteenth century black print militancy, I argue that black rebellion offered a speculative frame for advancing various ideas about racial justice as well as for prominent author-activists like Douglass, Truth, and Stowe to assert leadership claims within liberation movements spanning the antebellum and postbellum periods.[4] But black violence does not grant these figures cultural cachet. Whereas Leavell examines how black militants used more famous black radical texts to authorize their own ideas, this chapter explores how both black

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3 Lori Leavell, "Recirculating Black Militancy in Word and Image: Henry Highland Garnet's 'Volume of Fire," *Book History* 20 (2017): 153.

4 Recently historian Kellie Carter Jackson has argued that "violence became a political language" for black abolitionists. My chapter represents a specific example not just of the flexibility of that language over time but its unfolding as if in a conversation. See Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 4.

and white writers with differing politics and at different historical moments utilized and engaged black militant discourse—sometimes critically—to define their public identities, advance their racial justice projects, and vie for movement leadership.[5] Thus, this chapter poses a representative case study in the public lives of these three abolitionist luminaries as well as a novel exploration of black rebellion's discursive power.

The Douglass-Truth debate may have begun as an in-person confrontation over antislavery tactics.[6] However, its textual afterlife, which spans the latter half of the nineteenth century, shifted away from earnest tactical disagreement over the value of violence and toward the wider projects of these three figures. I do not aim to recover precisely what really happened at that abolitionist meeting. Doing so definitively would be impossible, as our only knowledge of the event comes from various mediated sources. However, those sources, along with the debate's later depictions, tell us a great deal about how abolitionists and postbellum racial justice activists defined themselves for audiences, how they positioned themselves in relation to each other, and how they used the idea of black violence to create meaning in unexpected ways. Like an artwork's "afterlife," the afterlife of the Douglass-Truth debate extends the encounter's original meaning even as later figures refashioned it under new conditions and to new purposes.[7] Because this debate's representational

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5 Leavell, "Recirculating," 152.

6 I have struggled with how to conceptualize and describe my object of study, finally settling on distinguishing the in-person exchange between Douglass and Truth from the texts in which Stowe, Douglass, and Truth depicted or addressed that exchange. This distinction between *debate* and *afterlife* usefully draws out black militancy's discursive power as well as highlights how these three figures publicly defined themselves in relation to each other.

7 On the concept of afterlives, see Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Selected Writings*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996), 253–63. Celeste-Marie Bernier's *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic*

history outlasts abolitionism, it speaks to multiple periods: the thought of black rebellion resonated both in a meeting hall in 1852 and in the postbellum struggle for civil rights. And because that representational history comprises three canonical abolitionist authors responding to each other, it warrants a sustained reading here.

This chapter chronologically explores the place of the Douglass-Truth debate in the lives and work of its three key authors: not only Douglass and Truth, but Stowe.[8] Although Stowe was not present during the original exchange, her literary appropriation of the event motivates subsequent depictions. The in-person encounter between the two black abolitionists was perhaps nearly forgotten until she drew on it first in her novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1856), and later for articles in the *Independent* (1860) and the *Atlantic* (1863), reviving the old argument and giving it a new textual afterlife. Because Stowe depicts the encounter more than any other author, she occupies a prominent place here. But she alone does not rewrite the story. Douglass reenters the fray, not to reply to Sojourner Truth but to Stowe. In response to Stowe's depictions of the meeting, Douglass rewrites the scene in *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, his 1881 autobiography (which he would later expand in 1892). For Douglass, retelling the debate in his favor does more than revise his own self-image; his version allows him to strike a new blow against black oppression during the rise of Jim Crow.

Imagination has been formative for my thinking on afterlives, as well as an inspiration for my methodology. Bernier, *Characters of Blood: Black Heroism in the Transatlantic Imagination* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2012).

[8] I take as an inspiration for this triangular framing Robert S. Levine's *Martin Delaney, Frederick Douglass, and The Politics of Representative Identity*, in which he traces the relationship among Delaney, Douglass, and Stowe to illustrate a "microcosm of the possibilities of black-white cross-fertilizations in antebellum culture." Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity.* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1997), 16.

The textual dueling between Stowe and Douglass, however, obscures the debate's other interlocutor: Sojourner Truth. Truth equally participated along with Stowe and Douglass in the in-person exchange. By examining the works of this white woman, black man, and black woman, we can discern how Truth's persona is coopted, revised, and repurposed. Yet even as Stowe and Douglass manipulated Truth's textual presence, that presence becomes part of Truth's oratorical and autobiographical self-representations, concluding with her 1884 revised *Narrative*. Truth continued to reinvent herself after 1852, an act of authorship no less creative than Stowe's or Douglass's. Writing about the "heroic" depictions of black icons like Douglass, Truth, and others, Celeste-Marie Bernier asserts that such "figures lived and died to become creators or 'painters' of their own representations." The three-way conversation that this chapter studies thus continues as well as expands on Bernier's thinking by showing how black and white author-activists became "painters" of their own as well as of each others' representations.[9]

Critical attention to the Douglass-Truth debate has been brief, a footnote rather than a feature story.[10] The following exploration of the meeting's press accounts and subsequent representations transforms what has been treated merely as a biographical curiosity into a significant literary episode in nineteenth century culture. At the heart of this story is the act of writing. Manisha Sinha reminds us that "abolitionists were not just quintessential agitators but wordsmiths."[11] In the history

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9 Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, xxii.

10 For example, David Blight's 2018 Douglass biography omits the event. See Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018). The scant scholarly attention that this confrontation received will be discussed later in this chapter.

11 Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 5.

of American abolitionism, there may be no greater workers in words, written or spoken, than Douglass, Truth, and Stowe. From Douglass's original exhortation for revolutionary black violence, all three derive a way to frame multiple, often competing, racial-political arguments and claims to leadership. All deploy the idea of black bodies in revolt in order to enable new possibilities for racial justice. They rewrite rebellion to fit new audiences and occasions. The story of this writing begins with Douglass and Truth together, debating whether violence or moral suasion would end slavery. To reach their words, however, we must first turn to the abolitionist press.

The Sword and the Truth

We can never know what really happened between Douglass and Truth. But we do know that, almost immediately, abolitionist factions would utilize the conflict and the prospect of black violence to define themselves and their opponents among other antislavery politics and actors, and that these initial acts of representing the debate would establish a pattern for its textual afterlife. For years, the actual details of the exchange between Douglass and Truth remained obscured by Stowe's and Douglass's better-known depictions. However, at least five antislavery newspapers covered the debate in 1852. Contrary to Stowe's setting at Faneuil Hall, Douglass's speech actually took place at a Friends meetinghouse in what the white journalist Parker Pillsbury, a William Lloyd Garrison supporter, described as "the

smoky, dingy little town" of Salem, Ohio.[12] There, from August 21st through 23rd, 1852, the Western Anti-Slavery Society (WASS), the American Anti-Slavery Society's western branch (formerly known as the Ohio American Anti-Slavery Society), held its tenth annual meeting. Important US abolitionists were in attendance, including Douglass, Truth, and Pillsbury.[13]

Perhaps more significant than major abolitionists' presence at the WASS meeting was the attendance of multiple factions within the antislavery movement. The abolitionist press coverage of the meeting suggests the ideological and racial divisions on display. Not surprisingly for a nominally Garrisonian organization, the WASS meeting had a strong Garrisonian presence, but present, too, were Free Soilers and political abolitionists aligned with Gerrit Smith's Liberty Party, who were at odds with Garrisonians on important elements of antislavery strategy.[14] Abolitionist factionalism, at least in the meeting's press coverage, coalesced around Douglass himself, perhaps because by then he was among the most prominent political

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12 Parker Pillsbury, "Letter from Parker Pillsbury," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 10, 1850.

13 Carleton Mabee and Susan Mabee Newhouse identify papers reporting on the 1852 meeting. Mabee and Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York UP, 1993), 83–86. For detailed minutes of the proceedings, see especially "Tenth Annual Report of the Western Anti-Slavery Society," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, August 28, 1852. For narrative accounts, see O. J., "Anniversary of the Western Anti-Slavery Society," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, September 4, 1852, 142; "Speech of Parker Pillsbury at the Anniversary of the Western Anti-Slavery Society," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 4, 1852; and Parker Pillsbury, "Anniversary of the Western A. S. Society," *Liberator*, September 10, 1852, 147. For a summary of the history of the Western Anti-Slavery Society, see Susan J. Covert, "Western Anti-Slavery Society," in *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1619–1895: From the Colonial Period to the Age of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Paul Finkelman (New York, Oxford UP, 2006), 3:334; see also Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 470.

14 Divisions are especially evident in O. J., "Anniversary," 142; "Speech of Parker Pillsbury"; and Pillsbury, "Anniversary," *Liberator*. However, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, a mouthpiece for the WASS, was specifically published to advance Garrisonian disunionism, according to Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 470. Nonetheless, Sinha notes that "in Ohio the line between Garrisonians and Libertyites was blurred." Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 265. For a summary of factions within abolitionism during the immediate antebellum, see Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 461–99.

abolitionists in attendance. Or perhaps the press harshly critiqued Douglass because of his recent break with Garrison. By the WASS meeting, what some have identified as Douglass's substantive split with Garrison was only a year old.[15] Or perhaps Douglass was singled out for criticism because of racism within the abolitionist movement: the press accounts conceal an undercurrent of white paternalism, just the type of racist abolitionism that Douglass denounces three years later in *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855).[16]

Whatever the reason, white press accounts marginalized the viewpoints that Douglass presented at the meeting.[17] Writing for the *Liberator*, for example, Pillsbury mourns "our once faithful and peaceful co-adjutor" "as he was in the days of his manhood." Pillsbury then critiques his former colleague for his "attempt to perform the politician," which is to say, for now advocating participation in the political process as part of a legislative strategy against slavery.[18] The *Pennsylvania Freeman* exults over Douglass's rebuke by Truth, patronizing them both: "It was indeed sublime to see the plausible sophistry of Mr. Douglass rendered powerless by a simple question from the mouth of an illiterate woman."[19] And though praising

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15 For a view of this rift that balances Douglass and Garrison's 1851 public break with a more gradual growing apart that began as early as 1846 or '47, see Robert S. Levine, *The Lives of Frederick Douglass,* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2016), 75, 112–16. Like Levine, Sinha reads Douglass' break from Garrison as being less about the white abolitionist's alleged racism than Douglass himself suggests; see Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 492–93.

16 Douglass writes at length about racism among white abolitionists, including the infamous admonitions for Douglass to "give us the facts . . . we will take care of the philosophy" or "better have a *little* of the plantation manner of speech than not; 'tis not best that you seem too learned." Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, in *Autobiographies,* ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994), 367. See also Levine, *Lives*, 172–73.

17 A generous account appears in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, which praises Douglass' speaking at the meeting but does not specifically mention Truth's disruption or the question of antislavery violence. Spectator, "Western Anti-slavery Anniversary," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 3, 1852.

18 Pillsbury, "Anniversary."

19 O. J., "Anniversary," 142.

Douglass for "soar[ing] above the mists and musks of politics," Pillsbury, this time in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, laments what Douglass once was and considers his position a confused advocacy for "some kind of political Anti-slavery."[20] If we take the papers at face value, Douglass was on the wrong side at the meeting.

But Douglass actually may not have been so embattled when he advocated antislavery violence.[21] Read critically, the newspaper accounts construct a condemnation of violence that their own words simultaneously complicate. Most reports detail the several abolitionist factions at the WASS meeting. They all imply that the meeting was a space of conflicting but changeable opinions. Speeches and debates held real stakes in swaying the audience. The *Pennsylvania Freeman*'s editorial correspondence, titled "Anniversary of the Western Anti-Slavery Society," provides the most detailed contemporary account not of the meeting but of Douglass's exchange with Truth. It also offers a glimpse into the crowd's reaction:

> Mr. Douglass, in the course of his speech, took occasion to glorify Violence as in some circumstances far more potent than Moral Suasion. He contended, in fact, that there were cases that could not by any possibility be reached by the latter. In this connection he referred us to the abject condition of the people of Russia, and ridiculed the

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[20] Parker Pillsbury, "Letter from Parker Pillsbury," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 9, 1852, 63.

[21] The scholarship on Frederick Douglass, radicalism, and violence is extensive. See for example Leslie Friedman Goldstein, "Violence as an Instrument for Social Change: The Views of Frederick Douglass (1817–1895)" *Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 1 (January 1976): 61–72; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989); Stauffer, *Black Hearts*; and Levine, *Lives*, 119–78. Benjamin Fagan writes that, during Douglass' editorship of the *North Star*, the paper connected the antislavery struggle in the US to the 1848 European revolutions. Douglass' speech at the WASS meeting seemingly draws on this revolutionary spirit. See Fagan, *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2016), 71–94.

> idea that anything short of the shedding of the blood of the tyrants could afford relief. When his argument on this point had reached its climax, and the audience had been wrought to a high pitch of excitement by his rhetoric—in answer to his exclamation, "What is the use of Moral Suasion to a people thus trampled in the dust?" was heard the voice of Sojourner Truth, who asked, with startling effect, "Is God gone?" Mr. Douglass stood for a moment in silence, and seemed fully conscious of the force of the question; and when he replied he could only affirm that God was present in the minds of the oppressed to stimulate them to violence! Sojourner's arrow, however, was sped by more than human power, and it pierced with deadly effect the Atheism which teaches that the Sword is mightier than the Truth.[22]

Of course the audience's "high pitch of excitement" can be read as a negative reaction to Douglass's speech. But Pillsbury recounts Douglass's performance during the meeting in similar terms: "Sometimes he spoke in a way to electrify us as no one else could."[23] It appears that Douglass successfully moved his audience to his position. He would have to in order for the *Freeman*'s depiction of Truth's victory to make sense: if Douglass does not convince his listeners, then Truth cannot refute him. That turning point in the argument will become the pivotal element to all of Stowe's later depictions. Scrutinizing these reports suggests that Douglass was not on such dubious ground in Salem after all.

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[22] O. J., "Anniversary," 142.
[23] Pillsbury, "Anniversary."

In fact, Douglass's exhortation to violence was not marginal within the national antislavery movement. At least, he was not alone: his WASS speech joined a chorus of militant black voices that appeared both in print and in person. Newspapers, pamphlets, conventions, and a black rank-and-file all situated the 1852 meeting in an identifiable radical culture. Perhaps no cultural object better exemplifies how these different forms interacted than Garnet's 1848 publication of his *Address to the Slaves* alongside Walker's *Appeal*. As discussed in this project's introduction, the *Appeal* had spread across the country like a rumor of a slave conspiracy, stoking white panic and influencing other discourses with its recirculation.[24] Garnet gave the incendiary antislavery pamphlet, first published in 1829, renewed attention when he used it in 1848 as a paratext to "authorize" his own militant *Address.*[25] In it, Garnet urges an imagined slave audience to declare a general strike against their masters, even as he implies actual violence: "Let your motto be resistance! resistance! resistance!—No oppressed people have ever secured their liberty without resistance. What kind of resistance you had better make, you must decide by the circumstances that surround you, and according to the suggestion of expediency."[26] Garnet's combined volume constitutes arguably the most prominent print forerunner to Douglass's WASS

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24 On the re-publication and recirculation of the *Appeal*, see Lori Leavell, "'Not intended exclusively for the slave states': Antebellum Recirculation of David Walker's *Appeal*," *Callaloo* 38, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 679--695; and Leavell, "Recirculating." See also Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1997).

25 Leavell, "Recirculating," 157.

26 Henry Highland Garnet and David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, with a Brief Sketch of His Life. By Henry Highland Garnet. And Also Garnet's Address to the Slaves of the United States of America*, ed. William Loren Katz (New York: Arno P, 1969), 96.

speech, although Douglass had a still more intimate connection to the *Address*: he had once opposed it for having "too much physical force."[27]

The *Address* thus illuminates the 1852 debate beyond print culture, as both Garnet's text and Douglass's argument with Truth emerged over how to achieve liberation. Black people expressed militancy in person no less than on paper. Originally a speech by Garnet submitted and then rejected for ratification at the 1843 Colored Convention, the *Address* exemplifies the pivotal role the Colored Conventions Movement played in shaping black discourses and training black activists throughout the nineteenth century. These all-black spaces raised different voices than interracial antislavery meetings like WASS. Black clergy, editors and writers, educators, tradespeople, sailors, and entrepreneurs came together as delegates and attendees to protest and build power.[28] Truth clashed with Douglass, then, within a national context of black agitation and theorizing, yet one that remained ideologically diverse: at the 1847 National Convention of Colored People, the disagreement between Garnet and Douglass resulted in the convention endorsing both

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[27] Cited in Leavell, "Recirculating," 150. On Garnet's *Address*, see Harrison Graves, Jake Alspaugh, and Derrick Spires, "Henry Highland Garnet's 'Address to the Slaves,'" Colored Conventions: Bringing Nineteenth-Century Black Organizing to Digital Life, ed. P. Gabrielle Foreman and Sarah Patterson, University of Delaware, accessed June 16, 2018, http://coloredconventions.org. On Garnet's use of the *Appeal* for legitimation, see Leavell, "Recirculating." Douglass' change of heart on violence may well have come about partly due to Garnet's volume. Leavell, "Recirculating," 163–64. For more on Douglass' conflict with Garnet over violence, see Fagan, *The Black Newspaper*, 71–94. Significantly, in 1852 Douglass also published his sole fictional work, *The Heroic Slave*, which depicts Madison Washington's revolt aboard the slave ship *Creole*.

[28] On the Colored Conventions Movement, see the digital project, Colored Conventions: Bringing Nineteenth-Century Black Organizing to Digital Life, ed. P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Patterson, http://coloredconventions.org. On the occupations of attendees, see "Black Wealth and the 1843 National Colored Convention: Tables and Maps," Colored Conventions: Bringing Nineteenth-Century Black Organizing to Digital Life, curated by Sarah Patterson, http://coloredconventions.org, accessed June 16, 2018.

Douglass's call to nonviolence and a resolution for members to study "the art of war."[29]

It would be a mistake, though, to think that black militating occurred only within Colored Conventions or among abolitionist luminaries like Douglass, Truth, or Garnet. In reality, Salem's local abolitionist constituency had been both interracial and ready to raise arms even before Douglass's speech. Pillsbury, attending the eighth annual WASS meeting in 1850, wrote that "men have risen and demanded that money be raised on the spot to arm every fugitive slave in the vicinity not able to arm himself. Slaves have asked, in trembling accents, '*will you defend us, or must we flee.*'"[30] Perhaps this same black constituency also moved WASS to eventually adopt the motto "Death to kidnappers."[31] Even if Truth successfully persuaded the 1852 audience to moral suasion, Douglass's exhortation to rebel was very much at home in Salem and among many black activists across the country.[32]

Black militancy in the US did not form a closed circuit, however: black author-activists derived ideas and discourses about liberatory violence from transnational revolutionary traditions, with the Haitian Revolution''s long afterlife being foremost among them. Writers drew on Haitian history for inspiration, models, and literary material. The anonymously authored "Theresa: A Haytien Tale" (1828), as discussed earlier, used the Revolution as a vehicle for imagining early black

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29 Fagan, *The Black Newspaper,* 82

30 Parker Pillsbury, "Letter from Parker Pillsbury," *National Anti-Slavery Standard,* October 10, 1850. See also Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 216, for a discussion of Pillsbury's attendance at the WASS meeting.

31 Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 507.

32 Parker Pillsbury, "Letter from Parker Pillsbury," *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (10 Oct. 1850); see also Dillon, *Slavery Attacked*, 216 for a discussion of Pillsbury''s encounter; Sinha, *The Slave''s Cause*, 507.

(literary) nationalism. James McCune Smith (1841) and William Wells Brown (1854), meanwhile, both wrote, delivered, and later published lectures on the Haitian Revolution as projects of black historiography, racial uplift, and theorizing freedom struggle. In *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and its Patriots*, Brown uses Haiti to narrate black excellence and create a threatening correspondence with the US: "Who knows," Brown asks, "but that a Toussaint, a Christophe, a Rigaud, a Clervaux, and a Dessalines, may some day appear in the Southern States of this Union? That they are there, no one will doubt. . . . and, if we are not mistaken, the day is not far distant when the revolution of St. Domingo will be reenacted in South Carolina and Louisiana."[33] While white writers like Leonora Sansay in *Secret Histories; or, The Horrors of St. Domingo* (1808) used the threat of the so-called San Domingo Hour to depict white fears of a world turned upside down, black writers like Brown used Haiti to write a revolutionary black past and future.[34] And although US-based figures like Smith, Brown, Garnet, and Douglass would not have known it, their shared discourse on black rebellion coincided with a comparable text from Haiti. The first Haitian novel, *Stella* (1859) by Émeric Bergeaud, blended historiography and allegorical fiction to tell the story of the Haitian Revolution. In doing so, the novel posed a nuanced yet laudatory meditation on the liberatory power of black violence.[35]

33 William Wells Brown, *St. Domingo: Its Revolutions and Its Patriots* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855), 32.

34 In Chapter XXIII of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the white St. Clare warns of the "San Domingo Hour." On the cultural work of nineteenth century black historiography, see John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2004).

35 For a thorough exploration of the cultural meaning and afterlives of the Haitian Revolution for the United States, see Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael J. Drexler, eds., *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2016).

The black militant discourse that had formed through this convergence of print, activist meetings, everyday agitators, and transnational revolutionism would serve as a conceptual frame—a narrative—for more than just other black militants. Thus, press accounts depicting the Douglass-Truth debate utilized the conflict in order to define the antislavery movement, advancing positions like Garrisonian moral suasion while marginalizing ones like Douglass's call to rebellion. Almost from the moment of the meeting's close, other abolitionists rewrote the exchange to serve their own agendas. At stake was the movement's direction, and so these accounts tried to craft and control what happened at WASS. Here we have the beginning of the Douglass-Truth debate's afterlife.

Yet perhaps Truth and Douglass had also been using the question of black violence to maneuver themselves within the antislavery movement. For a time, the confrontation appeared to fade from collective memory, only one among many abolitionist rifts. But Stowe would reignite the controversy in order to make new demands about black freedom to a broad national audience. She would utilize and heighten the image of a Christian moral suasionist woman challenging a revolutionary black man as a vehicle for her own ideas about achieving those demands. And she would join Douglass and Truth in asserting leadership within a long racial justice movement. These three would now be connected by a common story and the work of narrating it.

"The Key-Note of Another Harmony"

A debate about black rebellion proved to be a powerful plot device. Harriet Beecher Stowe found in the confrontation between Douglass and Truth at the WASS

meeting a way to provoke readers' sympathy for black people as the slavery crisis worsens. Staging a debate between characters based on Douglass and Truth in her 1856 novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, Stowe lets the moral suasionist, Aunt Milly, "win" against the fiery revolutionary, Dred, displaying black restraint in the process. In her plot, Stowe disarms black rebellion in order to highlight black forbearance. But Stowe wants it both ways: she also ends her novel with an account of real-world slave insurrection. In effect, Stowe's novel both pointedly avoids black uprising and subtly includes it in order to elicit white sympathy, even for black militancy, while simultaneously threatening righteous retribution for the sin of slavery.

With her 1852 novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe created a cultural phenomenon, but the novel's reception among black readers proved contentious; confronted with criticism over her story of a pacifist Christian slave, Stowe would center her follow-up novel around a revolutionary black man unafraid to violently oppose slavery's own violence.[36] Despite Stowe's apparent about-face, however, *Dred* never really delivers a full-fledged revolt. Its key passage actually depicts a moment in which an insurrection pointedly does *not* happen. The novel follows a sprawling cast of characters organized by families, plantations, and locations. The young Nina Gordon owns the declining North Carolina plantation of Canema, peopled by a diverse cast of slave characters, including the Sojourner Truth-like Aunt Milly. Nina's worldview begins to expand as she gradually falls for Edward Clayton, her suitor and

36 On black responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and their influence on *Dred*, see Levine, *Martin Delany*, 58-98 and 144-76.

a nascent abolitionist from a respectable family of lawyers and planters. But whatever hope lay in Nina's relationship with Clayton fails after her death, at which point her cruel brother, Tom Gordon, seizes control of her property, people and all. Disabused of the law's ability to protect Canema's enslaved and of the justness of Southern paternalism, Clayton follows the fleeing slaves to the Great Dismal Swamp maroons, a band led by a Nat Turner-like insurrectionary and scion of Denmark Vesey named Dred. But the plight of the Canema slaves comes to a head as Tom Gordon increasingly bears down on the maroons. Following the lynching of one of their members by Gordon, Dred exhorts his compatriots to raise war against the whites. In this moment, the novel seems poised between the prospects of black revolt or moral suasion.

Indeed, the text stages an argument between the two positions. Stowe writes a debate scene here in the text, and she uses the encounter between Douglass and Truth as a source. Dred poses his threat of insurrection in Biblical language, overcome with emotion and almost embodying the racial cataclysm he foretells: “As a thunder-cloud trembles and rolls, shaking with gathering electric fire, so his dark figure seemed to dilate and quiver with the force of mighty emotions. He seemed, at the moment, some awful form, framed to symbolize to human eye the energy of that avenging justice which all nature shudderingly declares.” Promising God's “day of vengeance” against the whites, Dred tells his band that “we will slay them utterly, and consume them from off the face of the earth.” The recent maroon death, Dred's grim prophesying, indeed, his *certitude*—here the text reaches perhaps its nadir of hope. Dred guarantees black rebellion, justified by God, in which whites will atone in blood for the sin of

slavery.[37] The novel answers Dred with a counter-argument, however. The text continues: “At this moment the whole circle were startled by the sound of a voice which seemed to proceed deep in from among the trees, singing, in a wild and mournful tone, the familiar words of a hymn . . .” By now readers understand that the voice is Aunt Milly's. Her entrance from the woods, her song, and its mournfulness all parallel Dred's first appearance in the novel, during which he urged the wounded Canema slave Harry to rebel by singing “a wild camp-meeting hymn,” only to be “interrupted by the sudden appearance of Milly.” Since Dred's introduction, the text has paired the rebel with the Christian slave, and their simmering tension boils over in this pivotal debate scene. Unlike Dred's earlier hymn that was recast as a call to arms, Aunt Milly uses this Christian hymn as a means of dissuading the maroons from rebellion by changing how they feel. She pleads, “O, brethren dere's a better way,” and “Leave de vengeance to [God]. Vengeance is mine—I will repay, saith the Lord. Like he loved us when we was enemies, love yer enemies.” In what I take to be the most significant line of the passage, the text reads, “A dead silence followed this appeal. The key-note of another harmony had been struck.” Milly wins against Dred and defers his “day of vengeance.”[38]

Stowe turns back to 1852 for inspiration for this scene. Robert Levine asserts that Stowe uses the conflict between Douglass and Truth to demonstrate “that black attitudes toward violence are not necessarily monolithic” and to show that Stowe, as a sign of her own changing attitudes, “allows Dred an equal place and stature [with

37 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp,* edited by Robert S. Levine, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 458, 459, 460.
38 Ibid., 460-1, 200, 462.

Milly] in articulating a rationale for a slave insurrection." Along with Levine, Mabee and Newhouse point out the parallels between Milly and Sojourner Truth, connecting the novel's "debate" scene to the 1852 exchange and raising the question of whether Stowe knew of its existence. Although Stowe's archive has not yielded definitive proof that she had known of the Douglass-Truth debate when writing *Dred*, a diligent reading of the novel's debate between Dred and Milly suggests that she did.[39] From the 1852 exchange at the Western Anti-Slavery Society meeting, Stowe derives a scene pitting black rebellion against moral suasion. The conflict between Dred and Aunt Milly represents her first use of the Douglass-Truth encounter, which she would return to in 1860 and 1863.

But the novel's confrontation between Dred and Milly owes more to press accounts of the WASS meeting from four years earlier than just inspiration: it closely mirrors the encounter between Douglass and Truth as portrayed in the antislavery press. An incendiary black man militates against slavery by advocating insurrection, stirring up his audience toward revolt, at which point a black woman counters him by posing Christian moral suasion; her seemingly hopeless rhetorical effort succeeds, turning the audience away from racial violence to forgiveness. Moreover, *Dred* places great emphasis on the important elements of 1852, especially as seen in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* account: the startling voice, its disruptive force, the "dead silence" that follows it. These pauses and powerful voices will continue to define depictions of the Douglass-Truth debate, particularly in Stowe's other versions.

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39 Ibid., xxiv; Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, 89. In a letter to Garrison in 1853, Stowe does describe herself as a "constant reader" of the *Liberator*, one of the principle sources for an account of the 1852 debate; quoted in Joan Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 251.

Whether Stowe came across the Douglass-Truth debate by the original press accounts or by abolitionist anecdotes, as she will later assert, she recognized that story's inherent drama. In *Dred*, she draws out that drama in order to use it to organize her plot and characterization.

Stowe does more than just fictionalize the WASS encounter because she also mingles elements of the meeting with a scene from Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* of 1850. In effect, Stowe combines Truth's camp-meeting scene with her debate with Douglass in order to create the main action of *Dred*'s pivotal chapter. The more substantial element of *Dred*'s argument scene actually derives from Truth's slave narrative. Published in 1850, the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* was an as-told-to autobiography written by Olive Gilbert.[40] One of its sections tells the story of a camp-meeting in Northampton, New York, during which "A party of wild young men, with no motive but that of entertaining themselves by annoying and injuring the feelings of others, had assembled at the meeting, hooting and yelling, and in various ways interrupting the services, and causing much disturbance." Truth initially fears for her life as "the only colored person here," but she suddenly feels divinely inspired to confront the men: "I'll go to the rescue, and the Lord shall go with and protect me." The *Narrative* continues: "Sojourner left the tent alone and unaided, and walking some thirty rods to the top of a small rise of ground, commenced to sing, in her most fervid manner, with all the strength of her most powerful voice, the hymn on the

40 For summaries of the complex textual history of the multiple editions of Truth's*Narrative*, see Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, 52-3, 202-3; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 103-12, 259-61; and John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 216.

resurrection of Christ." She enchants the toughs with her Christian hymn and begins preaching: "Her speech had operated on the roused passions of the mob like oil on agitated waters; they were, as a whole, entirely subdued, and only clamored when she ceased to speak or sing." Finally, Truth persuades the mob to leave, closing with a loud "Amen" that "ran through the multitude like an electric shock."[41]

Why, though, does Stowe use the old confrontation between Douglass and Truth as the basis for *Dred*'s pivotal moment? The real-life exchange (and its press depictions) contains an inherent drama, certainly. But what does it get or allow her? What meaning, in short, does it allow her to make?

With *Dred,* Stowe brings the slave nation face to face with God's wrath. By taking the 1852 debate between competing antislavery tactics and inflecting it with Truth's account of preaching to the mob, Stowe extends the theological stakes of the old debate. Truth herself did the same thing to Douglass. There is already a theology underlying the encounter at the WASS anniversary meeting. Douglass and Truth conceived of God differently, with the evangelical Truth believing in an immanent and personal God, in contrast to Douglass's greater emphasis on human agency in enacting the divine will. Besides her rejection of violence, then, Truth also balked at Douglass's apparent disbelief that God Himself would free the slaves without the human intervention of rebellion. One of Truth's most canny acts was to tease out the religious implications of Douglass's call to violence: she forces him to hold a political argument on theological grounds.

41 Sojourner Truth, "Narrative of Sojourner Truth," 1850, in*Slave Narratives,* edited by William Andrews and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (New York: Library of America, 2000), 653-6.

From Douglass to Truth to Stowe, then, there is an increasing investment in the theology of antislavery violence; for Stowe, this means the threat of God's divine judgment. In Stowe's fictional iteration of the encounter—and unlike in her later article versions—the conflict is not between ungodly violence and godly non-violence. Rather, the debate between Dred and Milly is one between the apocalyptic justice of Dred's righteous, wrathful God and the personal, immanent forgiveness of Milly's Jesus. Stowe inserts a commonplace into the debate scene, staging a tension between a purportedly Old Testament Lord of Hosts and the merciful Father of the Gospels. She arranges her characters to perform this dynamic by having Milly intercede to Dred for the whites as if she were Christ interceding for humanity.[42] Stowe has deployed this framing of antislavery violence in terms of God's apocalyptic judgment before in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Strictly speaking, that novel does not end on colonization, as critics have often asserted, but on the coming "wrath of Almighty God."[43] To the millenialist Stowe, slavery would end in God's judgment unless the nation repented of its shared sin of slavery. Expanding the 1852 debate's theological implications and inserting it as a scene in *Dred* elaborates on the concluding sentence of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and explores how the threat of God's justice will manifest. In this sense, the debate scene in *Dred* extends the religio-political argument that confronts the nation at the end of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

42 Mabee and Newhouse, similarly discuss the theological implications of the 1852 meeting. See Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, 87. We might read Milly as an Abramhic figure intervening on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, except that Milly herself bases her argument against Dred on Christ's own intercession for humanity; see Stowe, *Dred*, 461.

43 Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, edited by Stephen Railton, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2008), 453. I owe this insight into *UTC*'s apocalypticism to Stephen Railton.

Indeed, if we attend to the trajectory of rebellion across the novel, we find that *Dred* actually delivers on the threat of God's wrath that first appeared in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, except that God's avenging angel is a black insurrectionary. For the first forty-four chapters, the text appears to build up to the cataclysmic race war urged by Dred. But by interceding on behalf of the whites, Aunt Milly seems to disrupt the novel's revolutionary trajectory, while Dred's own Christ-like death at the hands of Tom Gordon and his band seems to guarantee the end of black insurrection in the text—"All over," as Dred says on his deathbed. The novel's final chapters follow the flight Northward of the Canema slaves. Ultimately, Aunt Milly settles in a New York City tenement to spend her days caring for an interracial cast of children; Clayton lodges himself in a curious utopian household with his sister and Livy Ray, the friend of his late lover, Nina; and the plot ends on a marriage scene in which a derelict First Family of Virgina, the Peytons, restart their aristocratic line in Massachusetts. Their faithful family slave Tiff describes the concluding wedding as a "brilliant consummation of his hopes" for the Peytons' prosperity and happiness. The story concludes with this seemingly idyllic union. Yet the black rebellion that Dred promises—he warns us that "The hour is not yet come!"—does indeed arrive by the time that readers have closed the pages of the novel.[44] The hopeful marriage scene ends the plot, but not the book itself: following the close of the story, Stowe includes an appendix of three texts, so that the wedding scene immediately leads to an edited reprinting of the *Confessions of Nat Turner* (1831). If we take the novel in its entirety, then, its insurrectionary trajectory changes dramatically. The black uprising that Dred

44 Stowe, *Dred*, 513, 549, 462.

prophesies interrupts the white wedding of the Peytons. The novel ends with Nat Turner.[45]

By inserting the *Confessions* at the end of her novel, Stowe manages to include a black and bloody insurrection without depicting it herself. She disavows rebellion in the debate between Dred and Milly by derailing Dred's retribution, even as she later conducts one in the form of Nat Turner's story. Stowe rebels by proxy, as it were, through Nat Turner's presence in *Dred*. Approaching the possibility of violence in the novel's main plot through a debate that ultimately disavows it allows Stowe to suggest the coming threat of retribution without actually representing it. Her roundabout approach absolves her of responsibility in depicting black violence, poses multiple black perspectives, and heads off some readers' outrage.

In alternating between Aunt Milly's Christian forbearance and the divine judgment embodied by Nat Turner's—or Dred's—insurrection, *Dred* appeals to whites for both sympathy and fear. It constituted an urgent plea on Stowe's part as the conflict over slavery worsened in the 1850s. The Douglass-Truth debate provided Stowe with a useful way to depict the crisis, and she would in fact use the debate again. This time she would not fictionalize Truth's encounter with Douglass, instead presenting readers with a supposedly true secondhand account. But the driving tension between her moral suasionist and insurrectionary "characters," between racial reconciliation and rebellion, would remain to guide her readers' toward both abolition and national healing.

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45 Ibid., 551. Stowe subtly edits the *Confessions*, however. By cutting and reordering passages, and by adding clarifying names and pronouns, Stowe distinguishes and simplifies the competing authorial voices of Nat Turner and his white amanuensis, Thomas R. Gray. The result is a clearer sense of the text as autobiographical, and thus as possessing an authorial voice like Dred's own.

"Frederick, Is God Dead?"

Stowe realized that the conflict between moral suasion and black insurrection came to serve as a conceptual language or figure for the work of racial justice. Several years after *Dred*, Stowe again draws on the contemporaneous press accounts to put the Douglass-Truth debate to new uses, by turns suppressing or heightening its threat of black violence. This strategy allows her to make first an antislavery argument as the threat of civil war intensified and then an argument for racial healing after Emancipation. These two depictions are stylistically unified: Stowe renders both anecdotally, and in both she foregrounds Sojourner Truth, holding her up as a sign to the nation. The 1863 text, the biographical essay in the *Atlantic* titled "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl," made Truth a household name and became a key source for (mis)information on her life. But before Stowe published this better-known version of the exchange and of her Truth character, she wrote a version that sidestepped the threat of black violence.

The now-neglected essay titled "The President's Message" appeared in the 20 December 1860 issue of the *Independent*. Here, Stowe indicts President James Buchanan for sympathizing with the slave South. Typical of proslavery apologists, Buchanan had blamed the North for inciting "servile insurrection" and agitating sectional conflict. And as he sought to end the slavery crisis through legislative appeasement, Buchanan "proposed an 'explanatory amendment'" to the Constitution that would clarify the right to own slaves in the South and the territories, as well as affirm slaveholders' right to fugitive slaves. This pro-slavery stance is "the

President's message" to which Stowe responds. She dubs Buchanan's attempt to enshrine slavery in the Constitution "the bottom of atheism."[46] The *Pennsylvania Freeman* leveled this same charge against Douglass for advocating black violence.[47] Both the 1860 and 1863 magazine articles made it appear increasingly certain that Stowe's source was the *Freeman*'s narrative account.

Stowe does not revisit the Douglass-Truth debate to argue abolitionist tactics. Rather she reimagines it as a broadly appealing antislavery argument. Her revision of Truth's question, "Is God gone?," appears initially in the *Independent* essay, here critiquing Buchanan. Stowe ends the essay by reading the 1852 scene against the president's attempt to stifle antislavery efforts. The passage reads in full:

> It reminds us of an anecdote of an old black slave-woman callling [*sic*] herself "Sojourner Truth," who sat in the front ranks once in an Abolition meeting, when Frederick Douglass, fired with the wrongs of his race, and the despairs of the white race, declared that there was neither hope nor help for the slave but in their own right arms.
>
> In the pause that followed this appeal, Sojourner lifted her dark face, working with intense feeling, and said in a low, deep voice, which was heard in every corner of the room,
>
> "Frederick, is God dead?"

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46 Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The President's Message," *Independent*, December 20, 1860, 1. On Buchanan's proposal, see Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, 83; and John Vile, "Corwin Amendment," in *Encyclopedia of Constitutional Amendments, Proposed Amendments, and Amending Issues, 1789–1995* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 118.

47 O. J., "Anniversary," 142.

> Let that old black slave woman's question ring through this nation, as then it rang through Faneuil Hall. To all who hope or dream to put down agitation by a covenant with death and an agreement with hell, old Africa rises, and raising her poor, maimed, scarred hand to heaven, asks us—
>
> "Is God Dead?"[48]

The *Independent* version notably places side by side "the wrongs of his race, and the despairs of the white race," then quickly passes over the question of violence in order to pursue Stowe's Christian indictment of Buchanan's proslavery message. These two moves constitute the text's defining features, and together they direct "The President's Message" to a wide audience. Blacks and whites alike have a stake in the slavery problem, this account implies. By including the "despairs of the white race" alongside "the wrongs of [the black] race," Stowe constructs a cross-racial alliance. She essentially downplays the racial conflict of slavery and, perhaps, antislavery. Stowe suppresses whatever specter of black revolt the scene raises as she quickly moves the reader from Douglass' and Truth's exchange to the essay's larger argument: that Buchanan's attempt to enshrine slavery in the Constitution warrants Truth's question, "Is God dead?" Allowing her audience no time to dwell on the prospect of antislavery violence, Stowe instead poses Truth as the nation's judge, a moral force against Buchanan's "atheism" and the slave power he accommodates. This version serves a very different purpose, then, than the version she writes in *Dred* only several years earlier.

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[48] Stowe, "The President's Message," 1.

Stowe was still not finished with the encounter, however. Clearly, she was fascinated by it and by Sojourner Truth herself. In 1863, amid civil war, Stowe published her biographical essay in the *Atlantic*. "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl" would become a principal source for the Sojourner Truth mythos, as well as for understanding her clash with Frederick Douglass. Stowe's essay uses Truth's "apocryphal" 1853 visit to the Stowe household as an occasion to romanticize Truth. While Stowe and her family begin the meeting with Truth by considering her body aesthetically, the essay ends on William Wetmore Story's famous sculpture, "The Libyan Sibyl," modeled after Truth—or, rather, on Stowe's version of Truth that she told to Story.[49]

Within "Sojourner Truth," Stowe inserts a new report of her Douglass-Truth scene. Just as she had done in "The President's Message," Stowe frames the story as an anecdote, now using Wendell Phillips, the prominent abolitionist. Here the scene reads like an aside that will further illustrate Truth's character:

> Speaking of the power of Rachel to move and bear down a whole audience by a few simple words, [Phillips] said he never knew but one other human being that had that power, and that other was Sojourner Truth. He related a scene of which he was witness. It was at a crowded public meeting in Faneuil Hall, where Frederick Douglas [*sic*] was one of the chief speakers. Douglas had been describing the wrongs of the black race, and as he proceeded, he grew more and more excited, and

[49] On Stowe's essay, see Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, 110–15; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: Norton, 1996), 151–63; and Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 229–35.

> finally ended by saying that they had no hope of justice from the whites, no possible hope except in their own right arms. It must come to blood; they must fight for themselves, and redeem themselves, or it would never be done.
>
> Sojourner was sitting, tall and dark, on the very front seat, facing the platform; and in the hush of deep feeling, after Douglas sat down, she spoke out in her deep, peculiar voice, heard all over the house,—
>
> "Frederick, *is God dead?*"
>
> The effect was perfectly electrical, and thrilled through the whole house, changing as by a flash the whole feeling of the audience. Not another word she said or needed to say; it was enough.[50]

Once again, Stowe creates a Truth character who acts as the slave nation's judge, a prophetic, moral voice who recalls the country to God.

Despite other commonalities between the two articles, between 1860 and 1863 Stowe crucially changes how race and violence figure in the Douglass-Truth debate to move from an antislavery argument toward a wider racial justice ethic following Emancipation. Whereas the scene as it appears in "The President's Message" expressly allies blacks and whites, pairing white "despair" and black suffering, the scene here has Douglass exclusively "describing the wrongs of the black race." Not only does this version of Douglass focus on black oppression, he frames whites as

[50] Stowe, "Sojourner Truth," 480.

potentially impeding freedom and equality. This Douglass dwells on black insurrection in a way that his 1860 incarnation does not. The 1863 scene actually does not mention slavery, only indefinite, raced "wrongs."

If Stowe's 1860 version appeals to a national audience in the interest of antislavery, then in her 1863 version she instead poses the debate's central conflict as racial animus separate from the slavery crisis. National white supremacy rather than Southern slavery concerns her, and this Douglass implies that the solution is race war. The 1863 *Atlantic* version now casts Truth as the voice of racial conciliation as well as moral suasion, countering Douglass's threatened black insurrection. Like Aunt Milly's clash with Dred, the *Atlantic* scene elicits white readers' sympathy for black people because Truth models Christian forbearance. In the spring of 1863, though, performing black restraint acquires special urgency.

The image of a black army, whether slave or free, marched across the cultural landscape. By the time Stowe published her *Atlantic* essay, African Americans had been barred by federal law from fighting in the US Army for nearly a century. Yet necessity, a changing political calculus, and black agitation had moved Lincoln on enlisting black soldiers.[51] Still, whites contested what a Union Army that included black men might mean—and the implications such an army held for future racial equality. Legislators fiercely argued the issue of black enlistment leading up to the Emancipation Proclamation, and many soldiers rankled at the thought of integration.[52]

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51 With the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln authorized freed slaves to serve in the Union Army. John David Smith, "Let Us All Be Grateful That We Have Colored Troops That Will Fight," in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. Smith (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2002), 9, 1.

52 W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880*, ed. Henry

In many ways, whites' new fears of a black army simply repeated their old fears of slave insurrection.[53]

For many blacks, too, the prospect of enlistment in the Union Army and of a slave uprising were closely related, as debates in the black press about martial activity suggest. In the *Weekly Anglo-African* in 1861, for instance, an anonymous piece titled "Let Us Drill!" urged public black military exercises as both a practical step toward war readiness and a signal of black power: "If the Government sees fit to refuse the enlistment of black soldiers, that is no reason why black men shall refrain from organizing themselves into military companies for purposes of drill."[54] In Benjamin Fagan's reading, such drills "could be read not simply as a demonstration of black fitness for freedom but also a warning to white onlookers of the threat of insurrection."[55]

Throughout 1861, black papers like the *Weekly Anglo-African* served as a hub for such discussions regarding black military action, discussions that earnestly suggested coordinating slave rebellion instead of joining the Union ranks. In this respect, Martin Delany's serial novel, *Blake; Or the Huts of America* (1859, 1861-2)—which he wrote partly in response to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)—became a signal text, as Delany depicted a transnational slave conspiracy.[56] The

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Louis Gates Jr. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 73, 81, 78; Smith, "Let Us All," 5. On blacks and the Union Army, see Smith, "Let Us All," 1–77; Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 44–103; Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009), 55–114; and Fagan, *The Black Newspaper*, 119–141.

53 Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 66.

54 "Let Us Drill!," *Weekly Anglo-African*, October 5, 1861.

55 Fagan, *The Black Newspaper*, 128.

56 On the relationship between Delany and Stowe, see Levine,*Martin Delany*; and "Stand still and see the salvation," *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture*, ed. Stephen Railton, http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/.

Anglo-African's editorials compared black military preparations to *Blake*'s slave plot and urged readers not to rally for the Union but rather "*to respond when the slave calls*."[57] As whites resisted an integrated army and the black press considered a widespread uprising, by 1863 many white Americans sought assurances of black restraint for when freedom came.

Published in April, "Sojourner Truth" entered this cultural terrain. Stowe lands on the wrong side of the debate over a black liberation army—and on the wrong side of history. Here, Stowe advances a politics of black nonviolence at precisely the moment when black people began to raise arms en masse as they fought for freedom. Stowe's depiction of Sojourner Truth in the *Atlantic* elides even the actual Truth's growing acceptance of violence, at least when waged by the Union Army in a war for abolition.[58] For all the ways that Stowe misrepresents Truth and denies black people the fullest range of political action and emotions, she does revise the debate scene to prepare for the day, seemingly fast approaching, when blacks and whites would have to encounter each other without the racial order that chattel slavery imposed. By textually portraying black restraint, Stowe encourages her white readers to support racial conciliation. Against the backdrop of tensions over a black fighting force, Stowe hones the edges of the Douglass-Truth debate, heightening its racial conflict and harshening Douglass' call to black arms, all in order to make Truth's plea for moral suasion and cross-racial conciliation that much more pointed, poignant, and sympathetic.

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57 Fagan, *The Black Newspape*r, 136–37; "Have We a War Policy?," *Weekly Anglo-African*, April 27, 1861, original emphasis. On Fagan's reading of Blake as part of a discourse on slave insurrection in the *Weekly Anglo-African*, see *The Black Newspaper*, 134–39.

58 On Truth's changing views on violence, see Mabee and Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth*, 89–92.

Stowe's retelling of 1852 speaks to the spring of 1863. When rewriting the old debate, Douglass would also use it to address the present. However, the present that he addresses would be a postbellum one in which blacks' newly gained civil rights are under attack, when black insurrection may no longer be as strategic as institutional protection.

"My Sanguinary Doctrine"

"Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl" introduced the black abolitionist-orator and artist to her largest audience yet. But if this widely-read article crafted a version of Truth and the encounter for the nation, then it also crafted a version of Douglass. An inveterate maker and remaker of his own image, Douglass could hardly leave his story to be told by someone else; he would have to retell it himself. He would wait eighteen years after the *Atlantic* article, rewriting Stowe's versions in the first edition of his final autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. Here, Douglass imagines a new ending: he adds a rejoinder to Truth's piercing, questioning indictment of violence, effectively writing himself as the argument's winner and crafting his own legacy by recasting himself as the victor in a way that also signifies on his relationship with Stowe. But much more is at stake in his telling. Douglass subtly shifts the contested terms of his confrontation with Truth from black insurrection to the Union Army's abolition war. In doing so, he makes a timely argument not so much about black violence as about federal intervention in the post-Reconstruction South.

Published in 1881 toward the end of his life, and then expanded and republished in 1892 three years before his death, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* necessarily concerns itself with its author's legacy. It finally tells, too, the story of Douglass's life since his 1855 autobiography. Some crucial Civil War scenes appear in Chapter VIII, titled "John Brown and Mrs. Stowe," in which Douglass rewrites his exchange with Truth. The chapter summary reads, "MY FIRST MEETING WITH CAPT. BROWN—THE FREE-SOIL MOVEMENT—COLORED CONVENTION—UNCLE TOM'S CABIN—INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL FOR COLORED PEOPLE—LETTER TO MRS. H. B. STOWE."[59] The chapter's structure matters for interpreting Douglass's version of the Truth debate, as does the summary's emphasis on Brown and the industrial school. This chapter concerns white allyship: it critiques Stowe, responds to her depictions of Douglass and Truth, and situates Douglass as the nation's continued leader of racial justice.

Douglass's signifying on Stowe, though, depends on first establishing a counterexample of successful white allyship with John Brown. The description of the 1852 debate only comes at the end of a substantial paragraph discussing his first meeting with John Brown, in which the white militant counters Douglass's moral suasion: Brown "thought that slaveholders had forfeited their right to live, that the slaves had the right to gain their liberty in any way they could, did not believe that moral suasion would ever liberate the slave, or that political action would abolish the system." Douglass's depiction of Brown's militancy functions purposefully in how he

59 Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, in *Autobiographies* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (New York: Library of America, 1994), 715.

describes his encounter with Truth, placing Douglass in a lineage with Brown Here, immediately following this introduction to Captain John Brown, Douglass inserts the now well-known exchange:

> From this night spent with John Brown in Springfield, Mass., 1847, while I continued to write and speak against slavery, I became all the same less hopeful of its peaceful abolition. My utterances became more and more tinged by the color of this man's strong impressions. Speaking at an anti-slavery convention in Salem, Ohio, I expressed this apprehension that slavery could only be destroyed by blood-shed, when I was suddenly and sharply interrupted by my good old friend Sojourner Truth with the question, "Frederick, is God dead?" "No," I answered, "and because God is not dead slavery can only end in blood." My quaint old sister was of the Garrison school of non-resistants, and was shocked at my sanguinary doctrine, but she too became an advocate of the sword, when the war for the maintenance of the Union was declared.[60]

The most obvious change to this scene is the ending: Douglass wins. No other account indicates that Douglass made such a strong reply to Truth's question. Regardless of the factuality of Douglass's response, however, the passage conceals a subtler authorial project.

Just as the militant John Brown withstands the young Douglass's argument for "moral suasion" earlier in the paragraph, so too does the older, radical Douglass

[60] Douglass, *Life and Times*, 717, 719.

counter both Truth and, by implication, “the Garrison school of non-resistants.” According to the paragraph’s logic, there is nothing left to say. The scene shifts, and the autobiography continues. Douglass himself wins, and so too does his position: the whole chapter, through the paired scenes of Brown and Truth, successfully advances a politics of liberatory violence over moral suasion. The paragraph makes such antislavery violence inexorable. Douglass structures the scene and his argument so that “slavery can only end in blood,” not because of God, but rather because of history. He triumphs retroactively because events have vindicated his politics. He was right precisely at the moment “when the war for the maintenance of the Union was declared.” Moral suasion did not end slavery: Douglass needs no other proof than Emancipation.

Douglass's telling leaves Stowe conspicuously absent, but we can still discern traces of her. Her most obvious influence on the scene comes with Douglass’ reply to Truth. His version hinges on Stowe’s dramatic phrasing of Truth’s question: “Frederick, is God dead?” rather than “Is God gone?” Answering her with “God is not dead” cleverly turns Truth’s question (and Stowe’s phrasing) on its head, making for a pithy response that also reclaims for Douglass the moral force of Truth’s argument. Though Stowe herself appears nowhere in his account, Douglass appropriates Stowe’s words to retell his story from his own perspective. In fact, Douglass here reckons with his entire relationship with Harriet Beecher Stowe. She may be most clearly present in the scene through her own phrasing of Truth’s question, but we can also detect her presence when we locate the scene within the wider context of the “John Brown and Mrs. Stowe” chapter of *Life and Times*.

Together with Brown, she structures and defines this chapter. Robert Levine has argued that in *Life and Times,* Brown functions as a model for white allyship, a rubric by which Douglass measures Lincoln. Following this reading, I argue that when the chapter's title juxtaposes Stowe with Brown, it effectively measures the two whites against each other.[61]

The entire chapter, then, becomes a harsh indictment of Stowe, and the debate scene implicitly participates in that indictment. Douglass begins Chapter VIII by lovingly depicting Brown, "a man whose character and conversation, and whose objects and aims in life, made a very deep impression upon my mind and heart." It ends with one of Douglass's most vulnerable moments: Stowe's abandonment of Douglass's industrial college project. At Stowe's request, he had proposed creating a school that would teach black students trades. Later, however, Douglass "was much disappointed to learn from her that she had reconsidered her plan for the industrial school. I have never been able to see any force in the reasons for this change." Douglass's understatement belies the hurt he feels, hinted at by repeated disappointment throughout the whole passage. The chapter begins by establishing John Brown as a model for cross-racial friendship; it ends by suggesting that Stowe falls short.[62] In the middle of this chapter, Douglass inserts the 1852 encounter, using Stowe's own words but eliding her name. Douglass's rewriting of his exchange with Truth, then, evokes Stowe. It functions as a way to revisit the old abolitionist

61 My argument here draws inspiration from Levine's reading of the relationship between Brown and Lincoln in *Life and Times*. See Levine, *Lives*, 179–239.

62 Douglass, *Life and Times*, 715, 733. On the cross-racial friendship of Douglass and Brown, see Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men*; and Levine, *Lives*, 179–239.

argument over black revolutionary tactics as well as to address his relationship with Stowe and to further meditate on white allyship.

By locating his discussion of Brown and his clash with Truth so close together, Douglass blends the two, thereby crafting a narrative about his own political trajectory that reinforces his position as a representative black leader.[63] The chronological location of Douglass's retelling in the "John Brown and Mrs. Stowe" chapter reads oddly: the reader moves from Douglass's 1847 meeting with Brown to his 1852 meeting with Truth (the timing of which Douglass conceals), then back to 1848 and the Free-Soil Convention in Buffalo. In the span of two paragraphs, the narrative folds several years. Douglass has interpolated a scene achronologically so he can emphasize his leadership.

According to *Life and Times,* Douglass moves from moral suasionist to revolutionary thanks only to Brown's influence. The recounting gives ethical meaning and narrative arc to a story that is actually messy and complex. For Douglass's readers, radical violence becomes the source of Douglass's break with William Lloyd Garrison and a defining feature of his later politics. Although Douglass's views on violence as an antislavery tactic did indeed evolve, his break with Garrisonian abolitionism had much to do with the personalities and personal relationship of the two men; likewise, both Garrison and Douglass always held ambiguous, fluid views on violence. Emphasizing the question of revolutionary violence in this section of *Life and Times,* however, lets Douglass control the story of his political evolution during the 1840s and 1850s so as to dovetail with his life story

[63] On Douglass' "representative identity," see Levine, *Martin Delany*.

in the 1880s and 1890s. By opening the chapter with Brown's influence on his thinking, Douglass portrays himself, through the debate with Truth, as a leaderly black man with discerning judgment. He was correct, he reminds us: so profound is his insight that he actually prophesies the Civil War.

More than anything else, it is the war that creates meaning in Douglass's rewriting of the initial debate scene. In Stowe's versions, the bloodshed that Douglass invokes is that of a black uprising. The press accounts, though ambiguous, plausibly corroborate her depiction. But in *Life and Times*, Douglass does not mention black rebellion. Rather, the passage culminates in "the war for the maintenance of the Union." Douglass erases black insurrection's radical violence and replaces it with the patriotic response of the Union North. Though some black newspapers like the *Weekly Anglo-African* equated black military activity with slave revolt, Douglass deploys the Civil War's memory to mean something other than black insurrection.

It may be tempting to interpret this switch as Douglass gravitating later in life toward establishment politics, as many have asserted. After all, he became a prominent Republican booster and government official. Precisely because Douglass's position on violence evolved throughout his lifetime, however, it would be a mistake to interpret his account as a straightforward statement on his politics in the 1880s and '90s. Contextualized within his final autobiography, Douglass prophesies the war, demonstrating in 1881 and 1892 his acumen as a black male leader. And as I argued earlier, he vindicates himself by aligning himself with history. By swapping his insistence on black revolt with his support for the Union Army, Douglass stands on

the right side of history: with Lincoln, Emancipation, and the Union.[64] In Douglass's retelling, insurrection's extra-legal violence, which once seemed to him to be black people's best hope for liberation, now becomes implicitly aligned with the insurgent white South. Following the Union's victory over the Confederacy, Douglass switches the terms of insurrection—it was not the enslaved but the enslaver who rebelled—thus legitimizing black action through proximity to state power. The passage constitutes dense but subtle legacy work for the Union North as well as for Douglass himself. It constitutes, too, a defense of black rights in the 1880s and '90s.

Recountings of the Douglass-Truth debate are partly about what will achieve black freedom. By replacing black insurrection with the Union Army, Douglass makes one more such argument, this time speaking to black people's plight near the turn of the century, including, in David Blight's words, "racial discrimination, the denial of black voting rights in the District, disappointment with the Republican Party, recurring violence against freed-people in the South, and emerging fears that the great changes wrought by the Reconstruction amendments were under dire threat."[65] In his famous speech, "Lessons of the Hour" (1894), for instance, Douglass denounces the horrors of the "Southern mob" that replaced "civil authority" with lynch law, a form of white terrorism as well as "a means of paving the way for our entire disfranchisement."[66]

64 On Douglass' relationship to Lincoln's memory and afterlife, see Levine,*Lives*, 179–239.
65 Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 638–89.
66 Frederick Douglass, "The Lessons of the Hour," in *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass: A Critical Edition*, ed. John R. McKivigan, Julie Husband, and Heather L Kaufman (New Haven: Yale UP, 2018), 459, 472.

The state provided little defense against such white revanchism, and by the 1880s and ’90s Douglass loudly condemned “the federal government’s refusal to enforce laws and protect black people.”[67] Southern blacks had effectively been abandoned, perhaps most obviously in the Supreme Court’s repeated rulings against the Reconstruction amendments, which were rendered “nothing more than dead letters” according to the National Colored Convention.[68] When the Court struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875, Douglass declared that “in humiliating the colored people of this country, this decision has humbled the Nation” and “presents the United States before the world as a Nation utterly destitute of power to protect the rights of its own citizens upon its own soil.”[69] Even Douglass’s Republican Party, once an apparent defender of black rights, refused to come to African Americans' defense.[70]

In rewriting 1852, Douglass inscribes the message that he spread widely in the 1880s and ’90s: federal intervention was needed to fight slavery, and federal intervention was again needed to guarantee black rights against disfranchisement, segregation, and white violence. The passage exemplifies Douglass’s new “memory war” in which he framed his calls for “hope and progress” in the present by summoning the Civil War past.[71] Against sectional reconciliation at the expense of

67 Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 655.
68 Ibid., 644.
69 Frederick Douglass, “This Decision Has Humbled the Nation,” in *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass,* 364.
70 Blight, *Frederick Douglass*, 613. On Reconstruction, see Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988); Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*; and Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America’s Most Progressive Era* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).
71 Blight, *Frederick Douglass,* 627, 639.

black lives and rights, he demanded a "politics of confrontation."[72] For Douglass in 1852, racial chattel slavery required a black revolt. For Douglass after the Civil War and Reconstruction, if black civil rights were to have meaning, then black people required a country to defend them.

Rewriting the old encounter with Sojourner Truth serves many purposes. It lets Douglass retell his own story again, so important in his final years. His rewriting, like all of the stories he told during his life, allows him to recast his image and legacy, and continue to portray himself as a representative leader. Twenty-nine years after the original argument, Douglass seemingly alters his stance about what freedom requires. Or rather, he adopts a new stance now that conditions demand. He no longer calls explicitly for black rebellion. As circumstances worsen for African Americans, Douglass hopes to harness the federal government again to serve liberation. He knows from the Civil War that black people find strange allies. What has not changed since 1852, and what has not changed from Stowe's versions, are the rhetorical uses for Sojourner Truth, and the uses to which Truth will put her interpreters.

"That Old Symbol"

Sojourner Truth herself enters this story last, but she perhaps best represents the whole: like the debate itself, she has been rewritten to meet many needs. Before her recovery as a representative figure for intersectionality and black feminism, Truth was best known for her cutting question to Douglass, popularized by Stowe's *Atlantic*

72 Ibid., 682.

depiction *Atlantic*.[73] Stowe's version proved so persistent that it followed Truth even in death: "Is God dead?" emblazons Truth's gravestone.[74]

But both Stowe and Douglass manipulated Truth's image for their own purposes. Each of their retellings poses a Truth character, as it were. Stowe writes her own vision of romantic and exotic blackness to eke out white readers' sympathy and forge cross-racial conciliation. Douglass, in contrast, uses Truth as a foil for his own black male leadership. Her "quaint" judgment as a "non-resistant" allows him to speak his prophetic judgment about the Civil War, which doubles as an argument for federal protection of Southern black (male) citizenship.[75] These accounts all treat Truth's identity as usable. How Stowe and Douglass represent Truth's black womanhood ultimately determines each version's meaning, yet focusing only on Truth's abjection risks falling into an interpretive dichotomy that Xiomara Santamarina cautions against: "Either the illiterate Truth was irredeemably susceptible to her interlocutors' agendas, or she was all-powerful."[76]

Truth was hardly all-powerful, but she did make and manipulate her own image alongside Stowe and Douglass, in the process challenging their projects. Just as much as Stowe or Douglass, Truth was an artist, and her primary art was her self-representation through new visual media and oratorical performance. Indeed, the story this chapter tells begins with Truth's pithy oratory in response to Douglass's

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73 Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 161. bell hooks' seminal text on black womanhood, *Ain't I a Woman* (1981), takes its title from a speech ascribed to Truth. Painter calls into question whether Truth herself spoke these words (or a version of them: "Ar'n't I a woman?"). Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 164–78. *Sojourner Truth*, 271.

74 On Truth's grave in Battle Creek, Michigan, see Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 271.

75 Douglass, *Life and Times*, 719.

76 Xiomara Santamarina, *Belabored Professions: Narratives of African American Working Womanhood* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 2005), 35.

appeal for insurrection. Without her canny and crafted question, "Is God gone?," there would be no debate or its textual afterlife.[77] She did not simply act as a passive inspiration; rather, along with Douglass's own contemporaneous speech, Truth creates one of the debate's original texts when she poses her provocative question, and subsequent representations have revised her text and written back to her. By coauthoring this debate and its later depictions, Truth also becomes a destabilizing presence within them. Like many writers since, Stowe and Douglass treated Truth not as a person but as a sign. Yet in doing so, they made of her something mythic and unfixable, as Truth herself sought to do. Her "anarchic, discordant, and antiauthoritarian identity" ultimately frustrated their attempts to discursively contain and control her.[78]

Truth does finally rewrite both Stowe and Douglass. At the end of her life, Truth alters her relationship to black violence in a way that also responds to her old depictions. She does so, circuitously, in her as-told-to autobiography, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1875). This text constitutes not so much a straightforward narrative, like its earlier version, as a multiauthored, multimedia scrapbook.[79] Reprinted in the 1875 *Narrative*, for example, is Stowe's 1863 *Atlantic* article, followed by a note on Truth's activities during the Civil War that suggests her changing attitude toward violence: "To the great work being done for the soldiers, she [Truth] lent a helping

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77 On Truth as an artist, especially on her use of visual media, see Carla L. Peterson, *"Doers of the Word": African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830–1880)* (New York: Oxford U Press, 1995), 24–55; and Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 200–49.

78 Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, 203, 200, 249. See also John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 2009), 105.

79 According to Ernest, the *Narrative* is actually a "complex bricolage of (auto)biographical narratives, sketches, letters, reviews, and even autographs, none of it authored directly by Truth herself." Ernest, *Chaotic Justice*, 126.

hand, seeking every opportunity to aid them. The first colored troops that enlisted from Battle Creek encamped in Detroit. As the thanksgiving season approached, Sojourner proposed that the citizens of that city should send the 'boys' a dinner, to which they cordially responded."[80] In supporting the Union's black soldiers, Truth appears to have revised her earlier opposition to liberatory violence.

But the 1875 *Narrative* also reprints an account of Truth's alleged reaction to Stowe's *Atlantic* article: "She was then full of intense interest in the war, and foresaw its result in the emancipation of her race. It was touching to see her eager face when the newspapers were read in her presence. She would never listen to Mrs. Stowe's 'Libyan Sibyl.' 'Oh!' she would say, 'I do n't want to hear about that old symbol; read me something that is going on now, something about this great war.'"[81] This Truth is a far cry from the moral suasionist depicted by Stowe or Douglass. She actively supports "the 'boys'" and expresses "intense interest in the war." She rejects Stowe's *Atlantic* article—as well as its depiction of a nonviolent Truth—in favor of news about "this great war." And, cannily, she preempts Douglass as a prophet for her people: Truth suggests she foresaw the results of the war, if not its start, in a way that anticipates Douglass' attempt to position himself as the conflict's seer. According to the *Narrative*, this account originally appeared in "the spring of 1864," nearly twenty years before Douglass's final autobiography first appears. Truth, like Douglass, has a legacy as a representative black leader to maintain.

80 Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Boston, 1875).
81 Truth, "Narrative of Sojourner Truth," 174.

By containing Stowe's article and other newspaper accounts of Truth in its bricolage, the 1884 *Narrative* signifies on the Douglass-Truth debate's afterlife. Unlike Douglass's *Life and Times*, Truth's as-told-to autobiography does not offer a definitive counternarrative to Stowe's *Atlantic* version. Instead, the *Narrative* calls into question *all* past portrayals. Truth pointedly does not take issue with what Stowe's article says; rather, she just puts the article aside. "That old symbol" cannot speak to what is "going on now." Here she demands something new, a testimony different from her old question, "Is God gone?" Truth again complicates and provokes. Impossible to arrest, evincing shifting or even contradictory views on violence, Truth addresses Stowe's famous biography in a way that emblematizes her own role in the story of her encounter with Douglass.

Their textual dueling could not last forever, yet the afterlife of the Douglass-Truth debate would continue after the lives of Douglass, Truth, and Stowe had all ended. Even following their deaths, the story of the exchange between the two black abolitionists would serve as a narrative strategy for engaging ideas about blackness and liberatory violence, and for new generations of writers to position these three author-activists as leaders in the nation's conflicted legacy of racial justice.[82] All three had become old symbols. Recirculating across decades, rewritten to meet new ends, their own images and their language of black rebellion offered a way to think

[82] For Eleanor Gridley, the story actually offered a way to depict Douglass, Truth, and even Abraham Lincoln. In her biography, *The Story of Abraham Lincoln* (ca.1900), the debate becomes a way to narrate not the problem of black violence or the racial justice projects of Douglass, Truth, and Stowe, or even to establish them as leaderly figures. Rather, Gridley retells the story in order to depict Lincoln's leadership of the nation and his movement toward Emancipation. Eleanor Gridley, *The Story of Abraham Lincoln: or, The Journey from the Log Cabin to the White House* (Chicago: M. A. Donohue & Co., [1900?]), 244–48.

through resistance, movement leadership, and the nation's history. Bernier tells us that "acts of black militancy remain indivisible from arts of black creativity."[83] The Douglass-Truth debate further tells us that writers, whether black or not, repurposed black militancy and creativity for new, sometimes divergent, ends.

Although Douglass's account of the debate realigned liberatory violence with state power instead of with extra-legal insurrection, other writers continued to envision action outside of the law. At the same moment that Truth and Douglass wrote to secure their legacies as leaders of the nineteenth century's racial justice movements, a young anarchist and labor agitator adopted abolitionism's militant language for her own radical project, one perhaps at odds with Douglass's efforts to legitimize black violence by aligning it with the Union Army. Slave revolt's radical image might still move audiences even after Emancipation, she thought. Now it would speak not to the fight against slavery but to the fight against capitalism.

[83] Bernier, *Characters of Blood*, xix.

Chapter Three: Lucy Parsons and Slave Revolt's Long Durée

Introduction

Upon the death of anarchist and labor agitator Lucy Eldine González Parsons (c. 1851-1942), the longtime radical's library and personal papers were seized. No agency ever claimed responsibility for the act, and her papers remain lost. Whether the work of the Chicago police's Red Squad or the FBI, the vanishing of Lucy Parsons's archive stands in for a larger problem in the study of her life-long activism and writing: in a sense we do not know who she was. Variously identified in the nineteenth century as "la mestiza," "mulatto," and "negro," Parsons herself claimed Native American and Mexican ancestry. Ever since, the few scholars who have studied her have debated the truthfulness of her self-telling, usually reading her vexed racial identifications as evidence of a "class-only" politics. According to Carolyn Ashbaugh, "Her denial of her blackness, and therefore of her oppression as a black woman, made it exceedingly difficult for her to analyze her social position in relation to anything but her class status," a reading revived in Parsons's most recent biography.[1]

1 Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary,* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1976): 266; Shelley Streeby, *Radical Sensations: World Movements, Violence, and Visual Culture,* (Durham: Duke UP, 2013): 39, 62; Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 66; Jacqueline Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy: The Life and Times of Lucy Parsons, American Radical,* (New York: Basic Books, 2017): xiv, 343, 42. For more of the limited work on Parsons, which reveals a shifting reception of her claims about her race, see Gale Ahrens, ed., *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004); Rebecca Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law: Anti-Lynching and Labor Defense in U.S. Radical History,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); and Dave Roediger, "Strange Legacies: The Black International & Black America," in *Haymarket*

Parsons did indeed commit herself to working class rebellion. Once dubbed "more dangerous than a thousand rioters," her radical agitation bridged the Civil War and Second World War. Likely born enslaved (whether in Texas or Virginia), Parsons became a key figure among the Chicago anarchists and labor radicals of the 1880s, engaging in militant labor organizing from that time until her death in 1942. She was at the center of the 1886 Haymarket events and activists' subsequent struggle against state repression. Following a confrontation with the police and a bombing by an unknown party on May 4th, 1886, key Chicago anarchists, including Parsons's husband, Albert, were rounded up, tried, and executed in a sweeping act of political persecution. Parsons then became a lifelong defender and memorializer of the Haymarket martyrs. In organizing legal defense and memorial projects for Albert and the other Haymarket defendants, Lucy Parsons pioneered a legal defense campaign tradition that would become central to social justice struggle into the present.[2] Her incendiary speeches and writings, in which she encouraged the working class to rise

Scrapbook, eds. Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986): 93-6. For scholarship on Parsons specifically within Latinx studies, see Rodolfo Acuña, *Occupied America; the Chicano's Struggle Toward Liberation,* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972); Laura Lomas, "*'El negro es tan capaz como el blanco*': José Martí, 'Pachín' Marín, Lucy Parsons, and the Politics of Late-Nineteenth-Century *Latinidad*," *The Latino Nineteenth Century: Archival Encounters in American Literary History,* ed. by Rodrigo Lazo and Jesse Alemán *(*New York: NYU Press, 2016); and Alfredo Mirandé and Evangelina Enríquez, *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Victor Valle and Rodolfo D. Torres, "After *Latino Metropolis*," in *Latino Urbanism,* ed. by David R. Diaz and Rodolfo D. Torres, (New York: NYU Press, 2012).

2 Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, xiii-xvii. Ahrens, *Lucy Parsons*, 5. For the argument that Parsons was not born in Texas, as has long been believed, but rather in Virginia, see Jacqueline Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy: The Life and Times of Lucy Parsons, American Radical,* (New York: Basic Books, 2017). See Streeby, *Radical Sensations* and Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law* for studies of Parsons's memory and legal defense work. The recent—and successful—legal defense campaign for those arrested for protesting Trump's inauguration exemplifies the kind of work that Parsons herself did on behalf of the Haymarket martyrs. For an overview of the Haymarket events, see Sidney Lens, "The Bomb at Haymarket," in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, eds. Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986): 11-19.

up against exploitation, have since become touchstones in US radical history, even while also inspiring skepticism from critics.

But Parsons's rebellious thought was actually more complex than scholars have acknowledged: she deploys language and imagery of black revolt that speculatively connects labor struggles with racial justice struggles. By focusing on the discursiveness of Parsons's work—that is, her canny use of language and culture to affect audiences—critics can reevaluate her and her cultural significance. To that end, this chapter takes as a case study one of her most important concepts and metaphors, a speculative idea that I dub "wage slave revolt."[3] In much of her writing and speaking, Parsons depicts working class resistance as a type of slave rebellion not simply by identifying capitalism as a new Slave Power but by reclaiming the figure of the slave rebel as the essential actor in freedom struggles. Doing so imagines for her readers new, more militant directions in the activist movements of the long nineteenth century.

Scrutinizing Parsons's wage slave revolt removes the major stumbling blocks to her critical recovery. This concept's very figurative-ness attests to Parsons's discursive sophistication, her attention to audience, her ability to craft a persona and imaginative scenes for readers and auditors experiencing her through mass media—in short, her "literariness." Moreover, her use of antislavery metaphor indicates that her labor radicalism drew substantively from antislavery. To be sure, she never elevates racial justice to the level that anticapitalism holds in her thought. However, slave

3 Because Parsons extensively uses the term "wage slave," and because she works in terms of figural concepts rather than in terms of the lived experiences of enslaved people, I elect to use "slave" rather than "enslaved" throughout this chapter.

revolt's importance for her disproves that she is the "class-only" radical many still interpret her to be. In short, my approach recovers Parsons's interest in race; the importance of wage slave revolt to her work further reveals how the idea of black rebellion enabled radicals and writers to speculate not only connections between movements but new forms of resistance.

The reparative reading of Parsons's work that I undertake here holds implications beyond just her biography or textual black rebellion, though. Approaching Parsons as such a literary writer with meaningful investments in racial justice actually pushes critics to reimagine periodization and the nineteenth century because her work becomes a keystone in a discourse of slave revolt that bridges eras. Attending to her textual sophistication reveals that she adopted a militant antislavery rhetoric so as to make working class resistance legible to post-Reconstruction audiences who were already familiar with abolitionism's legacy. At least on the surface, the movement to abolish chattel slavery carried the day, and abolitionism's effects were still being felt in the 1880s when Parsons first became active.[4] She drew on this still recent history as a recognizable source for her writing and activism, putting forward a unified version of antislavery that best accorded with her labor radicalism.[5] Her notion of wage slave revolt thus becomes a point of contact between antislavery and anticapitalism.

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4 For an account focusing on the persistence of slavery after the Civil War, see Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

5 Thus whereas previous chapters partly explored divisions within antislavery, the present chapter focuses on how one author-activist devised and deployed a more coherent afterlife of antislavery to speak to class struggles in her present moment.

Indeed, it actually becomes a point at which the antebellum and postbellum articulate. Scholars have debated at length rethinking the way we organize the intellectual terrain of the nineteenth century. For instance, in reconceptualizing the Civil War's role as a period marker—denoted by "antebellum" and "postbellum"—Cody Marrs usefully poses the term "transbellum" to describe the war's "periodic fluidity." The war itself traveled across time as a subject or perhaps obsession for many authors, yet many of these authors themselves wrote long before and after the conflict. For Marrs, then, authorial careers make the later 1800s coherent despite the seeming social rupture of the war. In contrast, Michael T. Gilmore asserts that the "censor," the policing of ideas and language particularly regarding the nation's racial imagination, represents the fundamental continuity between the antebellum and postbellum. However, in this chapter I follow Parsons herself by offering a different way to write a "transbellum" account of the nineteenth century: slave revolt. Using Parsons as a representative case, I will show that the notion of slave revolt held cultural power over audiences even after the supposed end of slavery.[6]

We can extend this reperiodization still further: Parsons's speculative vision of wage slave revolt drew connections to the antislavery past even as it presaged future radical thought and action in the twentieth century. At the turn of the century, Parsons's depiction of wage slave revolt came to mean a new form of direct action against capitalism: the general strike, a mass uprising of the working class. As I will show, by couching the general strike in terms of resisting "slavery," Parsons preempts

6 Cody Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Michael T. Gilmore, *The War on Words: Slavery, Race, and Free Speech in American Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

one of the key texts and theoretical developments of black scholarship. She, like later writers, emphasized “slaves'” resistance in order to center their agency and role in freedom struggles. She belongs to a tradition. In this way her depictions of slave rebellion provide a through-line across the antebellum, the postbellum, and even the early twentieth century.

The life, writings, and activism of Lucy Parsons actually do a great deal of work for critics—but only if we consider her as a literary figure who took race seriously, albeit imperfectly. For Parsons, her figurative language represents real theorizing about the correspondences and continuities of oppressions and the nature of resistance. Whereas this dissertation's first chapters demonstrated black rebellion's power to speak to questions of race, the current chapter shows slave revolt's ability to speak to other freedom struggles, particularly to class struggle. For that reason, I focus on wage slave revolt in the work of this neglected indigenous and Afro-Mexican anarchist. After first recounting her biography and critical reception, this chapter theorizes her use of wage slave revolt before examining it in two fuller, more nuanced literary readings. Although we may never be able to recover her lost archive, we can better understand Parsons by treating her extant writing and speeches as literary. More than just an exercise in recovery, though, scrutinizing Parsons's writing calls critics to a new accounting of nineteenth century African American literary and cultural history, one with a primary place for this radical, multiracial woman author.

Recovering Lucy Parsons

Explicitly or not, most scholars approach race in Parsons's work largely through her biography. Thus we should ask, just who was this anarchist agitator?[7] In truth, the erasure of Parsons's archive and the critical misreadings of her since her death have only replicated the uncertainty about her "true" self that she experienced in life. After all, the press and her critics constantly questioned her identity. She presented as racially ambiguous and publicly claimed Mexican and Native American descent. Carolyn Ashbaugh, Parsons's most influential biographer, argues that "Lucy Parsons internalized the racism of white society to the extent that she denied her own black ancestry." Elsewhere Ashbaugh more sympathetically points out that "Lucy and Albert Parsons were two displaced persons from Reconstruction; they were political refugees from the Ku Klux Klan and the renascent Democratic party in the South." She tells a harrowing story:

> In 1872 Lucy Gathings and Albert Parsons left Waco, Texas together. Albert had been a Confederate scout during the Civil War, but he had become a Radical Republican and an advocate of civil rights for black people after the war. Lucy was of mixed blood, and she had been living with the former black slave Oliver Gathings. Lucy and Albert were hated as miscegenationists by fellow Texans and when

7 The political philosophy of anarchism can be understood as an anti-statist variety of anti-capitalism, in contrast to orthodox Marxism, which considers seizing state power to be a necessary step toward communism. The anarchist rejection of the state derives from a rejection of any perceived form of coercive hierarchy. Thus for the anarchist Parsons, labor agitation, organizing against state repression, and even racial justice would be related political projects.

> Reconstruction came to an end in 1873, they knew they would have to leave Texas.[8]

Parsons herself bore witness to Klan violence in Texas, Ashbaugh speculates. In Ashbaugh's telling, Parsons coped by downplaying her blackness in favor of indigeneity and Mexicanness, using different maiden names on different state documents. Albert Parsons and his brother William, himself an eventual convert to labor reform and racial justice, would both similarly assert her "Spanish-Indian" lineage.[9] Despite these versions of her family history, both comrades and critics would claim a black identity for her throughout her life, to say nothing of her biographers. Her children were variously identified as "Negro" and "nigger" on birth certificates, while mobs slurred her as a "black bitch" and journalists tried to drum up scandal around her interracial relationship with Albert. Meanwhile, in anti-anarchist texts such as Schaack's *Anarchy and Anarchists*, Parsons was described as "mulatto." Parsons's other family members would eventually assert that her blackness was a family secret.[10]

What would Parson's own claims of Native American and Mexican identity accomplish for her? These were racial groups facing their own threats of violence and exclusion and caricature, after all, whether from the US government, white vigilantes, workplaces, print media, or others. Whatever security she might have found in choosing those identities instead of blackness would have been relative rather than absolute. However, those identities did hold their own implications. Public

8 Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 66, 18-9, 13.
9 Ibid., 14, 62.
10 Ibid., 36, 40, 81, 99; Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, 62; Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 267 n4.

questioning of Parsons's racial identity coincided with her growing prominence among the Chicago anarchists, particularly during the Haymarket trials. Thus in claiming indigeneity and Mexicanness Parsons could make arguments about anarchists as well as about the US: in one 1888 address, for instance, she traces her lineage back to native insurgents who fought "the conquering hosts of Cortez" and dubs herself "the genuine American." In doing so, she locates herself in a tradition of heroic resistance to settler-colonialism, whether committed by European nations or the US. As Shelley Streeby elaborates, "While Parsons's emphasis on her indigenous American-ness may respond to charges that the Haymarket anarchists were foreigners whose values were therefore alien to republican America, her allusion to the 'invasion' of Mexico reminds her listeners of the long history of empire-building in Mexico and the Americas."[11]

"Recovering" Parsons carries high stakes as her shifting relationship to race has played into persistent readings of her as a strictly "class-only" radical.[12] Ashbaugh is explicit in drawing political meaning from Parsons's racial ambiguity. According to Ashbaugh's biography, Parsons's "denial of her blackness" interfered with her thinking on race; more pointedly still, she writes that Parsons's labor activism, and the event of the Haymarket Massacre and subsequent defense campaign, "would give her little time to think about racism for years." Parsons's more recent biographer, Jacqueline Jones, revives Ashbaugh's thesis by dubbing the anarchist's self-identifications as lies: Parsons "offered up a fiction about her origins

11 Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, 84.

12 For examples of such readings, see Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002): 41, 42; Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, 84 and 85; and Valle and Torres, "After *Latino Metropolis*," 199.

and denied key elements of her own past," "created a false biography," and devised an inauthentic "crafted persona."[13] Similar to Ashbaugh, Jones asserts that Parsons's disavowal of her own blackness led her to avoid black struggle and black communal life.[14]

When Jones, Ashbaugh, and others argue that Parsons eschewed racial justice issues, they are partly right: Parsons simply did not attend to race as substantively or as often as she did class or even gender. Despite noting that *Freedom* under Parsons's editorship acknowledged the significance of anti-blackness, Roediger claims that Parsons "had little sense of racial oppression" and added little to efforts by black activists to address lynchings, for example. "The history of Haymarket and Black America was one of close connections, never made," Roediger concludes.[15] In terms of column space, Parsons devoted less to discussions of race. It is also true, as Jones claims, that Parsons did note take part in Chicago's black social world: she lived and organized in white ethnic and immigrant communities. In these important ways, then, Parsons gave more more time, energy, and personal involvement to labor activism.

However, critics like Jones who read Parsons as "class-only" divest her writing and speeches of their sophistication: for these critics, she can only be deceptive or superficially straightforward or both. This becomes true both personally and politically. In response to Parsons's racial self-identifications, Jones and others skeptically interrogate and ultimately dismiss her claims, despite a long history of

13 Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 66; Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy*, ix, xiii, 42.

14 Ibid., xi, 55-6, 349. Shelley Streeby, in contrast, takes seriously Parsons's claims of indigineity and Mexicanness while also reading her as black. Streeby's approach has offered me a model for validating the complex self-conception of this woman of color while simultaneously thinking critically about the cultural work performed by Parsons's narrative(s).

15 Roediger, "Strange Legacies," 94, 96.

whites interpreting black people as inauthentic.[16] Likewise, writing of the "bomb-talk" of the Chicago anarchists, Floyd Dell asserts that their militant rhetoric "was done partly to attract attention to their beliefs—it was a way of shocking the public into attention. So desperate a means of securing an audience is only taken by a small faction—it is the sign of weakness." Jones revives Dell's thesis as one of her own book's central claims. Jones dismisses Parsons's militant rhetoric as insincere and naïve. Punning on the anarchist newspaper, *The Alarm*, Jones asks of the Chicago anarchists, "Could they blast the laboring classes out of their sluggishness by spreading the gospel of dynamite? Were they themselves even true believers of that gospel? Or, more likely, were their threats merely rhetorical, idle, and the alarms they raised simply false?" According to Jones, Parsons and her cohort "fail(ed) to think past their own words" of revolutionary violence and "promoted that criminal message with impunity, and with breathtaking naiveté."[17] To claim, as Ashbaugh and Jones both do, that Parsons's denial of her blackness drives her naïve class-only politics unites these skeptical readings of Parsons's personal and political sides. The result is a totalizing picture of the activist. Given the long history of paternalistic and "sociological" readings of black people, and black women in particular, such readings should give us pause.

16 See my discussion of pseudo-slave narratives in chapter one.

17 Floyd Dell, "Bomb-Talking" in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, eds. Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986): 74. Jones 116, 107, 108. Jones elsewhere blames the militant rhetoric of the Chicago anarchists for the state's violently repressive attacks on the labor movement. Such readings as these hold Parsons up as a cautionary tale and a betrayal of peaceful protest, "who fell back on threats of violence." (xv) My reading of Parsons in this chapter seeks to rethink her words as more discursively textured than Dell or Jones allow.

I argue for a different approach, one that takes for granted the discursive complexity of Parsons's lifelong work. Literary studies is ideally suited to this task. In one sense, there can be no definitive answer to questions about Parsons's racial identity.[18] But following John Ernest, I suggest that critics attend less to diversionary questions about Parsons's "true" identity and instead "look at the race that extends beyond the identity or social position of authors, the race that is manifest in the literature."[19] If scholars only approach Parsons in the paternalistic and implicitly racist terms of idleness, naiveté, and criminality, then her racial identity and subsequent politics will inevitably be read in terms of (in)authenticity, (dis)avowal, even racial passing. Instead, what if we read her words as sophisticated, purposeful discursive acts in service of multiple activist movements? In short, what if Parsons's work is both more invested in blackness and more discursively savvy than her interlocutors admit?

I want to suggest that hers were not false alarms or mere bomb-talk but actually canny—albeit incendiary—discourse. Taking Parsons's depictions of wage slave revolt as a representative case study in her long life's work, the rest of this chapter will unfold a novel reading of Parsons that centers her "literariness" and thinking about race. She becomes in this new interpretation a bridging figure, part of a "transbellum" discourse on "slaves'" resistance. Indeed, her long life comes to exemplify slave revolt's long durée and the speculative power of rebellious violence.

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18 Jones, in her biography, does make a convincing case for Parsons's birth as a slave in Virginia, contra Parsons's own claims to the contrary. However, this claim necessarily places trust in the troubled archive of Atlantic slavery and dismisses entirely Parsons's self-identifications.

19 John Ernest, *Chaotic Justice: Rethinking African American Literary History*, (Chapel Hill N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009): 7.

Waging Slave Revolt: Antislavery Rhetoric and the Working Class

For such an allegedly straightforward and "class-only" radical, Parsons makes extensive use of a fundamentally racial metaphor in order to advance her politics. In her postbellum world the ideas of labor and antislavery reform were still closely connected. These two social justice movements sometimes seem distant now, especially after decades of criticism have called attention to the conflict between the friends of the enslaved and the friends of the wage worker.[20] However, given the fluidity and cross-pollination of nineteenth century reform cultures in the US, abolitionism and various anti-capitalist tendencies shared much in common. The enemies of abolition certainly thought so. Antislavery and other "progressive" movements belonged to one grand abolitionist project, at least according to the slavery apologist and jurist George Fitzhugh: "We treat the Abolitionists and Socialists as identical, because they are notoriously the same people, employing the same arguments and bent on the same schemes. Abolition is the first step in Socialism; the former proposes to abolish negro slavery, the latter all kinds of slavery—religion, government, marriage, families, property—nay, human nature itself." Fitzhugh was hardly alone in fearing that abolitionists had allied with other

20 For scholarship emphasizing the divide between antislavery and labor reform, see Marcus Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979): 27-31; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, (New York: Cornell UP, 1975): 350; and Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn*, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000), 196, 238-9. Others have offered counter-narratives asserting the convergence of the two movements, including Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1980); and Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

reformers, as “Southern proslavery writers saw abolition as akin to the dangerous -*isms* of the revolutions, Fourerism, socialism, communism, 'free lovism,' feminism, 'bloomerism,' agrarianism, and 'Proudhonism.'” Slaveholders' fears of a vast abolitionist alliance are perhaps overblown, but those fears are not mere paranoia either.[21] Antislavery existed within a constellation of reform movements. Abolitionism's rank-and-file shared a host of issues with other reformers, ranging from land reform to utopian communities to early anticolonialism to varieties of anticapitalism.[22] Movements shared members too.[23]

Although there was crossover in terms of both issues and activists, it was really with the movement for an eight-hour workday that abolitionism significantly gave way to labor reform after Emancipation. Marx himself posited as much in one of *Capital*'s often quoted passages:

> In the United States of America, every independent workers' movement was paralysed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the republic. Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin. However, a new life immediately arose from

21 Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 365. For more on Fitzhugh's and Jefferson Davis's own fears of collaboration between abolitionists and socialists, see Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Yankee International: Marxism and the American Reform Tradition, 1848-1876*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998): 25-6.

22 Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 339-80. My argument that labor and racial justice were more closely bound together for Parsons than usually thought relies especially on the work of Sinha, Foner, and Messer-Kruse.

23 Labor radicals like George Henry Evans and Henry Clarke Wright crossed over into antislavery, while Wendell Phillips, James Redpath, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, and Lysander Spooner all became socialists and anarchists. See Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford UP, 1980) 61; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 347-8, 589; John R. McKivigan, *Forgotten Firebrand: James Redpath and the Making of Nineteenth-Century America*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008): 171-2, 186, 190; “Views on Socialism: Colonel T. W. Higginson Speaks With His Well Known Conciseness” in *The Cambridge Tribune*, October 21, 1905; Jeffrey A. Tucker, *The Lysander Spooner Reader*, (San Francisco: Fox & Wilkes, 1992).

> the death of slavery. The first fruit of the American Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, which ran from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from New England to California, with the seven-league boots of the locomotive.

According to Marx, the movement for a shorter working day developed out of the abolition of slave labor, beginning the next phase in the wider class struggle. Indeed, "Labor movements after the war saw themselves as heirs of the abolition movement," and in practice groups like the Knights of Labor (KoL) did inherit the language and organizational knowledge of abolitionism. It was the KoL that would become most widely identified with eight-hour agitation during the "Great Upheaval" of the 1880s, a period of especially militant working class struggle. Parsons emerged as a writer, speaker, and agitator during these years. And although she and many of the other Chicago anarchists of the International Working People's Association (IWPA) rejected the KoL's reformist demands for better pay, safer conditions, and shorter hours in favor of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, Parsons nonetheless sided with them for the fateful eight-hour general strike of May 1st, 1886.[24]

Despite evolving along a reform trajectory in some ways very distinct from the antislavery organizing of the past, Parsons and the IWPA would put rebellion against chattel slavery to use in a way that advanced an anticapitalist project.[25] Her

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24 Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume One*, trans. by Ben Fowkes, (New York: Penguin, 1990): 414; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 358; Foner, *Politics and Ideology*, 76; Richard Schneirov, "'An Injury to One is the Concern of All' The Knights of Labor in the Haymarket Era,"in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, eds. Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986): 81.

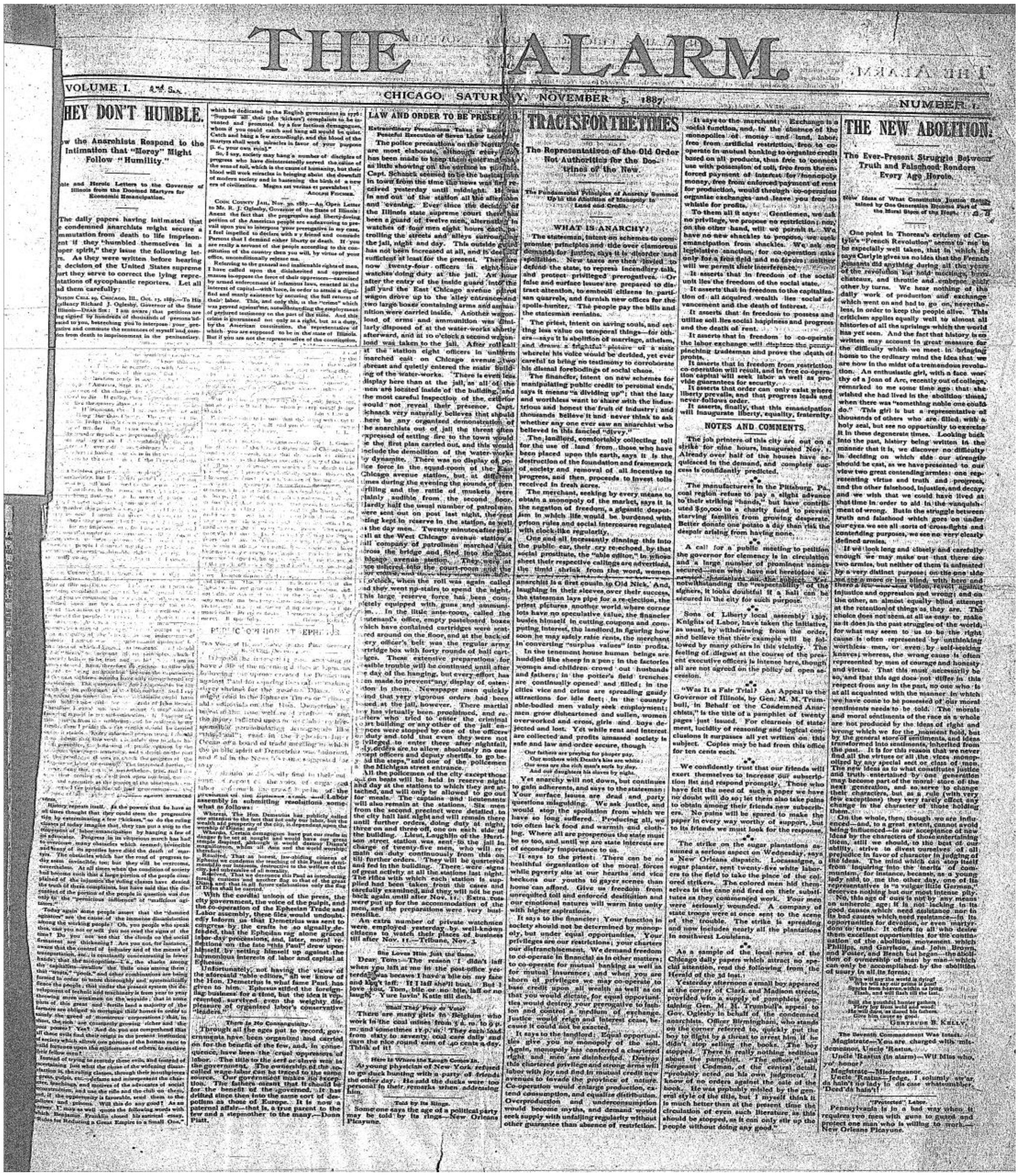
25 Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy*, 51. Whereas the New England abolitionist Lysander Spooner developed an individualist version of anarchism from his confrontation with state-sponsored chattel slavery, the IWPA in Chicago drew from the revolutionary socialist traditions of the city's European immigrants, particularly from Germany.

writing and speaking were actually deeply influenced by the recent history and conceptual vocabulary of black freedom struggle. She showed as much when the 1886 general strike devolved into the infamous Haymarket Affair.[26] The subsequent legal defense campaign, as well as Parsons's other writings, utilized images of slave rebellion, sentimental antislavery, and abolitionist iconography in order to rally support for the persecuted anarchists. It was a discursive move that Parsons would make throughout her lifelong activist career, helping to shape radical politics, labor reform, and community self-defense for decades to come. Her new "abolitionist" rhetoric connected justice movements from the nation's past with ones from Parsons's present. While scholars have studied some of her activist work, the literariness and cultural power of her writing remains neglected.

Like many labor reformers across the antebellum and postbellum periods, Parsons drew a correspondence between chattel slavery and "wage slavery," between the exploitation of unfree and nominally free workers, in order to critique the capitalist system.[27] In an 1885 article titled "Our Civilization: Is It Worth Saving?" published in the IWPA newspaper *The Alarm*, Parsons pleads with her readers, "Oh, working man! Oh, starved, outraged, and robbed laborer, how long will you lend attentive ear to the authors of your misery? When will you become tired of your slavery and show the same by stepping boldly into the arena with those who declare

26 For an overview of the Haymarket events, see Sidney Lens, "The Bomb at Haymarket," in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, eds. Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986).

27 On "wage slavery" discourses, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) and Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Arguably the period's most prominent US socialist, Eugene V. Debs, makes extensive use throughout his speeches of comparisons between wage labor and slavery.


THE ALARM.

VOLUME I. CHICAGO, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1887. NUMBER 1.

THEY DON'T HUMBLE.

How the Anarchists Respond to the Intimation that "Mercy" Might Follow "Humility."

LAW AND ORDER TO BE PRESERVED.

TRACTS FOR THE TIMES

The Representatives of the Old Order Not Authorities for the New.

WHAT IS ANARCHY?

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

THE NEW ABOLITION.

The Ever-Present Struggle Between Truth and Falsehood Renders Every Age Heroic.

Figure 4: The first page of the inaugural issue of the IWPA paper *The Alarm*.

that 'Not to be a slave is to dare and DO?'" It is a representative piece of her rhetoric. She poses a comparison between "working men" and slaves in the form of a challenge to her readers' working class masculinity, implying their "unmanly" servility for consenting to oppression.[28] This "wage slavery" metaphor was used by a range of movements and constituencies, including labor reformers, early feminists and suffragists, and US nativists. In one sense, Parsons's deployment of the term "wage slavery" signals her wider anarchist project and desire to abolish all coercive institutions.[29] But the wage slavery metaphor was not inherently progressive; it could be used just as easily to appropriate antislavery struggle in order to define and privilege whiteness and exclusive national belonging.[30]

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28 Lucy Parsons, "Our Civilization: Is It Worth Saving?," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, ed. Gale Ahrens, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004): 45. Parsons's writing, both public and private, is full of such moments that indicate the debt she owed to antislavery discourses. In a letter to Joseph Labadie from 1886, Parsons signs off, "Yours for emancipated labor." A phrase resonant with both abolitionists and revolutionary socialists, "emancipated labor" takes on a special meaning in the post-Emancipation labor world; it suggests a continuation of abolitionism's emancipatory project, perhaps confirming Fitzhugh's fear of one grand abolitionist plot. Lucy Parsons, "What Anarchy Means," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, ed. Gale Ahrens, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004): 57.

29 Amy Dru Stanley could well be writing about Parsons when she explains that "Not all Americans wholly accepted the antislavery claim that abolition had ended the buying, selling, and owning of human chattel. Instead many critics of postbellum life used slavery as a metaphor to assail conditions in both the North and the South." While anticapitalists like Parsons used slavery's labor register to make an argument on behalf of workers, the early women's movement "underscored the legal symmetry between slavery and marriage," a symmetry between the master's rights in the slave and the husband's rights in his wife. Some elements of antislavery, among black women especially, merged these perspectives to assert both the emancipation of the slave from bondage and black women's entitlement to their bodies as freedwomen. See Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998): xi, 176, 29-35.

30 In late-nineteenth century discourse on Chinese immigration in California magazines, "yellow slavery" signaled both a reform impulse toward the actually existing degraded working conditions of immigrant Chinese laborers as well as an act of exclusion based on the imagined moral degradation of Chinese men and women. The trope "register(ed) the seemingly contradictory yet mutually constitutive relationship between benevolent social reform and violent legal exclusion," offering a racialized shorthand for distinguishing "between citizen and foreigners, between reformable immigrants and unassimilable aliens, and between workers entitled to wages and racialized laborers subject to exploitation and dispossession." In an era after Emancipation, the slave figure served both as a sympathetic victim and an unwanted other to the nation's progress.

Still, Parsons found in the wage-slave metaphor a tool for "mainstreaming" her radical politics: she used the metaphor to define for her readers the conditions of capitalist oppression as well as to imagine the possibility of resistance. In the wake of the Civil War, antislavery offered national audiences a means to conceptualize workers' struggles. She fleshes out the well worn wage slave metaphor with a cast of characters, so to speak, in order to make labor relations under capitalism recognizable using slavery's more familiar terms. After all, Parsons worked primarily in mass circulation: as an orator she addressed lecture halls, rallies, or street corners, and as a writer she published in newspapers, broadsides, or pamphlets that were intended to spread widely. She therefore framed her ideas in terms of the century's most significant national events, still within personal memory for most of her audience. If the reality of the wage-relation is mystified under capitalism, Parsons sought to clarify it using the terms of antislavery. In an 1885 article in *The Advance and Labor Leaf*, she makes"good employers" the focal point of her wage slave comparison. Rebutting anti-anarchist critics, she writes,

> And as to those 'good employers,' so too there were good chattel slave masters, but what did that have to do with the system of chattel slavery, except to prolong its existence by having the good slave masters held up as shining examples to prove the harmony (?) existing between master and slave, which the horrible abolitionist would sever, just as is the case today with those relations between 'good' employers

Yu-Fang Cho, "Domesticating the Aliens Within: Sentimental Benevolence in Late-Nineteenth-Century California Magazines," *American Quarterly* 61, no. 1 (2009): 118, 120.

> and the wage-slaves, which the 'red-handed anarchist' is seeking to destroy.

Parsons elaborates an extended version of the wage slavery metaphor here. If ostensibly free workers are actually exploited "wage-slaves" under capitalism, then employers are likewise analogous to slave masters and plantation overseers. And in a fulfillment of Fitzhugh's worst fears, this passage rhetorically pairs the figure of "the horrible abolitionist" in the mind of Southern slaveholders with the "red-handed anarchist" in the minds of capitalists and the bourgeois public.[31] In moments like this, Parsons bridges antislavery and anticapitalism. She uses the historical victory of the former to "mainstream" the latter.

Comparisons between free and unfree workers were commonplace, of course; but Parsons's use of the wage slave metaphor is striking. She draws parallels not just between wage and enslaved workers but between waged workers' militancy and slave revolt. In "Wage-Slaves *Vs*. Corporations," Parsons asks her readers why they have not voted away their own exploitation, using slavery as her example: "What are you going to do about it? You had the ballot then. Could you have voted away black slavery? You know you could not because the slaveholders would not hear of such a thing for the same reason you can't vote yourselves out of wage-slavery." But what seems merely another rhetorical juxtaposition between wage and slave labor takes on a threat of violence:

> Remind [your employers] that the sword still hangs upon the wall and that the heart still beats within the man, and that *that* sword will be

31 Lucy Parsons, "What Anarchy Means," 60.

> unsheathed again, if necessary, in defense of your rights. Give them to understand that you will not stand patiently by and see your hard earnings squandered by a luxuriating class of idlers. If the American manhood will arouse itself and speak to those fellows in plain language, not to be misunderstood, they can save themselves, their country and their children, from the fate of poverty which awaits them. Will you do it?

The image of the sheathed sword stored on the wall is suggestive. It carries a threat of violent uprising, to be sure. But given the preceding references to both the abolition movement and to slave action, the sword becomes resonant with memories of the Union's abolition war or even with the old threat of slave rebellion. Elsewhere, Parsons is more explicit about the imagery of the slave rebel. In "What Anarchy Means," Parsons reads capitalist fears about anarchists in light of slaveholders' fears of abolitionists. The two agitators converge in the figure of the slave rebel: "The amusing part of this business to the average anarchist is just here—*i.e.*, that we are being used just now as a kind of bugaboo, a scarecrow to frighten the capitalists into certain concessions to their rebellious slaves, otherwise said slaves might become 'anarchist fiends.'" In these passages, Parsons suggests a correspondence between "wage-slaves" and chattel slaves not simply because of their conditions of exploitation but because of the threat that the "slaves" will rise up to overthrow their masters.[32]

32 Parsons, "Wage Slaves *VS*. Corporations,"100; Parsons, "What Anarchy Means," 58.

Even this language of "wage-slave revolt" had precedence, although Parsons would develop it and make it a central metaphor in her writing and speaking. The threat of workers rebelling against the conditions of their labor had been raised before. In "The Laboring Class" (1840), for example, the intellectual, reformer, and labor activist, Orestes Brownson, condemns the oppression of workers. Writing of their liberation, Brownson declares that

> The rich, the business community, will never voluntarily consent to it, and we think we know too much of human nature to believe that it will ever be effected peaceably. It will be effected only by the strong arm of physical force. It will come, if it ever will come at all, only at the conclusion of war, the like of which the world as yet has never witnessed, and from which, however inevitable it may seem to the eye of philosophy, the heart of Humanity recoils with horror.[33]

Robert Levine rightly argues that Brownson echoes the militant antislavery of David Walker, and we could add the cataclysm of any number of other antislavery figures as well.[34] As long as slavery served as a comparison for workers' suffering under capitalism, slave revolt would serve as a model or conceptual language for thinking about workers' liberation.

Parsons's use of this militant antislavery imagery has been overshadowed by her more explicit statements about race. In trying to make sense of Parsons's politics or identity, critics have overwhelmingly turned to articles like "THE NEGRO: Let

33 Orestes Brownson, "The Laboring Classes," *Boston Quarterly Review* (1840).

34 Robert S. Levine *Conspiracy and Romance: Studies in Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): 172.

Him Leave Politics to the Politician and Prayers to the Preacher" (1886), "Southern Lynchings" (1892), "Woman: Her Evolutionary Development" (1905), and "The Woman Question Again?" (1905). In these texts, Parsons offers some of her most forthright discussions of race and gender as they intersect with class. Or, rather, Parsons usually argues that capitalist exploitation fundamentally underwrites or even produces racial and gender oppressions. Writing of a brutal lynching in "THE NEGRO," she asks, "Are there any so stupid as to believe these outrages have been, are being and will be heaped upon the Negro because he is black? Not at all. It is because he is poor. It is because he is dependent. Because he is poorer as a class than his white wage-slave brother of the North."

Parsons seems inarguably clear about her politics in passages like this one: if race matters at all, it is only as a function of class.[35] She thus mirrored other prominent figures of the labor movement's radical wing. In "On the Color Question" (1903), Eugene V. Debs—who co-founded the Industrial Workers of the World along with Parsons—advances a similar economic reading of racism: "What the Negro wants is not charity but industrial freedom and then he will attend to his own education. There is no 'Negro problem' apart from the general labor problem. The Negro is no whit worse off than thousands of white slaves who throng the same labor market to sell their labor-power to the same industrial masters." Like Parsons, Debs takes his analysis as highlighting the need for an integrated socialist movement; in "The Negro in the Class Struggle" (1903), he argues that "Socialists should with pride

35 Lucy Parsons, "THE NEGRO: Let Him Leave Politics to the Politician and Prayers to the Preacher," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, ed. Gale Ahrens, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004): 54.

proclaim their sympathy with and fealty to the black race, and if any there be who avow themselves in the face of ignorant and unreasoning prejudice, they lack the true spirit of the slavery-destroying revolutionary movement."[36]

Yet focusing on clear ideological statements on the surface of Parsons's work only produces a contradictory picture and ultimately obscures how race really informed her writing. She actually denies us a neat, consistent ideological reading, passages like those above. Indeed, her wage slave revolt metaphor hints at the real importance of black struggles and agency to her thought. With wage slave revolt, she varied the commonplace wage slave metaphor, extending it and making it militate on behalf of workers. In "The Negro," Parsons used the occasion of the lynching at Carrollton, Mississippi to urge black workers to "Leave Politics to the Politicians and Prayers to the Preachers" in favor of militant direct action, framed suggestively as slave revolt. This article presents the victims of the Carrollton massacre as "poor and defenseless wage-slaves," but it presses the comparison even more explicitly by identifying the conditions of black life post-Reconstruction as being a new form of enslavement.[37] Speaking of white employers, Parsons asks her intended black readers,

> Are they not the idle few who you but lately acknowledged as your masters, and are not these loafers practically your masters yet in so far as absorbing all your labor product without even being compelled to return you sufficient to keep you in decent food and clothes? For they are not even actuated by the monied interest which they had in you in

36 Eugene V. Debs, "On the Color Question," *Indianapolis World*, June 20, 1903; "The Negro in the Class Struggle," *International Socialist Review*, vol. 4, no. 5 (Nov. 1903), 257-260.

37 On the details of the Carrollton lynching, see Carolyn Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons: American Revolutionary*, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1976): 65 and Jones, Goddess of Anarchy, 127-8.

> former years. The overseer's whip is now fully supplanted by the lash of hunger! And the auction block by the chain-gang and convict cell!! The same land which you once tilled as a chattel slave you still till as a wage-slave, and in the same cabin which you then entered at eve not knowing but what you would be sold from wife and little ones before the morrow's setting sun, you now enter with dread lest you will be slain by the assassin hand of those who once would simply have sold you if they did not like you.

Her emphasis on class and her slavery metaphor assert the continuity between antebellum and postbellum conditions for Southern blacks. That continuity of black oppression before and after the Civil War was maintained through a regime of practices including vagrancy laws, disfranchisement, lynchings, and, here, renewed exploitation of black labor. Parsons thus urges the black worker who loves "real freedom," "to leave politics to the politician, and prayer to those who can show wherein it has done them more good than it has ever done for you, and join hands with those who are striving for economic freedom." More than just a rhetorical ploy for Parsons, this connection between antebellum and postbellum lays claim to a wider project of "abolition" from oppression. Perhaps more importantly, it centers the work of resistance as uniting the oppressed across periods: if "slavery" never ended, then neither should slave revolt.

She takes the wage slavery metaphor to its logical and militant next step: if workers are indeed "wage slaves," then their oppression demands from them slave rebellion. For the anarchist Parsons, prayer and electoral politics mean that the

oppressed entrust their liberation to someone else; instead, she exhorts the oppressed to liberate themselves by blurring industrial direct action with the slave uprisings of the past. “You are not absolutely defenseless,” she reminds her intended black audience, “For the torch of the incendiary, which has been known to show murderers and tyrants the danger line, beyond which they may not venture with impunity, cannot be wrested from you.” Parsons's image here resonates with the old threat of slave insurrection: torches, blacks rebelling when pushed to the breaking point, violent struggle. “The Negro” constitutes some of her most explicit writing on race, and in it she resorts to the image of the slave rebel as a model for black workers' resistance. Whereas the discourse of wage slavery frames its comparison between wage workers and the enslaved as a plea for reform-inspiring sympathy, Parsons revises the comparison in order to make imaginable new modes of resistance for free black workers. She transforms revolt against chattel slavery into revolt against wage slavery, extending the militant abolitionist tradition that her labor activism had inherited.[38]

Even in recovering Parsons from neglect and disfavor, critics must concede the limitations of her thinking and writing on race. After all, I have been arguing for the *discursive* role that slave rebellion played in her work. It goes without saying that the distance between text and action is frequently vast. Jacqueline Jones's critique that Parsons did not substantively engage with black activism or social life may be partly apt. No amount of close reading will necessarily prove that Parsons devoted more time to organizing around, say, anti-lynching, nor will it reveal whether Parsons's

38 Parsons, “The Negro,” 55-6.

figure of wage slave revolt actually made a difference on readers and on the radical labor movement. Perhaps more significantly, Parsons's comparative approach itself is fraught. Approaching labor struggle in terms of antislavery risks flattening the important distinctions between different forms of oppression or between antebellum and postbellum movements. However, these shortcomings do not mean that Parsons is the "class-only" or anti-black radical that critics make her out to be; nor do her politics have to meet our own standards in order for them to be complex and multifaceted as I seek to show here. My argument instead aims for the much more modest goal of taking Parsons on her own terms, thereby revealing the significant—albeit still vexed—role of race and racial justice in her work.

Simply put, abolitionist memory and iconography consistently figure a more substantial racial politics in Parsons's writing. A text like "Southern Lynchings" uses the familiar language of militant antislavery to think through anti-black oppression, and, ultimately, radical resistance. After recounting lynching's violence against black women, she rhetorically looks to antislavery champions of the past as models in supporting black liberation, but she finds no one defending black people in the postbellum era. Instead she looks for help from an avenging "black John Brown": "The eloquence of Wendell Phillips is silent now. John Brown's body lies moldering in the grave. But will his spirit lie moldering, too? Brutes, inhuman monsters—you heartless brutes—you whom nature forms by molding you in it, deceive not yourselves by thinking that another John Brown will not arise."[39] For Parsons and others in her anarchist circle, particularly among the Haymarket defendants, Brown

39 Parsons, "Southern Lynchings," 70.

offered a powerful symbol, often held up as a "precursor" to their own struggle and persecution by the state. In fact, during the Haymarket trial, "John Brown's son helped [the defendants] establish their connection to the Old Man by sending them fruit baskets in prison and asserting that the Old Man would have approved of their actions," going so far as to claim that the antislavery militant was "a communist."[40]

In Parsons's handling, the admittedly patriarchal image of "the Old Man" enables a turn toward black agency in the form of insurrectionary action. Immediately following this passage, Parsons reconstructs a scene at a meeting of black Chicagoans, which introduces the threat of black violence: "As one of the speakers so truly said at a meeting of colored citizens held in this city March 27, to protest against the outrages being perpetrated in the South upon the peaceful citizens simply because they are Negroes, 'The white race furnished us one John Brown; the next must come from our own race.'" Of course black life and culture did afford such examples: Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, Shields Green, and unknown others. Perhaps more striking than this impoverished sense of black heroism—though we cannot say definitively whether it belongs to Parsons or the purported black speaker, Parsons clearly opts for citing John Brown over Nat Turner in her writing—Parsons acknowledges that anti-black violence does not reduce to class antagonism. Her phrase, "simply because they are Negroes" contradicts her statements elsewhere that reduce white supremacist oppression to capitalist exploitation. In perhaps her most explicit writing on race, then, she subtly validates

40 Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, 86; Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 97-8; Roediger, "Strange Legacies," 93. Of course, Parsons and the Haymarket defense campaign would switch between images of militant abolitionists like Brown and ostensible pacifists like Garrison depending on the situation at hand. See Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 88-91.

the particularity of anti-black oppression and concludes on a threat of militant black resistance.[41] If in "The Negro" Parsons draws out a vision of black revolt that bridges the antebellum and postbellum, antislavery and labor, in order to prompt a revolt against a new "Slave Power," in "Southern Lynchings" she uses rebellion to think about black oppression in and of itself by way of abolition's legacy.

Although that legacy was established by the time that Parsons wrote, it was by no means a given what version of abolitionism would be remembered, particularly at a time when radical Reconstruction gave way to nostalgia for slavery and the rise of "Lost Cause" revanchism. Parsons, working in memory more than rigorous history, put forward an account of the movement that suited her aims. As previous chapters have shown, the abolition movement contained a diversity of tendencies, tactics, and factions. Those chapters have complicated previous understandings of antislavery by centering militancy. The current chapter, by focusing again on militancy, likewise complicates the freedom struggles of the post-Reconstruction period. In the passages relating to wage slave revolt examined here, Parsons draws on the old movement's more militant—and white—elements. Rather than Henry Highland Garnet or Sojourner Truth, for instance, she opts for Brown, Phillips, and Garrison. For an anarchist urging direct action among especially white workers, such a strategy arguably offered a recognizable, palatable, and relevant way to agitate among her audiences. Perhaps to "mainstream" her anticapitalist politics, Parsons needed such a coherent, homogeneous antislavery. Yet this was not her only

41 Parsons, "Southern Lynchings," 70. The possibility that Parsons attended a "meeting of colored citizens" is striking and should further complicate claims that she was a "class-only" radical.

discursive strategy. In other texts, Parsons carefully utilized the conditions under which her work circulated in order to couch rebellion in comprehensible terms for readers. Sometimes, though, she sought to terrorize them.

"Learn the Use of Explosives!"

Parsons's most (in)famous piece of writing, the incendiary, insurrectionary "To Tramps, The Unemployed, the Disinherited, and Miserable" (1884), exemplifies not just the role of slave revolt in her thinking but the role of race itself—and how Parsons presents both in textually rich ways. In this text she deploys an altered version of her wage slave revolt, further extending the racial register of the concept; at the same time, she makes canny use of the text's open circulation to spread a "rumor" of revolution.[42] Printed first in the radical labor press and then as a broadside, "To Tramps" risked being read by more than just Parsons's tramp audience. By casting herself in the role of radical provocateur exhorting Chicago's unemployed to violently rise up against the rich, and by seeming to let her more hostile readers in on the revolutionary plot she proposes, Parsons creates a textual threat that simultaneously inspires solidarity among the poor and inspires fear among the rich. She summons the old threat of slave revolt alongside the period's newly racialized tramps, crafting a sense of imminent revolution that empowers as well as terrorizes—depending on the reader.[43]

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42 Ibid. See Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons*, 144 for the complete text of "To Tramps," published as a broadside after appearing in the inaugural issue of the *Alarm*.

43 Writing of insurrectionary fears in Melville's *Benito Cereno* (1855/56), Robert Levine has identified the correspondences between slavery and slave revolt, on the one hand, and other hierarchical social spheres on the other: "The most dreaded form of insurrectionary subversion in

In much of her work, Parsons casts herself in the role of provacateur. This is not to suggest that she was insincere in her public persona, but rather that she deliberately fashioned that self on stage and page alike. Challenging though it was to her audiences, her incendiary stance, along with her deployment of an abolitionist tradition as discussed above, "authorized" her as an activist, as a person of color, and as a woman confronting increasingly national audiences. It let her claim space and attention.[44] This rabble-rousing identity was in keeping with her broader style: in agitating against the injustices of capitalism and the state, Parsons worked in a primarily sensationalist mode. According to Shelley Streeby, "Whereas the sentimental mode in literature tends to emphasize the refinement and transcendence of the body, the sensational mode dwells on outrages done to bodies and often refuses the closure that sentimentalism strives for, where characters are reconciled with society."[45] In this sense, Parsons's fundamental project could be said to have been to encourage a break between the "characters" in her work—particularly "wage slaves"—and society. Her persona and her sensationalist style accorded so as to produce such a revolutionary fracturing, though whether one found comfort or dread in that break depended on one's location in the social order. Bound up with both this

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the South was black revolt; within the ghettos of expanding Northern cities, riots; and within the isolated, self-contained society of the ship, mutiny." See Levine, *Conspiracy*, 167. In particular, Levine does the hierarchized subjects of the ship "sailor-slaves"; I have likewise dubbed Parsons's subjects "tramp-slaves."

44 However, in many respects the anarchist and radical labor circles that Parsons moved in made significant space for women in a range of roles. In addition to the women associated with the IWPA's American Group, women adjacent to Parsons at various points throughout her life included prominent labor agitators and radicals like Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Mary Harris "Mother Jones," Emma Goldman, and Voltairine de Cleyre. See Carolyn Ashbaugh, "Radical Women: The Haymarket Tradition" in *Haymarket Scrapbook*, eds. Dave Roediger and Franklin Rosemont (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1986).

45 Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, 15.

incendiarism and sensationalism was a counter-representational strategy that challenged dominant ideologies and public perceptions. In her anthology, *Life of Albert R. Parsons* (1889), for example, she "used both words and pictures to make visible what was obscured by the mass-circulation dailies and the illustrated press," specifically, the violence of the state in its legal murder of her husband and its effect on her family.[46]

Each of these elements of Parsons's provocateur persona features in her early text, "To Tramps": she crafts a heroic counter-image of Chicago's unemployed homeless, rendered sympathetic through her sensationalist account of their plight, which she exhorts readers to resolve through insurrectionary violence. Parsons analyzed capitalist exploitation to include not just the worker but the masses of people forcibly excluded from employment. The unemployed, vagrants, the homeless—these *potential* workers are rendered by capitalism as surplus population, thus enabling further exploitation of the working class.[47] She imagined organizing these "ex-workers" who had been left out of more reformist labor efforts. Recognizing the power in a union of the unemployed, Parsons offers in "To Tramps" "A word to the 35,000 now tramping the streets of this great city, with hands in pockets, gazing listlessly about you at the evidence of wealth and pleasure of which

46 Ibid., 65.

47 See Marx, *Capital*: 784: "But if a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation, indeed it becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable industrial reserve army, which belongs to capital just as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates a mass of human material always ready for exploitation by capital in the interest of capital's own changing valorization requirements."

you own no part, not sufficient even to purchase yourself a bit of food with which to appease the pangs of hunger now knawing at your vitals."

Though not "wage slaves" because not wage-earners, these tramps endure a kind of capitalist "slavery" too, according to Parsons, and she urges them to their own acts of "slave rebellion." The text establishes, with lurid detail, the horrors faced by Chicago's homeless; as per Streeby, "To Tramps" meditates at length on the "outrages" against homeless, unemployed bodies. Thus her tramps both join with and diverge from other tramp figures appearing in literature of the period. Both Mark Twain and Jack London depict tramps at great length across multiple works. But whereas Twain and London make use of the tramp's romantic status as a figure of freedom unbounded by bourgeois norms, Parsons emphasizes sensationalistic violence to show that the tramp is a counter-intuitively "bound" figure—a tramp-slave.

Yet what distinguishes Parsons's tramps is that she depicts them as her audience: she writes *to* them.[48] She proceeds to direct her readers away from thoughts of suicide by drowning in the river to thoughts of revenge by dynamite: "Stop! Is there nothing you can do to insure those whom you are about to orphan, against a like fate? The waves will only dash over you in mockery of your rash act; but stroll you down the avenues of the rich and look through the magnificent plate windows into their voluptuous homes, and here you will discover the *very identical robbers* who

48 On the role of tramps and hobos in Twain and London, including their romantic register, see Jeanne Campbell Reesman, "Tramps and Hobos: Adventure and Anguish in Mark Twain and Jack London," *The Mark Twain Annual* 15, no. 1 (2017): 71-105.

have despoiled you and yours. Then let your tragedy be enacted *here*!" In an explosive rupture with the status quo, Parsons urges tramps to suicidal uprising:

> Send forth your petition and let them read it by the red glare of destruction. Thus when you cast "one long, lingering look behind" you can be assured that you have spoken to these robbers in the only language which they have ever been able to understand, for they have never deigned to notice any petition from their slaves that they were not *compelled* to read by the red glare bursting from the cannon's mouths, or that was not handed to them upon the point of the sword. You need no organization when you make up your mind to present this kind of petition. In fact, an organization would be a detriment to you; but each of you hungry tramps who read these lines, avail yourselves of those little methods of warfare which Science has placed in the hands of the poor man, and you will become a power in this or any other land.
>
> *Learn the use of explosives!*

From Parsons's own time into the present, this call for spectacular revolutionary violence or "propaganda of the deed" proved to be one of her most challenging texts.[49] The stereotyped image of the bomb-throwing anarchist, brought to life during the trial of the Haymarket defendants two years after "To Tramps" appeared, had its origin in texts like this one. Some anarchists of the period

49 For a brief explanation of the anarchist Johann Mot's notion of "propaganda by the deed," or*attentat*, see Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy*, 90.

recognized the leveling power of dynamite—what Albert Parsons's called "the abolition of authority" and the "dawn of peace."[50] Anarchists like Lucy Parsons were keenly aware of the still recent scientific advances in explosives and made use of this new technology, mostly rhetorically, in order to liberate the oppressed. However, contemporaries proved skeptical of dynamite's utopian dimension. One of labor's most prominent leaders regarded dynamite and the violence it represented as a threat to the movement: Samuel Gompers, who helped found the American Federation of Labor and even publicly supported the Haymarket martyrs, explained that, during those years, "dynamite became a familiar thought. Those of us who were trying to develop a constructive trade-union movement were exceedingly apprehensive of the reckless swing toward force."[51] Here Gompers draws a definite distinction between "constructive" organizing and dynamite's implicitly "destructive" violence. Simultaneously, depictions of dynamite's dystopian power proliferated: Twain portrays dynamite as a mystifying device in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), while Joseph Conrad makes explosives central to his depiction of anarchists as nihilistic terrorists in *The Secret Agent* (1907).

This was an implicitly racialized threat of violence. "To Tramps" appeared at a time when the racial hierarchy, particularly in terms of blackness, was reforming after the Civil War and when the old fears of slave uprisings reemerged as fears about raced mobs. Who even counted as white during this period was fiercely contested. Socialists of all stripes, European immigrants, and certain mobs were all racialized as

50 Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 86.
51 Quoted in Paul Avrich, *The Haymarket Tragedy,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984): 94.

non-white. Indeed, because these groups made up the substance of Parsons's life in the Haymarket era and after, she belonged to a milieu that media often represented as not quite white.[52] The Haymarket defendants, being mostly German-born immigrants, were thus subjected to ethnic abuse. The press "branded them as 'the offscourings of Europe,' as 'foreign savages' and as 'the lowest stratum found in humanity's formation.'" This racialization also extended to their politics. Socialists in general and anarchists in particular were depicted as a "type" using racialized imagery; these groups allegedly "possess(ed) a deformed head, discolored skin, facial asymmetry, large sinuses and more." One cartoon in the *Daily Graphic* depicted the Haymarket martyrs as lynched black crows in a "conflation of racist and anti-anarchist imagery."[53] Parsons's claim to "represent the genuine American" thus can be read as countering the period's racialization of some European immigrants and their socialist politics.

The racialization of European immigrants and the radical politics that were associated with them was rooted in longstanding structural inequality as well as the changing conditions of US life after the Civil War. According to Rebecca Hill, "The similarity of anti-immigrant anarchist and anti-Black stereotypes reflects their common source in republican conceptions of the undeserving poor." Moreover, images of revolutionary masses and violence had come to take on new meaning as the century progressed. A shift occurred across the antebellum and postbellum periods in

52 Mark Twain offers a suggestive example of the racialization of certain European immigrants. "Those Extraordinary Twins," an early version of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), ends with the lynching of the Italian immigrant conjoined twins, Luigi and Angelo. It is perhaps not surprising that the final novel becomes one of Twain's most significant examinations of race and slavery of his career.

53 Roediger, "Strange Legacies," 93.

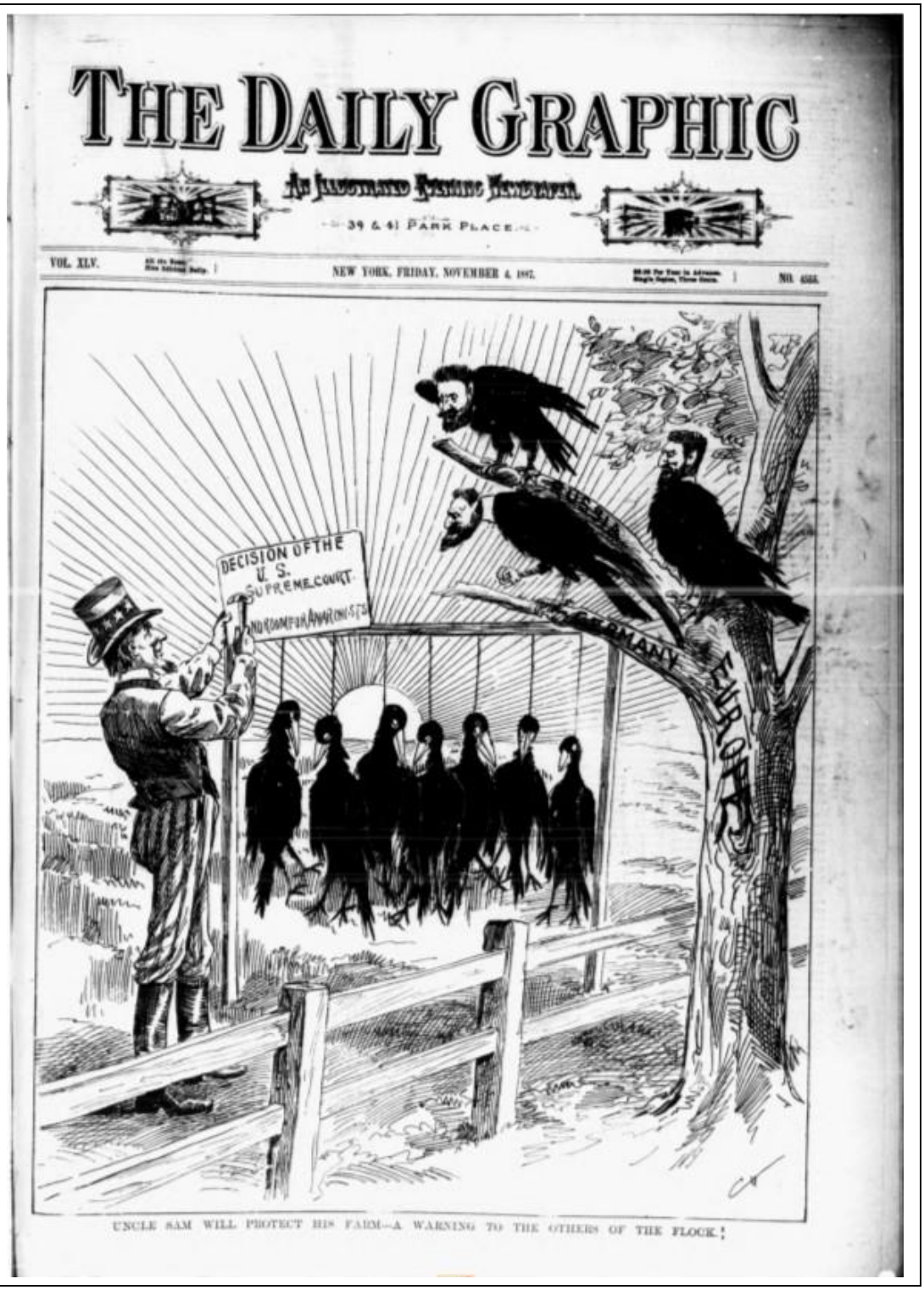

Figure 5: A Daily Graphic cartoon conflating anti-anarchist and anti-black imagery.

which the abolition war and industrialization "worked together to undermine the traditional American view of (white) violence as a characteristic of manliness and politics 'out of doors' as a virtuous practice. As industrial society was increasingly incapable of containing or managing 'tumultuous politics' of the antebellum type, and slaves were emancipated, the old bogey of insurrection appeared in the popular media."[54] Not only were the revolutionary masses now on the wrong side of a gendered American myth of violence, but they were racialized by dint of their violence and the mob-form.

Despite a long history of mobbing and rioting in the US, both were now displaced—except in the case of lynchings—onto radicals and not-quite white Europeans. "As migrants occupied a tenuous racial status, the characterization of the mob remained tinged by race," Hill explains. Just as in the *Daily Graphic*'s "Jim Crowing" of the Haymarket martyrs, images of revolutionary masses could even be coded as black: "When the Paris Commune rose in 1871, some American Southerners saw it through the frame of the ongoing Reconstruction and pronounced the French as incapable of handling liberty as the 'Negro slave."[55] However much anarchists like the IWPA organizationally segregated black anti-lynching activists from labor radicalism, the popular press conflated the two in important ways.

The convergence of rebellion and racialized mobs that Hill identifies in fears of the "American commune" underwrites "To Tramps" and expands Parsons's wage slave revolt rhetoric: here, she imagines something more like "tramp-slave revolt."

54 Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 76, 74.
55 Ibid., 74, 76, 73.

Dubbing Chicago's unemployed "slaves" of the rich performs cultural work on multiple levels in 1884. Parsons's tramps are definitively not wage-earners. So unlike the typical wage slave, Parsons's "tramp-slave" traces a correspondence between South and North, black and white, in another register besides that of labor. The tramp of this period existed as a fundamentally racialized figure. The projects of regulating free blacks in the South after Emancipation and the Northern unemployed both took shape through legal logics of anti-vagrancy. As Hill writes, "Laws similar to those for controlling recently freed slaves appeared in the North during economic crises. In 1877, Chicago passed an anti-vagrancy law that made unemployment nearly illegal." Outlawed for existing, depicted by the press and state as thieves and rapists, Parsons's tramps existed on a spectrum of racialized exclusion that included free blacks of the South who were subjected to "slavery by another name" once the Civil War ended.[56] The masses of the unemployed were seen as an undifferentiated, raced mob in the nation's popular imagination, and they occupied a similarly precarious legal situation as did recently freed blacks. The sensationalist, militant depiction in "To Tramps" poses a counter-representation of the tramp in the sense that it seeks to inspire solidarity among this "mob" while also inspiring terror among their persecutors.

Thus "To Tramps" functions in ways comparable to past literary depictions of chattel slave rebellion: less "propaganda of the deed" than "rumor of revolt." Parsons relies on the mass circulation of her text, her provocateur persona, and the racialized threat of tramp-slave revolt to speak differing messages to different audiences, simultaneously organizing tramps while threatening revolution to the rich and the

56 Hill, *Men, Mobs, and Law*, 75.

police. Like Martin Delany's serial novel of slave conspiracy, *Blake; Or the Huts of America* (1859, 1861-2), “To Tramps” works by suggesting a vast plot. According to Rebecca Biggio, Delany's novel crafts a textual version of rumors of a slave conspiracy: by depicting the rumor of revolt, Delany actually staged insurrection anxieties among potential white readers. In lieu of an actual uprising, this would be a powerful tool. Parsons's polemic does something similar, but with the seething resentment and militancy of the urban underclasses.

Critics like Jacqueline Jones have read this incendiary language as dishonest and reckless, but following Biggio's interpretation of *Blake,* we should instead read the threat of violence in “To Tramps” as reflective of its politics and discursive strategies: Parsons deliberately crafts a sense of impending “slave” insurrection to threaten unsympathetic readers with an organized, viable opposition.[57] The plausibility of revolutionary violence from tramps and anarchists is actually irrelevant. Rather, its promise both builds a shared identity among the oppressed and makes future militancy more possible. As Biggio writes of *Blake*, “the illusion of conspiracy is not less valuable in terms of creating and sustaining community if the violence it has threatened is finally executed; instead, maintenance of the illusion and the community it creates must exist before any successful unified action can occur.” Organized resistance, whether violent or not, by the criminalized and racialized tramps actually required the kind of communal identity that Parsons fashions. And

57 Rebecca Skidmore Biggio, "The Specter of Conspiracy in Martin Delany's *Blake*," *African American Review* 42, no. 3-4 (2008), 439.

fear on the part of the rich and the police actually serves as "the very basis on which that community is formed."[58]

Far from being the mere incendiary, naïve rhetoric that some critics have imagined, texts like "To Tramps" demonstrate that Parsons could deploy the incendiary language of insurrection to engage audiences in textually savvy ways. Moreover, her discursive strategy actually depended on the new racial registers that were coalescing in the post-Reconstruction period. "To Tramps" constitutes a text steeped in the complexities of race no less than class. With the turn of the twentieth century and as the memory of antislavery grew more distant, though, Parsons did not abandon the rhetoric of slave revolt but rather used it to advance new tactics for liberation struggle that would resonate well into the new century.

Slave Revolt's Long Durée: The General Strike

Parsons's depictions of "slave" revolt—whether of workers or the unemployed—performed cultural work, as shown in "To Tramps," but they did also direct her readers to *act*. Her framing of militant tactics in terms of antislavery eventually becomes foundational for one of labor's most successful revolutionary organizations of the early twentieth century. That historical influence would be significant enough, but the convergence between workers' direct action and the rhetoric of slave uprising also becomes a touchstone for black intellectual and cultural production. This chapter concludes by bringing together the significance of Parsons's

58 Ibid., 440, 443.

thinking on race, her "literariness," and her rhetoric of wage slave revolt by examining the cultural work of a new concept in her writing and speaking: the general strike. By the 1900s, a mass strike of all workers became Parsons's primary tactic for "slaves'" revolt; at the same time, the general strike also served black radical thinkers as a way to conceptualize black agency and rebelliousness. By approaching Parsons as a literary figure, then, as one whose writing is culturally and discursively rich, critics will find a through-line connecting not only the antebellum and postbellum periods, as I have shown with her rhetoric of slave revolt, but the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Even into the new century Parsons used the language of antislavery to illustrate her anticapitalism. Thus the militant union that she co-founded, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), would demand total "Abolition of the wage system." She was a founding member of the union, served as a delegate at its initial convention in 1905, and agitated with them for decades.[59] The IWW formed to be "one big union" that would organize workers across all industries in order to wage class struggle. In Parsons's own words,

> The line of action of the IWW is in direct contrast to that of the AFL, whose members are compelled to "scab" on each other when a strike of any dimension is declared, as was the case during the late teamsters'

59 Ashbaugh, *Lucy Parsons,* 219. The IWW still exists today as a militant alternative to professional unions like the AFL-CIO. The union continues to memorialize Parsons, whose influence can still be seen in the General Defense Committee of the IWW, which began as a way to practice legal defense for members of the working class engaging in class struggle, a tradition that Parsons herself helped establish in defending and memorializing the Haymarket anarchists. See Lucy Parsons, "Message to the IWW's General Defense Committee," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, ed. Gale Ahrens, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004): 166, for a note of support from Parsons to the GDC.

> strike in Chicago, where the freight-handlers had to receive, handle, and ship goods delivered to them by scab teamsters.
>
> Had these laborers belonged to the IWW, the freight-handlers, shipping clerks, teamsters and all others belonging to the shipping department would have refused absolutely to handle the scab-delivered goods. This drastic action would have brought on a crisis at once.[60]

Parsons envisions here a union of the entire working classes that would force a revolutionary situation through their solidarity across industries. If workers are capitalism's wage slaves, then she wants to unite them. Much of her antislavery rhetoric would be in the service of the new IWW. Parsons created a paper "Issued under the label of the IWW" (though not officially affiliated with it) titled *The Liberator*. "*The Liberator* is the only English-language anarchist propaganda paper in America," Parsons informs her readers. In a plea for support, she uses language reminiscent of other black editors who nurtured a vibrant black print culture in the nineteenth century:

> There is no way of building up a movement, strengthening it and keeping it intact, except by a press, at least weeklies, if dailies are impossible. The press is the medium through which we exchange ideas, keep abreast of the times, take the gauge of battle and see how far the class conflict has progressed. It is by the press we educate the public mind and link the people of most distant parts together in bonds

60 Lucy Parsons, "Industrial Workers of the World: Aims and Objects," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, ed. Gale Ahrens, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004): 132.

> of fraternity and comradeship. We can keep track of the work and accomplishments of our comrades in no other way, except by medium of paper.[61]

Parsons's editorship of *The Liberato*r places her in a tradition of black editors that includes Samuel Cornish, John Russwurm, Frederick Douglass, Mary Ann Shadd, and Pauline Hopkins, but the title of her paper references William Lloyd Garrison's original *Liberator* (1831-65) in perhaps her most explicit continuance of antislavery rhetoric. Like Garrison's more famous paper, Parsons's *Liberator* embarks on a political mission through education and agitation. Parson's announcement, "Salutation to the Friends of Liberty," promises to "lead the reader gradually, step by step, into the philosophy of anarchism" and to offer news and correspondence from the class war across the US. Connecting the old abolitionist struggle to the revolutionary traditions of Europe to which Parsons's anarchism belongs, she signs off with "Salutations and greetings to all friends of Liberty, Solidarity and Equality." As Streeby explains, "By naming her short-lived weekly newspaper the *Liberator* (1905-6), she implicitly compared Garrison's abolitionism to the post-Civil War project of emancipating the 'wage slave.'"[62] In this way Parsons's *Liberator* formalizes her longstanding project of using antislavery in order to conceptualize the labor movement's radical wing.

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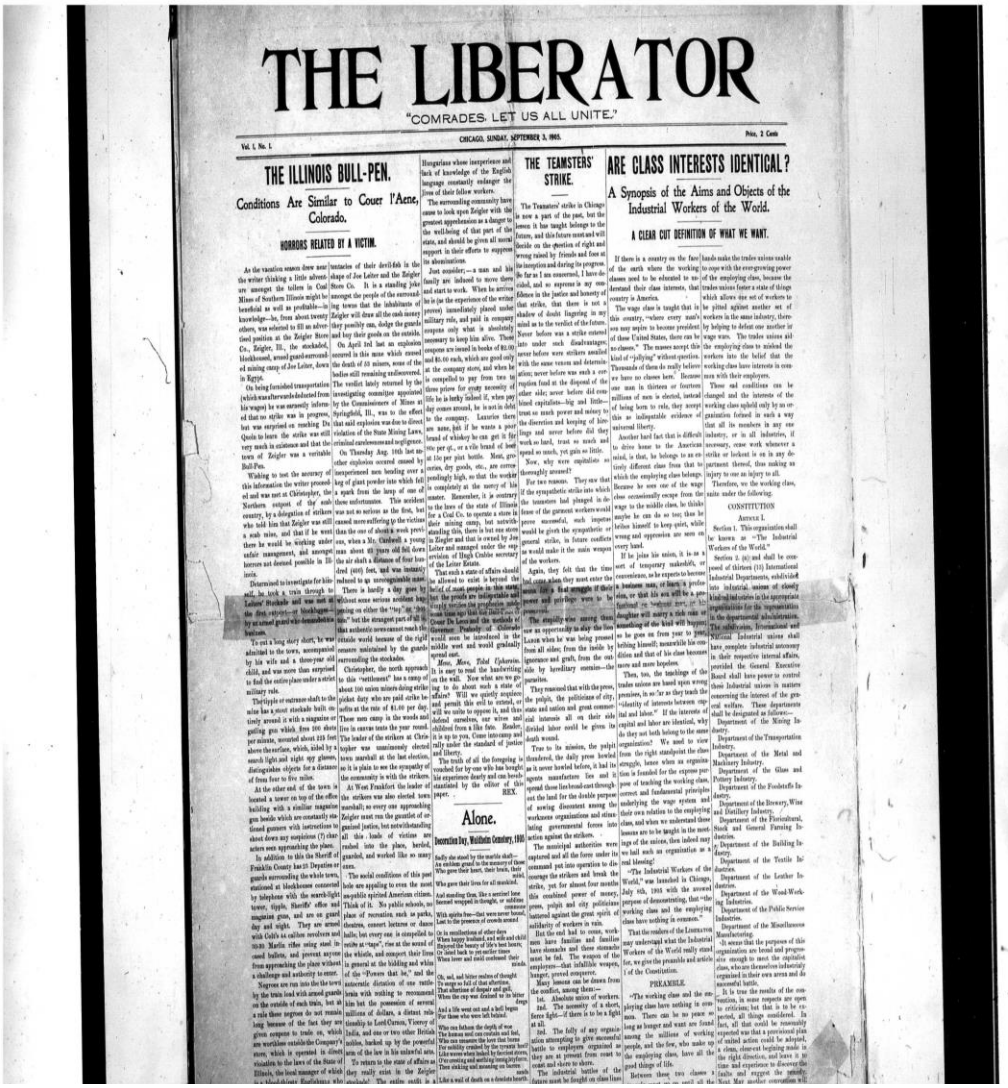
61 Lucy Parsons, "The Importance of a Press," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, ed. Gale Ahrens, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004): 127. For an overview of *The Liberator,* see especially Jones, *Goddess of Anarchy*, 269 and 275.

62 Lucy Parsons, "SALUTATION to the Friends of Liberty," in *Lucy Parsons: Freedom, Equality & Solidarity*, ed. Gale Ahrens, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 2004): 89; Streeby, *Radical Sensations*, 85.



THE LIBERATOR

"COMRADES, LET US ALL UNITE."

Vol. I, No. 1. CHICAGO, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1905. Price, 2 Cents

THE ILLINOIS BULL-PEN.

Conditions Are Similar to Couer l'Aene, Colorado.

HORRORS RELATED BY A VICTIM.

As the vacation season drew near the writer thinking a little advertising amongst the toilers in Coal Mines of Northern Illinois might be beneficial as well as profitable—in knowledge—he, from about twenty others, was selected to fill an advertised position at the Zeigler Stores Co., Zeigler, Ill., the stockaded, blockhoused, armed guard-surrounded mining camp of Joe Leiter, down in Egypt.

On being furnished transportation (which was afterwards deducted from his wages) he was severely informed that no strike was in progress, but was surprised on reaching Du Quoin to learn the strike was still very much in existence and that the town of Zeigler was a veritable Bull-Pen.

Wishing to test the accuracy of this information the writer proceeded and was met at Christopher, the Northern outpost of the stockade country, by a delegation of strikers who told him that Zeigler was still a sub mine, and that if he went there he would be working under unfair management, and amongst horrors not deemed possible in Illinois.

Determined to investigate for himself, he took a train through to Zeigler Stockade and was met at the first entrance of blockhouse—by an armed guard who demanded his business.

To cut a long story short, he was admitted to the town, accompanied by his wife and a three-year old child, and was more than surprised to find the entire place under a strict military rule.

The triple or entrance shaft to the mine has a most stockade built entirely around it with a magazine rifle pointing thru which, from 100 shots per minute, mounted about 125 feet above the surface, which, aided by a search light and night spy glasses, distinguishes objects for a distance of from four to five miles.

At the other end of the town is located a tower on top of the office building with a similar magazine gun beside which are constantly stationed gunners with instructions to shoot down any suspicious (?) characters seen approaching the place.

In addition to this the Sheriff of Franklin County has 25 Deputies or guards surrounding the whole town, stationed at blockhouses connected by telephone with the search-light tower, tipple, Sheriffs' office and magazine gun, and are on guard day and night. They are armed with Colt's 45 calibre revolvers and 30-30 Marlin rifles using steel jacketed bullets, and protect anyone from approaching the place without a challenge and authority to enter.

Negroes are run into the the town by the train load with armed guards on the outside of each train, but at a rate these negroes do not remain long because of the fact they are given coupons to trade on, which are worthless outside the Company's store, which is operated in direct violation to the laws of the State of Illinois, the local manager of which is a Republican Englishman who

[illegible] instances of their devil-fish in the shape of Joe Leiter and the Zeigler Stores Co. It is a startling fact amongst the people of the surrounding towns that the inhabitants of Zeigler will draw all the cash money they possibly can, dodge the guards and buy their goods on the outside.

On April 3rd last an explosion occurred in this mine which caused the death of 53 miners, some of the bodies still remaining undiscovered. The verdict lately returned by the investigating committee appointed by the Commissioners of Mines at Springfield, Ill., was to the effect that said explosion was due to direct violation of the State Mining Laws, criminal carelessness and negligence.

On Thursday Aug. 10th last another explosion occurred caused by inexperienced men loading over a keg of giant powder into which fell a spark from the lamp of one of these unfortunates. This accident was not so serious as the first, but caused more suffering to the victims than the one of about a week previous, when a Mr. Cardwell a young Loiter and managed under the supervision of Hugh Crabbe secretary of the Leiter Estate.

That such a state of affairs should be allowed to exist is beyond the belief of most people in this state, but the proofs are indisputable and [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Count De Leon and the methods of Governor Peabody of Colorado would soon be introduced in the middle west and would gradually spread east.

Mene, Mene, Tekel Upharsin.

It is easy to read the handwriting on the wall. Now what are we going to do about such a state of affairs? Will we quietly acquiesce and permit this evil to extend, or will we unite to oppose it, and thus defend ourselves, our wives and children from a like fate. Reader, it is up to you. Come into unity and rally under the standard of justice and liberty.

The truth of all the foregoing is vouched for by one who has brought his experience dearly and can boldly stand[illegible] by the editor of this paper.

REX.

Alone.

Decoration Day, Waldheim Cemetery, 1905

Sadly she stood by the marble shaft—
An emblem grand is the memory of those
Who gave their heart, their souls, their
mind,
Who gave their lives for all mankind.

And standing firm, like a sentinel lone
Surrounded by throngs, or solitude
unknown
With spirits free—that were never bound,
Lost to the presence of crowds around

Or in recollections of other days
When happy husband, and wife and child
Enjoyed the luxury of life's best hours,
Or lived back to yet earlier times
When lover and maid confessed their
minds

Oh, sad, and bitter realms of thought
To merge as full of that affection,
That alluvions of despair and grief,
When the cup was drained to its bitter
dregs

And a life went out and a bell began
For those who were left behind.

Who can fathom the depth of woe
The human soul can contain and feel,
Who can measure the love that burns
For nobility crushed by the tyrants heel
Like waves when lashed by ferriest storm,
Of unceasing and seething energy,
Then sinking and moaning on leaves
sands
Like a wail of death on a desolate beach.

THE TEAMSTERS' STRIKE.

The Teamsters' strike in Chicago is now a part of the past, but the lesson it has taught belongs to the future, and this future must and will decide on the question of right and wrong raised by friends and foes at its inception and during its progress. So far as I am concerned, I have decided, and no supreme is my confidence in the justice and honesty of that strike, that there is not a shadow of doubt lingering in my mind as to the verdict of the future. Never before was a strike entered into under such disadvantages, never before were strikers assailed with the same venom and determination; never before was such a corruption fund at the disposal of the other side; never before did combined capitalists—big and little—trust so much power and misery to the discretion and keeping of hirelings and never before did they work so hard, trust so much and spend so much, yet gain so little.

Now, why were capitalists so thoroughly aroused?

For two reasons. They saw that the sympathetic strike into which the teamsters had plunged in defense of the garment workers would become successful, such injuries would be given the sympathetic or general strike, in future conflicts as would make it the main weapon of the workers.

Again, they felt that the time had come when they must enter the arena for a final struggle if their power and privileges were to be preserved.

The employers were among them one opportunity to slay the foes LABOR when he was being pressed from all sides; from the inside by ignorance and graft, from the outside by hereditary enemies—the parasites.

They reasoned that with the press, the pulpit, the politicians of city, state and nation and great commercial interests all on their side, divided labor could be given its death wound.

True to its mission, the pulpit slandered, the daily press howled as it never howled before, it had its agents manufacture lies and it spread those lies broad-cast through out the land for the double purpose of sowing dissonant among the workmens organizations and stirring governmental forces into action against the strikers.

The municipal authorities were captured and all the force under its command put into operation to discourage the strikers and break the strike, yet for almost four months this combined power of money, press, pulpit and city politicians battered against the great spirit of solidarity of workers in vain.

Hot the end had to come, workmen have families and families have stomachs and these stomachs must be fed. The weapon of the employers—that infallible weapon, hunger, proved conqueror.

Many lessons can be drawn from the conflict, among them:—

1st. Absolute union of workers.

2nd. The necessity of a short, fierce fight—if there is to be a fight at all.

3rd. The folly of any organization attempting to give successful battle to employers organized as they are at present from coast to coast and shore to shore.

The industrial battles of the future must be fought on class lines.

ARE CLASS INTERESTS IDENTICAL?

A Synopsis of the Aims and Objects of the Industrial Workers of the World.

A CLEAR CUT DEFINITION OF WHAT WE WANT.

If there is a country on the face of the earth where the working classes need to be educated to understand their class interests, that country is America.

The wage class is taught that in this country, "where every man's son may aspire to become president" of these United States, there can be "no classes." The masses accept this kind of "rallying" without question. Thousands of them do really believe "we have no classes here." Because one man in thirteen or fourteen millions of men is elected, instead of being born to rule, they accept this as indisputable evidence of universal liberty.

Another hard fact that is difficult to drive home to the American mind, is that, he belongs to an entirely different class from that to which the employing class belongs. Because he sees one of the wage class occasionally escape from the wage to the middle class, he thinks maybe he can do so too; thus he belies himself to keep quiet, while wrong and oppression are seen on every hand.

If he joins his union, it is in a sort of temporary makeshift, or convenience, as he expects to become a business man, or learn a profession, or that his son will be a professional [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] daughter will marry a rich man or something of the kind will happen, so he goes on from year to year believing himself; meanwhile his condition and that of his class becomes more and more hopeless.

Then, too, the teachings of the trades unions are based upon wrong premises, in so far as they teach the identity of interests between capital and labor." If the interests of capital and labor are identical, why do they not both belong to the same organization? We need to view from the right standpoint the class struggle, hence when an organization is founded for the express purpose of teaching the working class, correct and fundamental principles underlying the wage system and their own relation to the employing class, and when we understand these lessons are to be taught in the workings of the unions, then indeed may we laid such an organization as a real blessing!

"The Industrial Workers of the World," was launched in Chicago, July 8th, 1905 with the avowed purpose of demonstrating, that "the working class and the employing class have nothing in common."

That the readers of the LIBERATOR may understand what the Industrial Workers of the World really stand for, we give the preamble and article I of the Constitution.

PREAMBLE

"The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among the millions of working people, and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a [illegible] lands under the trades unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class, because the trades unions foster a state of things which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping to defeat one another in wage wars. The trades unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These and conditions can be changed and the interests of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries, if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Therefore, we the working class, unite under the following.

CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I.

Section 1. This organization shall be known as "The Industrial Workers of the World."

Section 2. (a) and shall be composed of thirteen (13) International Industrial Departments, subdivided into industrial unions of closely related industries in the appropriate organization for the representation in the departmental administration. The subdivision, International and National Industrial unions shall have complete industrial autonomy in their respective internal affairs, provided the General Executive Board shall have power to control these Industrial unions in matters concerning the interest of the general welfare. These departments shall be designated as follows:—

Department of the Mining Industry.

Department of the Transportation Industry.

Department of the Metal and Machinery Industry.

Department of the Glass and Pottery Industry.

Department of the Foodstuffs Industry.

Department of the Brewery, Wine and Distillery Industry.

Department of the Floricultural, Stock and General Farming Industries.

Department of the Building Industry.

Department of the Textile Industries.

Department of the Leather Industries.

Department of the Wood-Working Industries.

Department of the Public Service Industries.

Department of the Miscellaneous Manufacturing.

It is seen that the purposes of this organization are broad and progressive enough to meet the capitalist class, who are themselves industrially organized in their own areas and do successful battle.

It is true the results of the convention, in some respects are open to criticism; but that is to be expected, all things considered. In fact, all that could be reasonably expected was that a provisional plan of united action could be adopted, a clean, close-cut beginning made in the right direction, and hints and suggestions and experience to discover the faults and suggest the remedy. Next May another convention will

Figure 6: The first page of the inaugural issue of *The Liberator*.

But at the turn of the twentieth century perhaps the "slave" uprising that Parsons always dreamed of must look different than she once thought, particularly following the disaster of Haymarket. At least she has come to imagine it differently. Gone is much of her "bomb-talk," or her promise of armed tramps lying in wait for the idle rich. Instead, she imagines a massive worker uprising. In the tactic of the general strike, her notion of wage slave revolt found new expression. The general strike attempted a strike of workers across industries, even perhaps a strike of *all* workers. While the general strike already had a long history—a general strike was the occasion for the Haymarket events in 1886, after all—Parsons helped popularize the tactic within the IWW. According to Philip Foner, "In the I.W.W. the general strike was first mentioned at the founding convention where it was advocated by Lucy E. Parsons."[63] There, Parsons elaborated her vision of an uprising of workers:

> I wish to say that my conception of the future method of taking possession of this Earth is that of the general strike; that is my conception of it. The trouble with all the strikes in the past has been this: the workingmen, like the teamsters of our cities, these hard-working teamsters, strike and go out and starve. Their children starve. Their wives get discouraged. Some feel that they have to go out and beg for relief, and to get a little coal to keep the children warm, or a little bread to keep the wife from starving, or a little something to keep

63 Philip S. Foner,. *History of the Labor Movement in the United States, Volume IV: The Industrial Workers of the World, 1905-1917,* (New York: International, 1947): 140.

> the spark of life in them so that they can remain wage-slaves. That is the way with the strikes in the past.
>
> My conception of the strike of the future is not to strike and go out and starve, but to strike and remain in and take possession of the necessary property of production. If anyone is to starve—I do not say it is necessary—let it be the capitalist class.

In these years, the general strike updates the insurrectionary thought that structures so much of Parsons's work. Here she adopts not so much her incendiary persona but rather that of a seasoned labor radical. However, her sensationalism remains as she recounts the bodily deprivations of workers and their families, moving her readers toward an irrevocable break with the social order in the form of the strike and a full seizure of resources by the oppressed. No doubt such a mass movement requires a less inflammatory stance than what Parsons used to work in. Now that she trades in the decentralized, spectacular resistance of "To Tramps" for the mass solidarity of the strike, her style reflects a similar shift. Nonetheless, her fundamental thinking on freedom struggles continues to resemble that of the wage slave revolt. For Parsons it is still a matter of the oppressed seizing their freedom for themselves, as she exhorts her audience that "There is no power on Earth that can stop men and women who are determined to be free at all hazards."[64]

Her vision of a mass worker revolt had a dramatic impact on the radical labor movement. According to Foner, the role of the general strike in the IWW's thinking over the next ten years resembled the language of militant abolitionism: "By 1910,

64 Parsons, "Speeches at the Founding Convention," 82-3.

and more especially in 1911, advocacy of the general strike began to appear quite regularly in the I.W.W. press. It was urged (1.) as a tactic in labor's guerilla warfare with capitalism, especially to force favorable court decisions, and (2.) as the means of achieving final emancipation."[65] If the oppressed under capitalism were wage slaves, for Parsons, then the general strike was their wage slave revolt. As in her other militant writings, Parsons used the image of "wage slaves" in revolt to imagine workers' own liberation struggle.

Such a pairing actually had a long history. If critics approach Parsons as a literary writer, as this chapter has argued, then her writing and speaking on the general strike tactic should be seen as of a piece with her depiction of workers' resistance in terms of "slave revolt." It is figurative, expressive, culturally productive. Focusing on her discursive pairing of the two, then, casts into relief a discourse on general strikes and slave revolts dating back to the antebellum. In his militant "An Address to the Slaves of the United States" (1843), Henry Highland Garnet exhorted his imagined slave audience not towards bloody rebellion but to worker rebellion. Strikingly forward-thinking, Garnet urged slaves to withhold their labor from slaveholders:

> We do not advise you to attempt a revolution with the sword, because it would be inexpedient. Your numbers are too small, and moreover the rising spirit of the age, and the spirit of the gospel, are opposed to war and bloodshed. But from this moment cease to labor for tyrants who will not remunerate you. Let every slave throughout the land do

65 Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 140.

> this, and the days of slavery are numbered. You cannot be more oppressed than you have been—you cannot suffer greater cruelties than you have already. Rather die freemen, than live to be slaves. Remember that you are **THREE MILLIONS**.

Garnet's language here reflects the most fundamental aspects of the strike: rebelling against working conditions, collective solidarity, direct action by workers on their own behalf. Most remembered for its militancy, Garnet's "Address" also posited a version of slave revolt that thinks specifically in terms of labor. He preempts, in that sense, Parsons's own thinking on the general strike.[66]

Yet the pairing of slave revolt and the general strike extended beyond both Garnet and Parsons to create a significant discourse on race, class, and the nature of resistance to oppression itself. Parsons never could have predicted that one of the founders of Black Studies would make of this conceptual metaphor a major theoretical intervention. In his magnum opus, *Black Reconstruction* (1935), W.E.B. Du Bois reinterprets the mass exodus of slaves from the South during the Civil War as a general strike. Their refusal to labor as slaves represented a properly agentic act and one that would carry world-historic significance. According to Du Bois,

> As soon, however, as it become clear the Union armies would not or could not return fugitive slaves, and that the masters with all their

66 Henry Highland Garnet and David Walker, *Walker's Appeal, With a Brief Sketch of His Life. By Henry Highland Garnet. And Also Garnet's Address to the Slave of the United States of America*, ed. William Loren Katz (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 96. On Garnet, see Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004) and "Henry Highland Garnet's 'Address to the Slaves,'" ed. by P. Gabrielle Foreman and Sarah Patterson, in *Colored Conventions: Bringing Nineteenth-Century Black Organizing to Digital Life:* http://coloredconventions.org/exhibits/show/henry-highland-garnet-address.

> fume and fury were uncertain of victory, the slave entered upon a general strike against slavery by the same methods that he had used during the period of the fugitive slave. He ran away to the first place of safety and offered his services to the Federal Army. So that in this way it was really true that he served his former master and served the emancipating army; and it was also true that this withdrawal and bestowal of his labor decided the war.

He echoes Parsons's own vision of the general strike when he writes, "This was not merely the desire to stop work. It was a strike on a wide basis against the conditions of work. It was a general strike that involved directly in the end perhaps a half million people. They wanted to stop the economy of the plantation system, and to do that they left the plantations." Hardly the passive beneficiaries of Northern justice, the slaves of the South were the agents of their own fate and the deciding factor of the war.[67] And Du Bois's reinterpretation of these events of the Civil War represents a watershed moment in the historiography of slavery and the black intellectual tradition generally: his work reframes black lives as the primary actors within their own stories.

If Parsons uses the rhetoric of antislavery and slave rebellion to inform her thinking on the general strike, then Du Bois uses workers' direct action in the form of the general strike in order to conceptualize slaves' agency during the Civil War. Though it is doubtful that the anarchist-agitator or the socialist scholar ever crossed paths or even writings, they nonetheless reread slaves' and workers' actions in terms

67 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 46, 54. For critical interpretations of *Black Reconstruction*, see Ed. Thavolia Glymph, "Du Bois's Black Reconstruction: Past and Present," special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* 112, no. 3 (2013).

of each other. They complement and invert the other: Parsons figuring labor in terms of race, and Du Bois figuring race in terms of labor. The slaves' general strike of the Civil War, for Du Bois, “was not dramatic or hysterical, rather it was like the great unbroken swell of the ocean before it dashes on the reefs. The Negroes showed no disposition to strike the one terrible blow which brought black men freedom in Haiti and which in all history has been used by all slaves and justified.” Yet for Parsons, the two—slave insurrection and “wage-slaves'” general strike—were not so different. At least she used one to think about the other. She used one to understand all liberation struggle.[68]

The general strike, wage and tramp-slave revolts: more than just tactics or inflammatory propaganda, these constituted ways to theorize and depict the nature of oppressed peoples' struggle. When Parsons envisions a mass rebellion of working people, she no less than Du Bois rethinks who has agency. Refocusing our perspective on collective militancy, as Parsons and Du Bois both urged us to do, reveals a new shape to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Parsons throws this new periodization into relief even as this approach elevates her own writing, opening up her work for fresh scrutiny and discovery. It recasts her work as theoretically significant to black freedom struggles, both influenced by abolitionism and foreshadowing Du Bois. And it locates an anarchist woman of color—indigenous, Mexican, black even while denying her blackness—at the heart of a black-authored radicalism and intellectual tradition.

68 Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 52.

Chapter Four: Insurgent Identities: Collective Racial Identity in Griggs, Dixon, and Hopkins

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, I turned to depictions of enslaved insurrection, black armies, and worker strikes throughout the nineteenth century to show black rebellion's speculative and cultural work. With these textual iterations of black uprising, writers imagined solidarity with militants, argued for competing racial justice projects, vied for movement leadership, or bridged disparate freedom struggles that were sometimes at odds. Perhaps unexpectedly, images of black violence could do more than just inspire fear: they could actually create. Now I conclude the dissertation by turning to figurations of black rebellion that worked to remake readers and their social worlds. Whatever else had changed throughout the nineteenth century, black rebellion's cultural power—and political flexibility—remained. At the turn of the century, depictions of "racial insurgency" served some writers as a literary means to reimagine racial identities and, ultimately, communities, albeit for opposing ends.

In my dissertation's final chapter, I focus on the contradictory potential of rebellion, now under the post-Reconstruction sign of "insurgency." Novelists—both black and white—developed new understandings of collective racial identity by depicting fictional rebellions—whether black or white—against state power. Whereas

Lucy Parsons and W. E. B. Du Bois theorize collective agency from images of struggle, as I argue in chapter three, the writers examined in chapter four use the language of black rebellion to remake their racial communities. Just as characters in their novels waged revolt to summon new collectivities into existence, Sutton E. Griggs, Thomas R. Dixon, and Pauline E. Hopkins sought to textually define their racial groups by depicting insurgent threats. I turn primarily to two texts: Griggs's novel about a secret black nation, *Imperium in Imperio* (1899) and Dixon's novel about white revolt against Reconstruction, *The Leopard's Spots* (1902). In *Imperium*, Griggs actually invites his black readers to choose for themselves how to define their collective black identity: will they be an activist black public within the US, pressing for civil rights, or will they be a truly separate black nation? In contrast, Dixon figures a resurgent white identity for the defeated South, one that connects disparate whites through shared discourse and symbols despite claims to a naturally unifying racial identity. Although the white supremacist Dixon surely never read the obscure proto-black nationalist Griggs, I position their novels in this chapter like a call-and-response within Jim Crow literature in order to cast into relief their politics and literary projects. My approach underlines the flexibility of their chosen trope: the two writers deploy mirror images of racial insurgency to cross purposes.

Perhaps because it conceptualizes embattled collective struggle, the image of insurgency could help create new identities for peoples undergoing dramatic change and even redefinition. Of course, how writers understood such change depended on their own identities. Griggs and Dixon wrote with the memory of Reconstruction in mind and in the wake of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, which helped reconstitute the

racial caste system in the US. By seeking to rigidly define racial identity by way of the "one-drop rule," the *Plessy* case represents a touchstone in a period of racial (re)formation when preexisting social categories were now called into question.[1] This decision only worsened the Supreme Court's diminishment of the Reconstruction Amendments, as discussed in chapter two. In this moment, writers like Griggs and Dixon sought to represent blacks and whites in fiction in the interest either of mobilizing activist readers who would struggle for black equality or of solidifying white supremacy.[2]

Griggs and Dixon write a different iteration of rebellion than the ones I explore in previous chapters; instead, they imagine what I will call state insurgencies. Crucially for their community-defining projects, both authors depict rebellions against racially dominated state power, whether the white supremacist United States or black-led Reconstruction governments. Pitting their insurrections against the state, Griggs and Dixon highlight features of the post-Reconstruction period as well as their respective authorial projects. With the Civil War, the federal government enjoyed expanded powers on a number of fronts, notably including the so-called Ku Klux Klan Act.[3] At the same time, old notions of slave rebellion gave way to new ones about black political takeovers or coups. Whites' fears regarding black rebellion had

1 On the Plessy case, see Brook Thomas, *Plessy V. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents,* (Boston: Bedford, 1997). On the notion of racial formation, see Omi, Michael and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

2 In juxtaposing Griggs and Dixon in terms of their depictions of rebellion, my chapter resembles Susan Gillman's chapter "Procrustean Bedfellows? Black Nationalism and White Supremacy at the Turn of the Century" in Susan Gillman, *Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 73-116. Unlike Gillman, I connect Pauline Hopkins to Griggs and Dixon in substantive ways and further locate all three novelists within black rebellion's long durée.

3 Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877,* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 454-9.

not disappeared with chattel slavery. During the Civil War, those fears merely shifted from slave revolt to black enlistment in the Union Army. After the war, white anxiety about black violence necessarily shifted again, this time to issues of black citizenship and governance.[4] Griggs and Dixon both register these historical developments. According to Brook Thomas, the two novelists wrote in large part about the changing, centralizing nature of federal power.[5]

The term "insurgency," with its connotations of both conspiratorial coups and the toppling of lawful authority, thus emphasizes the changing context for imagined black (or white) political violence after the Civil War while describing how these two authors think structurally about the federal government. The term situates race, the state, and militancy together in a way specific to the literature of Reconstruction and Jim Crow, even as these insurgent scenes maintain continuity with the works discussed in previous chapters of my project.

Of course the meaning of such insurgencies depended on one's identity and perspective. This chapter takes a comparative approach to explore this phenomenon, juxtaposing a black and white novelist in order to cast into relief how images of rebellion could be put to opposing ends. Although previous chapters have engaged white-authored texts, Dixon provides a new object of study in my project because his work specifically opposed the type of racial justice writing I have so far emphasized. Ending with Dixon, then, helps to expand the scope of the dissertation. Critics have often read the two writers together not only for their comparable subjects but for their

4 Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long: The Aftermath of Slavery,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980): 66.

5 See "Chapter 2: Federalism" in Brook Thomas, *The Literature of Reconstruction: Not in Plain Black and White,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017).

comparable lives. Hanna Wallinger has detailed the connections and comparisons between their biographies and writing: both men were Southerners, sons of Baptist preachers who became preachers themselves, orators, and, of course, novelists.[6] Such similarities only help to highlight the authors' contrasting politics: one a "race man" dedicated to black equality; the other, a popular voice for white supremacy. Their contrasting identities and ideologies make clear the flexibility of racial insurgency as a literary means to (re)imagine racial community.

However, I invert standard literary historical readings that position Griggs as Dixon's respondent, instead positioning Dixon as responding not to Griggs but to the insurgent politics of black equality that he represented.[7] Doing so reveals what other readings often obscure: just how embattled was Dixon's version of white supremacist identity and collectivity. For this reason, I begin the chapter with *Imperium in Imperio* before examining *The Leopard's Spots*. By organizing the chapter around first Griggs's Imperium, an "insurgency" against the nation's white supremacy, followed then by Dixon's rejection of black equality in the form of vigilante "counter-insurgencies," I hope to formalize the historical white reaction against black freedom after the Civil War. My approach helps rethink how literary critics juxtapose these two authors of Jim Crow literature even as my approach also teases out the significance of racial insurgency to both writers. Organizing the chapter using a series

6 See Hanna Wallinger, "Sutton E. Griggs Against Thomas Dixon's 'Vile Misrepresentations': *The Hindered Hand* and *The Leopard's Spots*," *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs*, Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth Warren, eds. (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 2013).

7 Wallinger and others have usually read Griggs as Dixon's interlocutor: Griggs's novel *The Hindered Hand* (1905) was commissioned as a response to Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and references Dixon in one scene; subsequent editions of the text even included Griggs's explicit rebuttal of Dixon's racism as an appendix. See ibid., 167-8.

of fictional insurgencies that "counter" each other ultimately illustrates how Griggs and Dixon differently deployed rebellion to contest the nation's racial order at the turn of the century.

For these writers, reimagining racial identitites and, subsequently, communities was not an abstract process but something imminent and practical. Thus the epilogue closes by briefly discussing how textual rebellions figured new understandings of black identity amid the period's exploding black print cultures with not just national but transnational scope. Both Griggs's and Dixon's writing on insurgency link racial regimes in the US to US imperial projects abroad. For this reason, and to add a complication to this epilogue's sequence of readings, I conclude my discussion of Griggs and Dixon with a brief discussion of their contemporary, Pauline Hopkins. She extends my reading of Griggs and Dixon into a triptych: black insurgency, white counter-insurgency, black self-defense. For Hopkins, readerly black communities could define and defend themselves through a diasporic consciousness. By turning to Hopkins's serial novel *Of One Blood* (1902-3), I offer not only a third term to the insurgencies I examine but also an exploration of how she and Griggs sought to create "insurgent" black reading communities by imagining black belonging in print.

Insurgency: The Imperium

Imperium in Imperio (1899) weds a social mission with writing. Its author, Sutton E. Griggs, was steeped in the conditions of Southern black life and worked toward black progress in a range of venues, from the pulpit to the page. Born in Texas

to a former slave and Baptist minister, Griggs would study at Richmond Theological Seminary in Virginia, moving from there to Tennessee and back to Texas where he remained until his death. Griggs thus spent his entire life living and writing in the South, in contrast to his more famous black and Southern-born contemporaries.[8] He was among the era's "race men," using organizing, oration, and writing as vehicles for black equality. Along with W. E. B. Du Bois, he belonged to the Niagra Movement, the precursor to the NAACP. His novels, autobiography, and later pamphlets all deal in the struggles of black life under Jim Crow, depicting the horrors of lynchings, disfranchisement, anxieties about miscegenation, "racial science," and US imperialism.[9] Despite a prolific writing career, his first novel remained until recently the only one in print and the most critically discussed.[10] For someone who wrote in obscurity, Griggs's life and work have become contentious subjects for critics. Scholars have variously dubbed him a (proto-) black nationalist, militant, accommodationist, and futurist. Griggs has eluded definitive characterization, however.

Uncertainty about Griggs's politics is due partly to his compelling but complex experiments in fiction; in his first, the self-published *Imperium in Imperio*,

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8 Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth W. Warren, "Introduction," *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs,Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth W Warren, eds., (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013):* 1. For Griggs's biography, see Chakkalakal and Warren as well as Finnie Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle against White Supremacy, (*University of Tennessee Press, 2007).

9 See Caroline Levander "Sutton Griggs and the Borderland of Empire," in, *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs,Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth W Warren,* eds., (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013); Robert S. Levine, "Edward Everett Hale's and Sutton E. Griggs's Men Without a Country," in *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs,* Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth W Warren, eds., (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013).

10 John Gruesser, "Empires at Home and Abroad in Sutton E. Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio,*" in *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs,* ed. Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth Warren, (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 2013), 50.

debates about the secrecy or publicity of a black insurgency prompt Griggs's audience to (re)define black collective identity and its relationship to US citizenship. As John Ernest has written about another of Griggs's novels, Griggs deliberately positions the reader within black freedom struggle.[11] In *Imperium in Imperio,* Griggs does this through the prospect of race war between the US and the all-black "nation within a nation," the Imperium.[12] The novel ends with a looming insurgency to overthrow the US government and achieve black civil rights, but just what this means or whether Griggs advocates militancy remains unclear. But clarity about militancy is not the text's goal. It is not simply the looming violence that implicates readers, asking them to align with militancy or accommodation. Rather the novel invites its black readership to define itself in wholly new ways, as a new "combination" capable of struggling against Jim Crow. Whether that struggle takes place within or against the US, however, remains for readers to decide.

Although there is a danger in focusing on *Imperium in Imperio* to the exclusion of Griggs's more neglected work, I take this novel's ending as key to Griggs's lifelong project. The text ends on the precipice of black insurgency and a new civil war. Yet most of *Imperium in Imperio* tells the parallel, contrasting stories of two friends born in Virginia under Jim Crow. The light-skinned Bernard and the dark-skinned Belton begin as best friends who separate in adolescence, encountering

11 John Ernest, "Harnessing the Niagra: Sutton E. Griggs's *The Hindered Hand*," in *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs*,Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth W Warren, eds., (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013): 205.

12 Much of the criticism of the novel has focused on its ending. More recently, scholars have expanded their focus within this novel as well as within Griggs's catalogue. See Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth W. Warren, eds. *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs,* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013). However, *Imperium in Imperio*'s ending proves useful for thinking about black rebellion's depictions in the Jim Crow period.

the various barriers and dangers of the Jim Crow South before they reunite to become leaders of a secret black "nation" called the Imperium. But whereas the text had been positioning Belton as the story's militant "New Negro," with Bernard as his more moderate counterpart, the text ends by reversing their roles. Following a lynching based on the infamous Frazier Baker murder, Bernard moves the Imperium to full-scale war with the US, while Belton urges peace, at least temporarily.[13] The novel leaves readers suspended in this opposition—what Robert S. Levine calls a "dualism" rather than a "binary"—and with Belton executed as a traitor to the Imperium. But the novel's final chapter actually returns us to its start. Readers only discover the events of the novel and the Imperium's looming race war by way of the novel's frame: the Imperium's secretary of state and one of Belton's executioners, Berl Trout, exposes the black nation in order to avert another Civil War.[14] The chapters "Berl Trout's Dying Declaration" and "Personal (Berl Trout)" bookend the novel with Berl's justifications for turning traitor, while an opening note written by one "Sutton E. Griggs," frames the novel as a found manuscript. Readers are always just confronted with the revelation of the secret black nation on the eve of racial cataclysm.

Throughout its pages, the novel reveals its investment in collective black identity. In particular, "Berl Trout's Dying Declaration" depicts the Imperium as intensely secretive, harkening back to the early black secret societies that provided a sense of community, pride, security, and mutual aid within a hostile white culture.

13 Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio,* (New York: Modern Library, 2003): 163. On the Baker lynching, see Autumn Womack. "Lynching's Afterlife," *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 6, no. 1 (2018): 204-211.

14 Levine, "Edward Everett Hale's," 81. For readings emphasizing Berl's narrative role, see ibid. and Gruesser, "Empires at Home."

Most famous among these groups were the so-called Prince Hall Freemasons. Together with other black Masons segregated from Masonic lodges in the US, Prince Hall chartered the African Lodge of Boston in 1787. As Joanna Brooks explains, Hall's order appropriated the metaphysical symbolism of traditional masonry to create "a template for race consciousness."[15] In his pamphlet, "The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry" (1853), Martin Delany unfolds a similar project. He locates the history of Freemasonry in Biblical, philosophical, cultic, and scientific traditions emerging originally from Africa. Black people, in this view, originated the world's highest knowledge; at the same time, the "scientific" system of Masonry provides a framework for black personal and communal perfection.[16] By building race consciousness and community organizations, secret societies fashioned a shared understanding of black identity and struggle within a slave society.

Like historical secret societies, Griggs's Imperium creates a shared black identity. The Imperium effectively gives formal shape to a diverse and expansive racial community—no longer significantly defined by chattel slavery—complete with institutions to protect and advance black interests. For Griggs, identity- and institution-building were both crucial at a time when the Supreme Court had undercut the Reconstruction Amendments and paved the way for the Plessy defeat and, ultimately, Jim Crow segregation. In the world of his novel, the Imperium has already provided such support for decades. Readers eventually learn that the Imperium was

15 Joanna Brooks, "Prince Hall, Freemasonry, and Genealogy," *African American Review* 34, no. 2 (2000): 199, 198.

16 See Martin Delany, "The Origin and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry," in*Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Robert S. Levine, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

founded when all black secret societies federated into one group. From there, the united coalition builds a shadow government, replicating the federal government of the US in structure but with the ultimate goal of black emancipation and uplift.[17]

Yet unlike historical black secret societies, the fictional Imperium eventually threatens the whites of the US with war. This impending insurgency figures a collective group identity fit for the turn of the century because it demands that black people rethink their relationship to the segregationist state. The novel ends with a choice, situating readers, as per Ernest and Levine, between choices: violent militancy or gradualism. Following a lynching of one of the Imperium's members, a US postmaster named Felix A. Cook, the novel reaches a crisis point. Bernard uses the occasion to rouse the Imperium's legislature into a war-frenzy: after Imperium senators debate solutions to the "race problem" that include "amalgamation" and emigration, "a bold speaker arose who was courageous enough to stick a match to the powder magazine which Bernard had left uncovered in all their bosoms. His first declaration was: 'I am for war!'" Bernard "swore a terrible oath to avenge the wrongs of his people," and the speaker proposes a resolution for war with the whites for the sake of "wreaking vengeance" and "obtaining all our rights due us as men."[18]

The threat of race war sets up a dilemma that readers must ultimately resolve. Belton responds to the war fever by urging a response that takes violence as a last resort. Recalling his earlier militancy while a student at the fictional "Stowe

17 Griggs, 129-135.
18 Ibid., 151, 152.

University," Belton delivers a speech that balances uncompromising self-defense with generous moral suasion:

> We must change the conception which the Anglo-Saxon has formed of our character. We should let him know that patience has a limit; that strength brings confidence; that faith in God will demand the exercise of our own right arm; that hope and despair are each equipped with swords, the latter more dreadful than the former. Before we make a forward move, let us pull the veil from before the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon that he may see the New Negro standing before him humbly, but firmly demanding every right granted him by his maker and wrested from him by man.[19]

He resolves that the secret Imperium reveal itself to the whites, en mass, before "we sojourn in the state of Texas, working out our destiny as a separate and distinct race in the United States of America."[20] His plan, Belton cautions, "is primarily pacific: yet it is firm and unyielding. It courts peaceable adjustment, yet it does not shirk war, if war is forced," and he urges the Imperium to "be prepared, if [the white race] deems us unfit for so great a boon, to buckle on our swords and go forth to win our freedom with the sword just as has been done by all other nations of men."[21] Belton does not preclude the possibility of violence against the whites. However, even though Belton and Bernard represent "dualities" rather than "binaries," Bernard still pushes the Imperium to insurgent war.

19 Ibid., 162-3.
20 Ibid., 163-4.
21 Ibid., 164, 165.

With their debate, the text positions readers to take action. The audience remains suspended between Belton and Bernard, implicitly prompted to make a choice. Griggs renews the threat of black rebellion for the Jim Crow era—no longer black rebellion as slave revolt but as a coup, a plot to topple the US itself. To this Griggs adds a new register, the memory of the Civil War and its apocalyptic bloodshed: Bernard's vision for freedom would come at a terrible price. Both Belton and Berl try to avert this cataclysm "in the name of humanity." However, neither character nor the text itself necessarily critiques Bernard's indictment of the whites or even his willingness to use violence per se. The text asks readers not to choose between beliefs so much as to choose to act at all, faced with the knowledge imparted to them by Berl. The debate thus belongs to the text's wider "rhetoric of direct address [meant] to reinforce an image of the reader as an active collaborator in a shared enterprise," as Chakkalakal writes. Eric Curry has usefully dubbed this the text's "determined indeterminacy." If the novel and its politics seem contradictory or inscrutable, it is because Griggs aims not to answer questions but to prompt black readers to commit themselves to working for racial justice.[22]

Despite the threat of war, the insurgency at the heart of the novel hinges not on violence but on how it defines itself: the debate between Belton and Bernard comes down to how the Imperium will depict—or not depict—its relationship to the US in particular and to whites in general. Critics of the novel have usually focused on its question of violence; however, the final confrontation between its characters

22 Griggs, *Imperium*, 176; Chakkalakal, "Reading," 154; Eric Curry, "'The Power of Combinations': Sutton Griggs'*Imperium in Imperio* and the Science of Collective Efficiency," *American Literary Realism* 43, no. 1 (2010): 23.

centers around whether whites will read, hear, or otherwise learn about the Imperium at all. Following Belton's successful rebuttal of the war resolution, Bernard drafts a "Plan of Action for the Imperium in Imperio" and achieves it by way of backdoor dealing and "a secret, formidable combination" of Imperium senators.[23] Above all, Bernard urges the Imperium's congress to maintain secrecy, reflected in his proposal's language. According to the plan, the Imperium will proceed to "*Quietly* purchase all Texas land contiguous to states and territories of the Union. Build small commonplace huts on these lands and place rapid fire *disappearing* guns in fortifications dug *beneath* them. All of this is to be done *secretly*. . . ."[24] From there, the Imperium will enlist all black Americans in the US Navy and negotiate treaties with the nation's enemies before staging a coup to seize Texas and sabotage the fleet. As Bernard's plan concludes, "We will demand the surrender of Texas and Louisiana to the Imperium. Texas, we will retain. Louisiana, we will cede to our foreign allies in return for their aid. Thus will the Negro have an empire of his own, fertile in soil, capable of sustaining a population of fifty million people."[25] Bernard has planned not just a "race war" but a secret coup.

The dilemma ultimately hinges on the secrecy of the Imperium rather than on the value of violence, and in this way transforms the final debate into one about how to define the Imperium's collective racial identity. The Imperium's members (and Griggs's readers) are confronted with the question: Do blacks remain Americans or become a true secret—and separate—society? Belton and Bernard both seek to

23 Griggs, *Imperium*, 167.
24 Ibid., emphasis added.
25 Griggs, *Imperium*, 168.

determine how they collectively circulate in national discourse and, in turn, how they relate to the US. Belton's proposal concludes by resolving to temporarily avoid confrontation with whites, while Bernard's concludes by resolving to wage war and seize power. Yet both plans begin with contrasting resolutions regarding the Imperium's secrecy. Belton wants to "no longer conceal from the Anglo-Saxon the fact that the Imperium exists," whereas Bernard wants to "Reconsider our determination to make known the existence of our Imperium, and avoid all mention of an emigration to Texas."[26] The plans, like the characters, constitute mirror images or "dualities." At stake in their competing proposals is whether the Imperium's black members will, at least for now, maintain their citizenship with the US or whether they will continue to function like a secret society, a separate "nation within a nation." Through the question of secrecy versus publicity, Belton and Bernard seek to redefine the exact relationship between race and national belonging.

Imperium in Imperio itself has performatively weighed into the debate. The novel is a multiply framed narrative by way of Berl Trout's whistleblowing. Siding with Belton, Berl exposes Bernard's war plan in hopes of disarming the Imperium's threat. Even the first words of the text, announcing "Sutton E. Griggs's" prefatory note, are about revealing the existence of the Imperium. They read, "To the Public." From its first page to its last, then, *Imperium in Imperio* has signaled the questions that define the novel's climactic debate.

Given Griggs's method of implicating his readers, the insurgent Imperium prompts his audience to redefine its collective black identity and community. In their

26 Griggs, *Imperium*, 163, 167.

conflict over the Imperium's secrecy or publicity, Belton and Bernard bring to a head the problem of shared identity represented by the Imperium itself: does the Imperium continue like a secret society, or does it maintain its connection to the white-dominated US, albeit temporarily? Dedicated to black equality and advancement, Griggs put his fiction to use in (re)imagining black collectivity and prompting its members to action. In his first novel, the Imperium's insurgency—or at least its possibility—offers a figure for community as well as action.

Insurgency's image of an embattled people and their resistance to oppression could be put to opposing uses. If Griggs found that imagery useful for urging his readers to remake their shared identity, then other writers could too. Despite resurgent racial hierarchy following Emancipation and Reconstruction efforts, white identity was tenuous, unstable, even incoherent. Racial insurgency could do for white readers what it did for Griggs's black ones. A few years after Griggs, Dixon would write his own version of rebellion as a way to shore up white supremacy's social regime. To do it, he would imagine not a “nation within a nation” but an “invisible empire” of Ku Klux Klansmen and vigilante Democrats. If this vision for racial insurgency was not a reaction to Griggs's novel, it was a reaction to the promise of black political power and equality embodied in Reconstruction. Against Reconstruction's promise, the image of insurgency could unite white readers through a shared sense of embattlement and grievance.

Counter-Insurgency: White Hoods and Red Shirts

Thomas R. Dixon surely never read Sutton E. Griggs. Yet Dixon's first novel, *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) offers what reads like a response to *Imperium in Imperio*.[27] He puts the image of racial insurgency to opposing ends by reversing the racial dynamics at play. Whereas Griggs depicts a threatening black insurgency against the Jim Crow US, Dixon depicts the opposite: white insurgencies against supposedly illegitimate black political power. White rebellion in Dixon figures a resurgent white identity—something new, cohesive, and coherent in the aftermath of Reconstruction, at the same time that racial difference was being codified through Plessy v. Ferguson. Dixon actually creates a microcosm of this larger project within the world of his novel: just as the author circulates a resurgent whiteness through his fiction, the revolutionary conspiracies in *The Leopard's Spots* come into being only through various "media," from gruesome lynchings to whispered rumors to spectacular marches. Despite their pretensions to secrecy, Dixon's insurrectionary Ku Klux Klan and Red Shirt movement exist only through highly public acts that render their racial terror—and their identity—legible and effective.

Dixon knew something about spectacle. After all, he worked throughout his long career to speak to national audiences using a range of media. His legacy today rests on his popular *Reconstruction Trilogy*, beginning with *The Leopard's Spots*, which tells a redemptive history of the postbellum South in order to assert the dangers of black franchisement and miscegenation. These books, particularly *The Clansman*

27 Thomas frames the relationship between Dixon and Albion Tourgee in a similar way, arguing that Tourgee's earlier novel preemptively "responds" to Dixon's later one. See Thomas, *Literature*, 154.

(1905), inspired D.W. Griffith's epochal 1915 film, *The Birth of a Nation*. Dixon was a filmmaker himself, writing several film scripts and founding his own production company. He understood the power of cultural representation and discourse, disseminating his ideas variously as a novelist, filmmaker, lecturer, minister, and politician over the course of his life.[28]

Despite the ultimate impact of Dixon's *Reconstruction Trilogy, The Leopard's Spots* itself was not a particularly novel literary text, but it did join existing popular traditions and discourses to enormous success. A redemptive narrative had already been recuperating Southern identity for years, mythologizing the South's "Lost Cause" with literary expressions from authors such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page. Plantation romances such as theirs, or the idyllic imagery of the minstrel shows, rewrote the history of slavery. As W. Fitzhugh Brundage notes, the "romanticization of the Ku Klux Klan, for example, was well under way before Dixon wrote *The Clansman*" or even *The Leopard's Spots*.[29] Dixon's first novel does not invent so much as it effectively joins what had already existed. It became a uniquely popular and prominent example of a resurgent conservative whiteness. And there lies the novel's project: building a collective identity.

If Dixon did not directly respond to Griggs, he did to both Harriet Beecher Stowe and the novelist, lawyer, and activist Albion Tourgée, which perhaps reinforces the feeling that Dixon would actually rebut *Imperium in Imperio*.[30] In *The*

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28 For useful biography, see Michel Gillespie and Randal L Hall, "Introduction," *Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006): 3, 7; see also Wallinger, "Sutton E. Griggs."

29 W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Thomas Dixon: American Proteus," *Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America,* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006): 30.

30 Thomas, *Literature*, 104.

Leopard's Spots, Dixon mixes triumphant Southern sectionalism, resurgent white power, patriarchal politics, and imperialist nationalism in hopes of producing an activist literature to rival the work of either Stowe or Tourgée.[31] Book I of the novel tells a Reconstruction story: the "scalawag" Simon Legree and the black politician Tim Shelby (both Stowe's characters) lead a power grab to establish a despotic Reconstruction government, complete with wealth redistribution, black political power, and a reign of terror throughout the South. But the white men of the fictional Hambright, North Carolina, led by Reverend John Durham, overthrow the regime through a series of KKK lynchings and marches. Durham, fearful of an uncontrollable Klan, then disbands the group, restoring peace to Hambright. Book II continues two decades later with the Republican party again gaining power in North Carolina. Durham's young protégé Charlie Gaston has rejected some of Durham's more militant racial politics. But over the course of the novel, Gaston becomes a staunch advocate of Durham's ideas. He ultimately leads another American "revolution" in the state in order to beat back the insurgent Republican Party and lead the Democrats to victory on a platform of white supremacy and imperial ambition. Meanwhile, Durham drives out the depraved "scalawag" Allan McLeod, who had been sowing local discord even as he led the political opposition to Gaston. The novel ends in a symbolic union between Gaston, the South's new leader, and Sallie Worth, daughter of the old Confederacy.[32] In its melodrama of white uprising, Southern redemption, and black

31 Tourgée's novels *A Fool's Errand* (1879) and *Bricks Without Straw* (1880) depict the struggles of Reconstruction, including KKK violence. He further developed his work on the Klan into a book-length study, *The Invisible Empire* (1880).

32 For a useful summary and further biographical information, see Jennifer L. Larson and Mary Alice Kirkpatrick, "Summary," in *Documenting the American South*: https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/dixonleopard/summary.html.

corruption, *The Leopard's Spots* seeks to do for the white South what Stowe did for abolitionism or what Tourgée did for black civil rights.

Though opposed politically, Griggs's and Dixon's novels create a kind of Reconstruction call-and-response, with Dixon replying not to Griggs himself but to the politics of black equality that emerged from the Reconstruction period. *The Leopard's Spots* explicitly frames Reconstruction as a seizure of political power by conspiring white liberals and black cabals. Dixon is plain about this. For instance, he titles Chapter XIV "The Negro Uprising," which begins, "The summer of summer of 1867! Will ever a Southern man or woman who saw it forget its scenes? A group of oath-bound secret societies, The Union League, The Heroes of America, and The Red Strings dominating society, and marauding bands of negroes armed to the teeth terrorising the country, stealing, burning and murdering." In a telling act of ideological refraction, Dixon blames Reconstruction on "secret societies" despite lionizing similar groups to bring about Reconstruction's end. Elsewhere in the novel, the Freedmen's Bureau hints at "coming confiscation, revolution, and revenge" in the South, and the narration dubs Reconstruction a "new revolution [that] destroyed the Union a second time."[33] When we juxtapose their two novels, Dixon's resembles a rebuttal to Griggs's scenes of black militancy.

The novel's great threat is supposed "Negro supremacy," and the novel's first half explicitly depicts the beginnings of "anarchy" amid a disorganized white populace too broken to resist.[34] In a chapter following "The Negro Uprising" titled

33 Thomas R. Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1902): 100, 60, 83: https://docsouth.unc.edu/southlit/dixonleopard/leopard.html.

34 Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 440. Throughout, the novel uses the word "anarchy" to describe racial equality in order to discredit it. This is "anarchy" in its sense of disorder, in contrast to the

"The Second Reign of Terror," black soldiers who are occupying the defeated Confederacy interrupt the wedding of Flora Camp and Hose Norman: "Suddenly a black shadow fell across the doorway. The fiddle ceased, and every eye was turned to the door. The burly figure of a big negro trooper from a company stationed in the town stood before them. His face was in a broad grin, and his eyes bloodshot with whiskey. He brought his musket down on the floor with a bang." The sexual threat of the troops is palpable in Dixon's description. Entering under the pretense of searching the house (a way to depict the Union occupation's illegitimacy), the black soldiers take the opportunity to seize Flora and attempt to rape her. When "Hose's mountain boys" pursue the attackers, they shoot Flora rather than risk her "virtue." Flora's father Tom urges them on, yelling, "Shoot, men! My God, shoot! There are things worse than death!" The whites of Hambright prefer Flora's death to threats of black sexuality and miscegenation. Following the incident, Tom consoles Hose's friends, telling them, "Let us thank God [Flora] was saved from those brutes. . . . You've saved my little gal. I want to shake hands with you and thank you. If you hadn't been there—My God, I can't think of what would'a happened! Now it's all right. She's safe in God's hands."[35] In the novel, black power can only be illegitimate, and it can only lead to such scenes of violence.

If, for Dixon, Reconstruction constitutes a "Negro Uprising," then *The Leopard's Spots* becomes a novel about a white "counter-insurgency" that finally

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political philosophy of Lucy Parsons. Interestingly, when the town of Hambright passes a resolution dubbing a local black newspaper editor an "anarchist," the text picks up on the racialization of anarchism that I discuss in chapter three. Dixon himself was an anti-Communist; see Gillespie and Hall, "Introduction," 13.

35 Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 124, 125, 126.

organizes revanchist whites into a unified political force. The text depicts two examples of such insurrection. In a well-known plotline, Dixon first uses a romanticized version of the KKK as the vehicle for secret white rebellion.[36] Given the KKK's prominence in our own cultural imagination, attention toward the novel has usually centered around this section. But there is a less stylized yet functionally similar white insurgency later on, framed not around the KKK but the "Red Shirts." Appearing at the end of Reconstruction, the Red Shirts acted as a paramilitary wing of the Democrats, enforcing white supremacy through violence and intimidation. Most infamously, they helped propel Wade Hampton into office as Governor of South Carolina. In general, the red shirt became "the new badge of uncompromising resistance to radicalism" and "the symbol of a Confederate nationalism which blossomed during the [South Carolina gubernatorial] campaign of 1876."[37] *The Leopard's Spots*'s second half fictionalizes the historical role of the Red Shirts when Gaston uses them to beat back the Republicans and win control of the Democrats. In the context of the novel, the ostensibly secret insurgencies represented by the KKK and the Red Shirts forge a triumphant white Southern identity in the face of black political power.

These are explicitly revolutionary—or rather counter-revolutionary—movements. The narration describes the KKK's first appearance as "a spontaneous and resistless racial *uprising* of clansmen of highland origin living along the

36 Dixon actually rejected later iterations of the KKK as nationally divisive. See Gillespie and Hall, "Introduction," 13.

37 George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984): 168; Edmund L. Drago, *Hurrah for Hampton!: Black Red Shirts in South Carolina during Reconstruction*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998): 9.

Appalachian mountains and foothills of the South, and it appeared almost simultaneously in every Southern state produced by the same terrible conditions." In the text's own language discussed above, the KKK actually constitutes a counter-uprising to Reconstruction. The narration even agrees with the corrupt "scalawag" government of Governor Amos Hogg: "Hogg's Legislature promptly declared the Scotch-Irish hill counties in a state of insurrection, passed a militia bill, and the Governor issued a proclamation suspending the writ of *Habeas Corpus* in these counties."[38] In the novel's second half, the KKK has been replaced by a new militia movement, the Red Shirts, which continues this tradition of white insurrection. Although he is critical of Gaston at this point, Sallie Worth's father, General Worth, describes the Red Shirt movement to his daughter in roughly positive terms: "We have had terrible riots in Independence while you were absent in which Gaston was the leader of an armed revolution which overturned the city and county government. Two thousand men were under arms for a week and several were killed and wounded on both sides. The results were good as a whole, I confess. We have a decent government and we have security of property and life, but such methods will lead to civil war." A few lines later, the General dubs the affair "The Revolution."[39]

Dixon fictionalizes historical insurgencies against Reconstruction governments. From roughly 1868 to 1871, white groups such as the KKK, the White Brotherhood, the Knights of the White Camelia, and the Red Shirts enacted what Eric

38 Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 150, emphasis added; 154.

39 Ibid., 419-20. General Worth's description in particular recalls the Wilmington coup, a white insurrection that in 1898 overthrew a legitimate local government sympathetic to black progress. Charles Chesnutt famously fictionalized the event in his novel, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901).

Foner calls a "wave of counterrevolutionary terror."[40] Interclass alliances of whites, often working in tandem with the Democratic Party, utilized violence and racial terror to undermine Reconstruction measures, effectively reclaiming the social and labor authority of the old enslaving class.[41] Moreover, this insurgent activity occurred as reaction against Union military occupation of former Confederate States. Some state governors effectively put down Klan activity in particular by "suspend[ing] normal legal processes and employ[ing] armed force" like the fictional Governor Hogg.[42] But the federal government ultimately intervened against Klan violence with the Enforcement Acts of 1870 and '71. The last of these bills, informally dubbed the Ku Klux Klan Act, granted the federal government power to protect civil rights as well as to suppress conspiracies against the US. However bombastic the revolutionary rhetoric in *The Leopard's Spots* appears, the federal government had taken seriously the insurgent threat of groups like the Klan.

This first iteration of the historical Ku Klux Klan that existed from 1866 to the mid-1870s actually reveals much about *The Leopard's Spots*. Critics must always distinguish the historical Klan from the one that Dixon fashions on the page, as well as from the Klan operating in the American cultural imagination (although the latter owes much to Dixon).[43] After all, this was the only version of the KKK that had existed by the time that Dixon wrote his novel. According to Elaine Frantz Parsons,

40 Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877, (*New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 425. Foner's chapter, "The Challenges of Enforcement" provides a comprehensive summary of the the Ku Klux Klan as well as the federal government's response.
41 Ibid., 432, 428.
42 Ibid., 440.
43 Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015): 10-1. 2015.

the first Klan was less an “organization” than a “decentralized pattern of violence” given meaning and circulation through the media's discursive practices.[44] Yet Dixon appears to give readers precisely the opposite in the form of a coherent, highly structured secret society that is preceded by a stable white male Southern identity.

Despite apparent differences, Dixon's fictionalized white insurgents closely resemble the historical Klan: the KKK and the Red Shirts in *The Leopard's Spots* give definite shape to a whiteness that is actually amorphous and contingent. Parsons argues that the “Ku-Klux” label granted disparate groups of conservative and Southern whites a new political identity. It brought them together. “'Ku Klux,'” she explains, “was a brand-new identity in an old and defeated region.” In a South fractured less by war than by Emancipation's up-ending of the old sociopolitical order, “'Ku-Klux' became one of many new identities conservative white men could lay claim to.”[45] If slavery could no longer tie together diverse white constituencies, and until Jim Crow appeared in its full force, then the vigilante and paramilitary arms of the Democratic party would have to. The dual plots of T*he Leopard's Spots* follow this trajectory as the whites of Hambright transform from defeated and disorganized to a coherent, insurgent political force.

Parsons's emphasis on the discursiveness of the KKK dovetails with current literary readings of Dixon's work because both highlight the active formation of new white identities. As Gretchen Murphy summarizes, “[a] current approach to interpreting Dixon's novel is to look for and describe gaps, contradictions, and

44 Parsons, *Ku-Klux*, 17.
45 Ibid., 14, 15.

instabilities in Dixon's definition of whiteness."[46] For instance, Susan Gillman argues that the conflicted, even contradictory whiteness that emerges in *The Leopard's Spots* figures the period's unstable racial categories. Murphy builds off of Gillman's argument to suggest that depictions of race in the novel are less symptomatic of the period than they are a function of Dixon's authorial goals.[47] With his fiction, he actively sought to reconcile competing racial and political projects, from Southern sectionalism to centralized state power to imperial ambition.

Following this line of thinking, we can recognize the moments when *The Leopard's Spots* works to create a coherent version of whiteness by making it appear as a natural or preexisting category. The novel presents the KKK in particular as if they were a given. They seem to appear out of nowhere and with no explanation: "The origin of this Law and Order League which sprang up like magic in a night and nullified the programme of Congress though backed by an army of a million veteran soldiers, is yet a mystery." Indeed, their first appearance identifies them suggestively as "K.K.K."[48] Grandiosely dubbed the "Invisible Empire of the White Robed Anglo-Saxon Knights," the KKK is implicitly everywhere, yet unseen. Presumably the group is no secret to the thousands of white men who had belonged to it the whole time. Despite their apparent numbers, "It was impossible for [the Reconstruction government] to secure evidence against any member of the Klan unless by

46 Gretchen Murphy, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden: US Imperialism and the Problem of the Color Line*, (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 58.
47 See Gillman, *Blood Talk*, 73-116 and Murphy, *Shadowing the White Man's Burden*, 58-86.
48 Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 150.

intimidation of some coward who could be made to confess. Not a disguise had ever been penetrated."[49]

The novel's white insurgency gives shape and, by appearing as part of the natural racial order, justification to the revanchist white identity that Dixon champions; at the same time, readers can discern how that identity must be constantly created and then circulated in discourse in order to achieve its racial dominance. Despite the Klan's mystery, its insurgency in *The Leopard's Spots* comes into being not as spontaneous displays of a natural white identity but rather as deliberate acts of spectacular racial terror. In this, Dixon's Klan resembles the media-savvy Klan that Parsons identifies. Even their violence takes the form of a message that must be circulated. After all, the group first appears in order to lynch Tim Shelby. The lynch mob pretends to secrecy, working under cover of darkness: "The next night at twelve o'clock two hundred horses assembled around the old home of Mrs. Gaston where Tim was sleeping. The moon was full and flooded the lawn with silver glory. On those horses sat two hundred white-robed silent men whose closefitting hood disguises looked like the mail helmets of ancient knights."[50] But the lynching, or its gruesome result, is public. It is meant to be seen. For this reason, it takes the form of a horrific message in the town square:

> When the sun rose next morning the lifeless body of Tim Shelby was dangling from a rope tied to the iron rail of the balcony of the court house. His neck was broken and his body was hanging low—scarcely

49 Ibid., 154.
50 Ibid., 149-50.

> three feet from the ground. His thick lips had been split with a sharp knife and from his teeth hung this placard: "*The answer of the Anglo-Saxon race to Negro lips that dare pollute with words the womanhood of the South. K.K.K.*"[51]

Their ceremony and spectacular violence give the lie to the Klan's naturalizing mystery. For their white counter-insurgency to succeed, they must *not* be secret but rather seen.

There is a fictiveness to the insurgent Klan and to the white identity Dixon uses them to represent; like the Klan's first incarnation, they actually exist and achieve success primarily through rumor, spectacle, and exaggeration. On some level, they lack the very substance that they seek to project.[52] Following Tim Shelby's lynching, the Klan makes a massive show of force that stages their mystery and their spectacle at the same time. When Legree and Hogg enter the town,

> they saw a sight that made their souls quake. At ten o'clock, the Ku Klux Klan held a formal parade through the streets of Hambright. How the news was circulated nobody knew, but it seemed everybody in the county knew of it. The streets were lined with thousands of people who had poured in town that afternoon. At exactly ten o'clock, a bugle call was heard on the hill to the west of the town, and the muffled tread of soft shod horses came faintly on their ears. . . . They rode four abreast in perfect order slowly through the town. It was utterly

51 Ibid., 150. For a reading of the discursive quality of Shelby's lynching, see Michael T. Gilmore, *The War on Words: Slavery, Race, and Free Speech in American Literature,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

52 Parsons, *Ku-Klux*, 17.

> impossible to recognise a man or a horse, so complete was the simple disguise of the white sheet which blanketed the horse fitting closely over his head and ears and falling gracefully over his form toward the ground. No citizen of Hambright was in the procession. They were all in the streets watching it pass. There were fifteen hundred men in line. But the reports next day all agreed in fixing the number at over five thousand.[53]

The procession was a "sight," one intended to be witnessed and enhanced by the Klan's ritual costume. News about the procession somehow spreads throughout the county without anyone's specific knowledge how. Perhaps most importantly, the group's victory in this moment lies not in material harm but in their mythic image that circulates following the march: later reports grossly inflate the KKK's size and strength. Like Dixon himself, witnesses in the novel are actively constructing a discursive Klan that comes to represent a resurgent white identity.

Although less violent or extensively described, Gaston's Red Shirts in the novel's second half function in the same way: they give shape to a reactionary white identity, but that shape is actually less substantial than it initially appears. Indeed, they mirror descriptions of the KKK in Book I both in their sudden appearance and their spectacular power. As in Book I, the looming threat of black power leads to a what the text portrays as a spontaneous, organic uprising of white men. Although not depicted with the same ritualistic secrecy as the KKK, these Red Shirts implicitly rely on their own combination of mystery and spectacle:

53 Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 154.

> A strange thing had occurred that had upset all calculations. Beginning at Independence a race fire had broken into resistless fury and was sweeping along the line of all the counties on the South Carolina border and over the entire state with incredible rapidity. Everywhere, the white men were arming themselves and parading the streets and public roads in cavalry order dressed in scarlet shirts. This Red Shirt movement was a spontaneous combustion of inflammable racial power that had been accumulating for a generation.[54]

This particular moment parallels the KKK's initial appearance. It is a generational repetition: although Durham deactivated the KKK itself twenty years earlier, the same spirit of white rebellion spreads, now under the leadership of Durham's heir Gaston. The repetition becomes clearest when the Red Shirts hold a procession of their own, a fictional version of their actual marches that mirrors the Klan parade depicted earlier in the novel:

> When Gaston spoke at Independence, five thousand white men dressed in scarlet shirts rode silently through the streets in solemn parade, and six thousand negroes watched them with fear. There was no cheering or demonstration of any kind. The silence of the procession gave it the import of a religious rite. A thousand picked men were in line from Hambright and Campbell county and they formed the guard of honour for their candidate for Governor.[55]

54 Ibid., 414-5.
55 Ibid., 446.

In the novel, the Red Shirts repeat the work of the KKK, albeit without living on in the cultural imagination like the KKK has.

These two vigilante insurgencies together shape Dixon's vision for his readers as the Jim Crow regime consolidated at the turn of the century. Like the hoods of the KKK, the uniform of the Red Shirts give definition to a version of white identity seeking to reassert itself during a period when black political power was momentarily and partially achievable. But despite what Dixon or his vigilante insurgents would claim, that white identity was always contrived and artificial, given form by the very symbols it deployed to spread racial terror. Anti-black violence without a note signed "K.K.K." or a public lynching lacks the same discursive power; a white uprising without red shirts is just a riot. Such acts give form and political meaning to white violence. They organize actually disparate white reactionaries into a coherent, homogenous political force. The novel's trajectory in both halves moves from disorganized, suffering whites to resurgent whites organized under the auspices of the Klan or the Red Shirts.

The white insurgencies of *The Leopard's Spots* thus resemble that of *Imperium in Imperio* in that they make a political identity, mobilizing whites as a counter-force to black political power. Like Griggs, Dixon attempts to write an effective literature. But unlike Griggs, Dixon depicts insurgents whose racial identity has to be actively fashioned through violence and symbolic domination. The novel's KKK and Red Shirts perpetuate racial terror, relying more on public perception than on a critical mass of insurrectionary violence in order to fashion a racial community.

Conclusion: Defending Telassar

The imagined insurgencies of *Imperium in Imperio* and *The Leopard's Spots* are ultimately about collectivity. They fashion for readers new shared racial identities while moving them to action. For Griggs, this means encouraging an activist black public to take black advancement as its special mission; for Dixon, it means consolidating white identity and entitlement at a time of racial (re)formation. Thus paired, the two novels tell a story of black resistance and white reaction, insurgency and counter-insurgency.

But at the dawn of the twentieth century, white supremacy's violence was spreading around the globe, and writers imagined insurgent identities that extended beyond the US. Even *Imperium in Imperio* and *The Leopard's Spots* hint at imperial adventures. Both texts feature moments in which news of US imperialism erupts into the narrative. According to Amy Kaplan, for example, in *The Leopard's Spots* "the Spanish-American War intervenes like a *deus ex machina* to unify white men in chivalrous rescue of white women from black men and of the white nation from black Reconstruction," while Gretchen Murphy adds that news of the War "functions . . . to awaken all sorts of whites to their Anglo-Saxon world mission."[56] In *Imperium in Imperio*, meanwhile, news of the sinking of the USS *Maine* at Cuba precipitates a "war excitement" that can be read both as a critique of US imperial ambition and foreshadowing of the Imperium's own attempt at liberation.[57]

56 Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of US Culture,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 121; Murphy, *Shadowing*, 68.

57 For readings of transnational readings of Griggs, see Levander, "Sutton Griggs," Kaplan, *The Anarchy*, and Murphy, *Shadowing*.

Given how US imperialism hovers at the edges of these novels, I want to conclude the chapter with a final example that obliquely uses racial insurgency to fashion black diasporic identity and imagine black self-defense from white supremacy: the serial novel *Of One Blood* (1902-3) by the novelist, journalist, critic, editor, and playwright Pauline E. Hopkins. Appearing over several months in the *Colored American Magazine, Of One Blood* takes the form of a "historical romance" with the utopian African city of Telassar at its heart.[58] A literal secret society like the Imperium, Telassar represents blackness outside of US borders and connects the novel's main characters to an ancient black past. Not precisely like the insurgencies depicted by Griggs and Dixon, Hopkins's Telassar nonetheless reveals something new when put in conversation with her contemporaries: a diasporic identity, and even the prospect of black victory against white oppression. Ending on Hopkins lets us end not on the real horror of Dixon's white paramilitaries but on the equally real promise of Telassar. Hopkins extends my reading of Griggs and Dixon into a triptych: black insurgency, white counter-insurgency, black self-defense.

The "hidden city of Telassar" frames the novel's black characters but also its black readers, giving form to their diasporic belonging. The novel's mystery centers largely around three characters whose lineage derives from the ancient but advanced African civilization of Meroe.[59] Telassar is all that remains of this society, and the city comes to embody the characters' forgotten diasporic history as well as the novel's

58 Dana Luciano, "Passing Shadows: Melancholic Nationality and Black Critical Publicity in Pauline E. Hopkins's *Of One Blood*," *Loss: The Politics of Mourning,* ed. by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003): 148.

59 Pauline E. Hopkins, *Of One Blood, Or, the Hidden Self,* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2004): 114.

romantic Ethiopianism.[60] In fact, the novel's protagonist, Reuel, discovers that he is the long-prophesied heir to the throne of Telassar. His heritage comes as a symbolic revelation: he discovers his long secret African past. The text poses this as a revelation for readers too. The knowledge of a lost diasporic identity creates a new race consciousness for them no less than for Hopkins's characters. Dana Luciano explains that Hopkins's "melodramatic novels," like *Of One Blood*, fashioned "ways of inventing a stylized and historically informed blackness with which to move into the twentieth century. Hopkins sought to elaborate an aesthetic form for black critical publicity" during the Jim Crow period no less than Griggs and in contrast to Dixon's white readers.[61] More than Griggs's, though, this sense of black collectivity understands itself in the context of wider diasporic belonging. Reuel discovers his true identity only outside of the US, as part of a history of African-descended peoples dispersed around the globe. For this reason, the novel's symbolic black community takes a notably different form from Griggs's US-modeled Imperium: a mystic lost civilization, not a secret "combination." Its suggestive Ethiopianism moves readers beyond the US by connecting them with an ancient, global sense of belonging.

This may be a novel that figures diasporic blackness, but not one that imagines insurgency in the ways that *Imperium in Imperio* or *The Leopard's Spots* do; however, the text does ominously end on something like an insurgent threat to Telassar. By the final page, Reuel has left the US to live in Telassar as its king, hinting at his own growing diasporic consciousness. The novel implies that his

60 On Ethiopianism, see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925,* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1978).
61 Luciano, "Passing Shadows," 152.

kingship is a melancholic development, and Reuel seems haunted by his memories and travails from over the course of the text. Still, he is poised to be a benevolent king who can symbolically bridge the gap between blacks' experience in the US and Telassar's ancient past. Whatever promise might lie in his kingship gets unsettled by the looming threat of conflict:

> Reuel Briggs returned to the Hidden City with his faithful subjects, and old Aunt Hannah. These he spends his days in teaching his people all that he has learned in years of contact with modern culture. United to Candace, his days glide peacefully by in good works; but the shadows of great sins darken his life, and the memory of past joys is ever with him. He views, too, with serious apprehension, the advance of mighty nations penetrating the dark, mysterious forests of his native land.
>
> "Where will it stop? he sadly questions. "What will the end be?"
>
> But none save Omnipotence can solve the problem.[62]

Written at the height of Europe's brutal scramble to colonize the African continent, the novel ends gesturing towards Telassar's precarity. What will *its* end be? Where will the colonial threat stop? If Hopkins does not depict insurgency, as do Griggs and Dixon, she does end her novel on an "insurgent" threat to Telassar. It is not at all hard to imagine a white attack on Telassar's black power resembling those counter-

62 Hopkins, *Of One Blood*, 193.

insurgencies that Dixon romanticizes. His was a novel about the overthrow of black governance, after all.

Yet this would only be a partial reading of the novel's ending, and an insufficiently historical one. Certainly another interpretation of this passage holds that Telassar, perhaps against all odds, beats back "the advance of mighty nations" and the white world's insurgent threat. Such a reading might fly in the face of melancholic readings like Luciano's. How could we read hope in *Of One Blood*'s ending when nothing else about the text seems hopeful?

But such an anti-colonial reading does not fly in the face of history, literary or otherwise. Not ten years earlier, in 1896, Ethiopia won a decisive victory against the Italian army at the Battle of Adwa, successfully halting imperial expansion into its territory until the Second World War. By 1935 Ethiopia was one of only two African nations that had never been colonized.[63] The looming "Battle of Telassar" had already happened, and the "mighty nations" had lost. The *Colored American Magazine* itself had alluded to the event in its December 1900 issue.[64] So far we can only speculate—although plausibly given her involvement with the magazine—that Hopkins read this passage and therefore knew of Ethiopia's victory against Italy's insurgent threat. And perhaps looking for a hopeful reading of the novel's final page demands too much from a text so invested in the experience of racial melancholia. Yet such a reading remains possible. If one were writing a diasporic collective identity into being at the turn of the century, then readers could find a figurative home in Telassar—or Adwa.

63 Molly Crabapple, "Hidden Fighters: Remembering America's Black Antifascist Vanguard," *The Baffler* No. 35, (June 2017): https://thebaffler.com/salvos/hidden-fighters-crabapple.

64 I owe this insight to Edlie Wong. See S.E.F.C.C. Hamedoe, "Menelik, Emperor of Abyssinia," in *Colored American Magazine*, December, 1900, 151.

At least for black writers, imagining these collective identities was no abstraction but rather an immediate and urgent activist project. The racial community-building that Griggs and Hopkins figure through insurgency had real world counterparts in their involvement in the period's vibrant black print culture. Simply put, they helped create the collectivities that they sought to enact in their rebellious images. Scholars of African American print culture have shown that the nineteenth and early twentieth century was a time of rapidly expanding black reading practices, whether in the form of growing literacy rates, proliferating reading groups, or increasing publications.[65] According to Elizabeth McHenry, during these years "literature resurfaced as one of the practical tools black Americans envisioned using not only to reflect but also in fact to redefine themselves and their roles in the larger community."[66] Thus the insurgent identities that Griggs and Hopkins wrote reflected their era's wider print culture. Significantly, both writers also dedicated themselves to the institutional world of black publishing.

In trying to mobilize an activist black audience, Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio*'s insurgency enacts *on* the page a project that Griggs would spend much of his life trying to enact *with* actual pages. After publishing his first novel with a vanity press, Griggs subsequently founded his own black-centric publishing house, Orion Press. Orion would publish Griggs's remaining novels. After giving up writing

65 See for instance Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies*, (Durham: Duke University Press), 2002; and Eric Gardner, *Unexpected Places: Relocating Nineteenth-Century African American Literature*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); and Frances Smith Foster, "Genealogies of Our Concerns, Early (African) American Print Culture, and Transcending Tough Times," *American Literary History* 22, no. 2 (2010): 368-380.

66 McHenry, *Forgotten Readers*, 188.

fiction, Griggs published pamphlets and tracts under the auspices of the National Public Welfare League, which he also founded. In his first novel, then, we find Griggs early on hinting at a lifelong concern: crafting a black (reading) public.[67] Unfortunately as Tess Chakkalakal has shown, few people, white or black, read Griggs's novels.[68]

Like Griggs, Hopkins also wrote to summon into being a critical, literary black audience, but by any measure Hopkins was the more successful of the two writers. She would produce her most significant work as part of a literary cooperative that published the *Colored American Magazine* (1900-9, though Hopkins's involvement ended after 1904), which sought to connect black people through print, and through that connection to agitate against oppression. In the words of the *Colored American*'s inaugural editorial, "Above all it aspires to develop and intensify the bonds of that racial brotherhood, which alone can enable a people, to assert their racial rights as men, and demand their privileges as citizens."[69] This was an activist endeavor, not unlike Griggs's own publishing efforts. Writing of *Freedom's Journal* and an earlier black periodical literature, Frances Smith Foster explains that newspapers blended the "practical and pedantic, scholarly and serviceable,

67 On Griggs's publishing and circulation, see Chakkalakal, "Reading."

68 Tess Chakkalakal, "Reading in Sutton E. Griggs," in *Jim Crow, Literature, and the Legacy of Sutton E. Griggs,*Tess Chakkalakal and Kenneth W Warren, eds., (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013): 143.

69 "Editorial and Publishers' Announcements," in *Colored American Magazine,* May, 1900. For an excellent resource including digital scans of the magazine, see Eurie Dahn and Brian Sweeney, *The Digital Colored American Magazine,* http://coloredamerican.org/; Hazel V. Carby, "Introduction," *The Magazine Novels of Pauline Hopkins,* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988): xxxi-ii; and Luciano, "Passing Shadows," 150, 151.

informative and diversionary."[70] Although later than *Freedom's Journal*, *Colored American Magazine* was printed in the same spirit.

The images of insurgency in Griggs's and Hopkins's novels embody turn of the century black print culture's meeting of art and activism. Both authors wrote with a mission. Amid Jim Crow's racial (re)formations, their efforts to reimagine black collectivity in print served as a kind of speculative, communal self-defense, providing black readers with ideas and discourses to encounter the period's white supremacist regimes. After all, Dixon's vision for racial insurgency had its own real life corollary in the vigilante violence and state repression that diminished what gains had been made by Reconstruction. The racial insurgencies all three authors wrote—no less than slave uprisings, black armies, or worker strikes—offer a concentrated picture of a broader interaction between aesthetics and politics, text and action. Across the long nineteenth century, authors figured black rebellion in hopes of imagining solidarities, projects, movements, and collective identities. They made a creative language out of violence that, in turn, could make something of its own.

70 Foster, "Genealogies of Our Concerns," 378.

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