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Burgess, Alexandra G

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Approved:

Hsuan Hsu, Co-Chair

Matthew Vernon, Co-Chair

Michael Ziser

Committee in Charge 2023

Abstract

This dissertation analyzes how nineteenth-century African American authors used print practices and writing strategies to actualize objectives related to the project of self-determination. These objectives include nineteenth-century historical movements like abolitionism and emigration as well as cultural values and behaviors promoted by authors who believed that a spirit of activism, philanthropy, debate, and community engagement would be critical to individuals invested in African American self-determination. I argue that in theorizing social and political objectives aimed at organizing and defining a national African American community, nineteenth-century Black authors also theorized about the purpose of print and the writing and publishing strategies that structure it. Further, I assert that this conception of print as a necessary means of advancement produced a range of unacknowledged approaches to writing and publishing that should inform the way critics read and archive nineteenth-century Black print.

The central claim of my project is that the archive of canonized African American literature is largely made up of activist-authors—or authors who produced both nonliterary and literary writing. As such, my project builds on contemporary scholarship about the multi-generic nature of Black print to revisit three authors central to the nineteenth-century African American literary canon and read their oeuvres with a holistic approach. I consider the ways multiple works by a single author illustrate a fluid relationship between literary and nonliterary writing and evaluate aspects of literary writing, including genres and techniques associated with fiction alongside those associated with nonfiction. I also consider how each author's literary and nonliterary writings reflect different approaches toward similar aims regarding the path to self-determination. This intertextual approach both decenters the novel in the study of African

American literature and reframes canonical literary authors as activist-authors whose work is the aggregate of a lifelong commitment to community.

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Introduction

Vehicle of Thought: The Collective Vision of a National African American Press In October of 1847, leaders from African American communities across the country gathered at a national Black convention held in Troy, New York to deliberate and campaign for African American¹ civil rights. The Troy convention is part of a centuries-long tradition of mass African American political organization whose origins lie in 18th-century fraternal societies and Methodist churches. The 1847 Troy Convention was particularly massive. It took place over four consecutive days and dozens of delegates from across the country participated, including well-known leaders such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Alexander Crummell, James McCune Smith, and more. On the fourth day of the convention, the Committee on a "National Press and Printing Establishment for the People of Color" submitted a report on the importance and practicability of establishing a national African American press. The committee imagined a single independently operated printing press that produced a weekly and quarterly periodical intended to keep the African American community "steadily alive" to their responsibilities and to pose as a "Banner on the outer wall," informing the world of their struggles and strivings and celebrating their victories. ("Proceedings," 19) The report is explicit in the role a printing press would play in the future of African American self-

Of the means for the advancement of a people placed as we are, none are more available than a Press. We struggle against opinions. Our warfare lies in the

determination; it would be critical:

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¹ Here I will take a moment to clarify language. Throughout this dissertation I use the inclusive term, Black, when referring to communities and individuals of African descent in the United States. I use the term African American to refer both to individuals who have specifically self-identified as African American and when referring to the distinctly nineteenth-century African American polity and its ideological infrastructure, which, at various points, established itself within and against the American political sphere.

field of thought. Glorious struggle! God-like warfare! In training our soldiers for the field, in marshaling our hosts for the fight, in leading the onset and through the conflict, we need a Printing Press, because a printing press is the vehicle of thought—is a ruler of opinions. ("Proceedings," 19)

A national African American press never materialized in the way the 1847 Press Committee imagined, primarily because of the financial difficulties of sustaining even a local African American newspaper in the nineteenth century. However, in laying out the principles that would guide the operation of a national press, the committee also articulated a critical framework for the rich archive of Black American writing circulated by periodicals throughout the nineteenth century. In beginning with an analysis of the Press Committee's report from the 1847 Troy Convention, this project develops on Black print scholarship that treats the nineteenth-century African American print sphere as a site of social and political organization. By explicitly linking print practices to self-determination, the Troy report on a "National Press and Printing Establishment for the People of Color" offers itself as a theory of nineteenth-century African American print² that can guide our interpretation of this archive based on values and aims established by its early authors.

Overall, two key claims that have come out of recent scholarship on Black Print Studies inform this project: Firstly, early Black print both theorized and enacted African American self-determination. In other words, the publication, circulation, reception, reproduction, and

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² Frances Smith Foster's "A Narrative of Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African American Print Culture" helps to define the contours of early African American print production, which Foster describes as the promulgation of written words by people of African descent considered worthy of expressing to and for themselves. This print sphere involves the writing, circulation, and reception of organizational documents such as constitutions, minutes of meetings, resolutions, and lectures as well as poems, songs, eulogies, essays, and novels. It published texts in broadsides, pamphlets, periodicals, and book forms. I include aspects of newspaper culture in this description of African American print culture, including correspondence and journalism and the types of writing they produced.

internalization of various kinds of texts constitute an ongoing performance of cultural knowledge³. These texts both expressed collective goals and produced the conditions for organizing, often at the same time, and in this way, early Black print was both theoretical and practicable. Secondly, Black print also produced critical discourses that revealed and challenged the underlying exclusive relationship between white male property owners and citizenship⁴. As such, scholars argue that we should view the Black print sphere in America as emerging from the contradictions between public sphere ideals and sociopolitical practices; that in generating a Black print counterpublic, with its textual objects and publishing practices, authors also dispelled hegemonic truths, revealing that concepts associated with discourses of power-like citizenship, identity, and knowledge production-are unfixed. This project builds on work in Black Print Studies by developing reading practices sensitive to the ways print both expressed and enacted theories about self-determination across the long nineteenth century. As such, to read early Black print for the ways it actualized self-determination requires that we understand both the political and social objectives of Black authors in the nineteenth century as well as the strategies by which they made print operate to those ends.

Black Print and the Path to Self-Determination

Above all, the Troy Committee stressed that print was an ideal vehicle for selfdetermination. Self-determination refers to efforts to secure sovereignty by politically and economically oppressed groups that define themselves as a people or nation. In *Black Self*

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³ The concept of print as performance is credited to Performance Studies scholars like Diane Taylor, who proposes that scholars view print as part of a social practice aimed at transferring knowledge. This approach contextualizes writing within a range of embodied behaviors that can contribute to our interpretation of texts.

⁴This claim comes explicitly from Joanna Brooks's "The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic."

Determination: A Cultural History of the Faith of the Fathers, V.P. Nelson writes that African American self-determination in the nineteenth century operated in a dialectical relationship to white supremacy and involved numerous objectives: from freedom from enslavement, or the right to Black control over Black life, to economic independence after emancipation, to civil rights, to political empowerment within and outside the United States (4-6). Critical conversations around Black print and self-determination have produced theories and reading practices dedicated to elucidating the ways print networks contributed to African American organizing efforts. For Black persons living in nineteenth-century America, this meant using print to forge collective spaces within which they could self-govern. Joanna Brooks argues that print offered itself as a site for Black persons to reclaim a measure of subjectivity in America during enslavement. The print world existed as a counterpublic: a collective public presence that operates outside of white government-sanctioned public spaces like the political sphere. Derrick Spires argues that Black print spheres offered participants a pathway to citizenship despite being disenfranchised, revealing that the concept of citizenship in early Black political thought was linked to behaviors—what Spires refers to as *practicing* citizenship—as opposed to identity. Much of this work also proves that in forging a distinctly African American collective presence through print, Black authors theorized about the institutionally white spheres—public and political—against which they framed their counterpublic presence.

This project expands on critical conversations about the role of print in nineteenth-century African American self-determination by asserting that in addition to theorizing its own civic engagements and critical discourses about American civic ideologies, African American writing also explicitly theorized itself. In other words, the pathway(s) to self-determination can also be read as a guide for interpreting the intertextual, multi-generic archive of nineteenth-

century Black print; the immediate and long-term goals associated with the project of self-determination led to a range of intellectual strategies exercised in print during this period, some of which do not register as such in the contexts of Western literary studies. African American self-determination as a documented, cultural project, then, produced distinct values and practices based around social concerns, such as education and the representation of Blackness. This project seeks to trace how those concerns both literally and figuratively translated to print.

A key component of nineteenth-century African American self-determination was education. This makes up the second major principle articulated by the 1847 Troy report, which links the education of the African American community to the role of print: "Education of the intellect, of the will, and of character, is, doubtless, a powerful, perhaps the most powerful means for our advancement: yet a Press is needed to keep this very fact before the whole people, in order that all may constantly and unitedly labor in this, the right direction." ("Proceedings," 18) Education as an aspect of self-determination in the nineteenth century took many forms, from the promotion of literacy to industrial training to the spiritual teachings of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In the context of the Troy report, education refers more to a practice of engaging audiences in meaningful deliberation than educational institutions themselves, be they churches or public schools. The report claims that print can facilitate education by affording a field in which important means can be discussed in "the hearing of the whole people, and to the profit of all." ("Proceedings," 18) Thus, print practices reflected the intentions of writers and publishers to engage readers in meaningful ways, which, I argue, has significant implications for the ways we should read published texts.

Print as a facilitator of education, or, as the committee puts it, a "vehicle" for thought, necessitates the periodical in the work of self-determination because of its predominance

during the nineteenth century. Thanks to the historical work of scholars like Frances Smith

Foster and Eric Gardner, the archive of African American periodical writing in the nineteenth century, which includes newspapers and literary magazines, has significantly expanded in recent years—in terms of both the scope of material accessible for study and the range of approaches for interpreting it. Frances Smith Foster's research into Frances Ellen Watkins

Harper resurfaced three serialized novels published by Harper in *The Christian Recorder*—a discovery that has recently solidified Harper as *both* a poetess and a prolific novelist. Eric Gardner's *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture* records a history of writing and editorial strategies illustrated in the pages of *The Christian Recorder*, the longest-running and most influential African American newspaper of the nineteenth century. Gardner's work reveals that the Black press was remarkably democratic: its editors explicitly solicited contributions from anyone, regardless of political affiliation or identity, and its columns hosted heated debates about the future of African Americans.

The 1847 Troy Committee designated the periodical as crucial to the political project of self-determination because of its popularity: Popularized writing, then, did not just serve a general African American reading counterpublic, but it helped to create it. This reconceptualization of popular writing suggests that popular writing genres—be they literary, such as poetry, or nonliterary, such as newspaper correspondence—should be read for the ways they engaged and structured readerships. Taking seriously, as Frances Smith Foster has said, writing that is "unabashedly sentimental, religious, or didactic" both acknowledges the complex writing strategies Black authors used to make popular writing accessible and stimulating and begins to change our understanding of the characteristics of popular genres

featured in African American periodicals, like sentimentalism and romanticism, which are not overtly associated with political activism. ("Gender, Genre, and Vulgar Secularism," 49) In addition to reconsidering genre, reading for the ways print facilitated and maintained relationships between readers and contributors requires that we incorporate formal aspects of the periodical into our reading methods. Meredith McGill and Victoria Jackson have modeled practices for reading newspaper writing that include elements such as formatting. My research builds on current methods for close reading both the form and content of African American periodical texts with an eye toward strategies used to implicate readers in contemporary debates. I posit that nineteenth-century authors often turned to the writing genres associated with the periodical, such as correspondence, to implicitly structure readers in important relationships with the national African American community.

In addition to education as a matter of ideological engagement, representation of Black life was a crucial concern of print in the nineteenth century. The third principle from the 1847 Troy report carves out the role of print in battling racial stereotypes. The report reads:

Our friends sorrow with us, because they say we are unfortunate! We must battle down those antipathies, we must command something manlier than sympathies! We must command the respect due men, who, against fearful odds, are struggling steadfastly for their rights." ("Proceedings," 20)

Thus, early African American periodicals were also instruments of historiography; writers used their pages to circulate representations of themselves and their ideas in ways that disproved negative stereotypes and tended to the personal histories fragmented or lost to the conditions of enslavement. In this way, again, the early Black press was both responsive to the material conditions of antebellum America and generative of a collective African American cultural

identity.

Representation of Black life and history in nineteenth-century literature has remained a focal point of Black Print Studies. Generally, scholars have turned to historiography as a useful writing context for thinking through the ways Black authors represented themselves and battled stereotypes. Frankie Hutton has asserted that Black journalists regularly framed contemporary historical events in meaningful contexts, proving that journalism during this time supplemented reporting practices with creative writing strategies such as the use of symbolic language and hyperbole for a variety of reasons. (The Early Black Press) These journalism strategies contextualized everyday events in deep histories, countered dominant racializing historical narratives, and supplemented undocumented histories with Blackauthored fabulations intended to empower readers. John Ernest's Liberation Historiography analyzes the historiographical role of African American newspapers, specifically, writing that the periodical press was not only a source of historical information but was "uniquely suited to the task of telling the story of African American history-because the story would be marked by narrative disruption and because, in telling the story, the press could only be multivocal and multi-perspectival." (279) As opposed to focusing on the formal elements of the newspaper, literary critics like Andreá N. Williams and Eric Sundquist have turned to the novel as an agent of historiography in Black print history. Williams writes that Black authors altered the conventions of realism, for example, producing African American literary realism, which sought to reveal the racial prejudices embedded in everyday life otherwise unrepresented by white-authored realism. ("African American Literary Realism") Sundquist interprets speculative writing in historical fiction as a mode for purposely misrepresenting history to produce the possibility of what Sundquist calls a revolutionary cultural ethos. (To Wake the

Nations)

My project focuses on the relationship between newspapers and novels in representations of Black life and history; Black authors often tapped both mediums for their historiographical potential and reading works of historiography across both fiction and nonfiction texts reveals that nineteenth-century Black writing regularly collapsed distinctions between fact and fiction. As a result, the genres and narrative strategies employed and invented by Black authors in his period are remarkably transportable across mediums and genres; this collection of historiographical texts redefines the concept of history, as John Ernest has written, as "something indicated by the mode of historical writing rather than as a story captured in a historical narrative." (*Liberation Historiography*, 6) Viewing the periodical and the novel as writing venues that were not only linked to but communicated with each other allows us to trace historiography both in and out of literary spaces.

Methodology

Methodologies in Black Print studies have often treated individual texts as sites of reception because turning to the social contexts in which texts were produced and circulated underscores the dynamic ways in which print functioned and emphasizes its impact on societies. By incorporating methods from other fields, such as Performance and Cultural Studies, this approach encourages scholars of Black print to devote equal attention to the consumption and reception of particular texts in social spaces, even after their initial publication. Thus, contemporary critics often describe the work of print as a performance or a practice to emphasize the embodied behaviors print both indexed and occasioned. In *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays*, Todd Vogel articulates the Black periodical as a

stage upon which content is situated both in relation to other content and to readers: "In this way the press gives us the chance to see writers forming and reforming ideologies, creating and recreating a public sphere, and staging and restaging race itself." (3) In *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States*, Derrick Spires builds on Vogel's image of print as a stage by thinking through print production, not as an archive of fixed meaning, but as a repertoire of performances occurring as a collection. These texts, writes Spires, "were not static documents. . . instead, they involved, among other things, public gatherings, oral delivery, recording, public debate in print and in person, and varying vectors into print and into variously constituted print publics." (11)

Reading for the complex meanings of Black print requires us to follow the multiple phases of print that transcend the page; to, as Todd Vogel writes, seek to understand "the way the page peeled off a letterpress, traveled to far-flung towns, landed in the hands of literate people, and then accelerated at the speed of sound through the voice of a reader who broadcast to friends and community..." (2) In focusing on the life cycles of texts, this approach favors the study of one text or genre at a time and often separates literary analysis and the close reading practices associated with it from the study of non-literary texts. By non-literary texts, I am referring to published writings that do not fit into discrete literary genres, such as speeches, letters, reports, and treatises. These texts were often published in the periodical alongside fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and many of them inform the book-length works of literature their authors would eventually be known for. Encountering major literary works like novels or books of poetry in their "de-genred format" as Ivy Wilson has said, allows us to think "more capaciously about print cultures outside of the book." ("Trajectories") Wilson's thoughts suggest expanding the purview of Black print studies to make room for more ephemeral texts

associated with periodical because limiting the study of African American authors to booklength literary works underestimates the extent and nature of nineteenth-century Black print. In considering the intertextuality and generic diversity of the filed, my approach asks how texts of varying genres and subgenres can contextualize each other; I explore both the aesthetics of non-literary texts—like a letter to the editor of a newspaper—and articulate how literary works like novels functioned practically—beyond aesthetics—by reading across multiple texts in one author's oeuvre.

The authors in this dissertation were prolific, nimble writers, and they utilized an incredible range of genres and mediums to broadcast their ideas. For example, Sutton Griggs, perhaps the least known of the authors in this project, wrote five political novels in less than a decade and dozens of religious and political pamphlets. He also wrote several nonfiction books; one is a theoretical guide to racial uplift called Guide to Racial Greatness; or, The Science of Collective Efficiency. Frustrated with the difficulty of circulating his ideas through independent African American newspapers, Griggs often distributed his work door-to-door and eventually started his own publishing company. In addition to being a prolific novelist, essayist, biographer, and publisher, Griggs was a Baptist minister and pastor. Of Martin Delany's diverse collection of novels, published speeches, and political tracts, he is often only associated with his serialized novel, Blake; or, the Huts of America, or his political tract, The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States. In 1859, Delany traveled to Liberia to establish a Black nation in the area during his campaign for emigration to Africa. He founded his own newspaper, *The Mystery*, in 1843 and coedited *The* North Star with Frederick Douglass, and his public letters to Douglass while fundraising for his newspaper make up one of the earliest extant African American travel narratives. During

the Civil War, Delany was the only Black officer to receive the rank of Major. He was also a broker, a physician, and a politician throughout his life. Few know that the famous poet, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper has also been called the journalistic mother⁵ of the African American press because she contributed more writing to African American newspapers than any other female writer that we know of. In addition to her poetry, Harper was a novelist. She wrote four novels—three of which were only rediscovered within the pages of *The Christian Recorder* newspaper by Frances Smith Foster in 1994. She was the first African American woman to publish a short story, a celebrated abolitionist lecturer, an essayist, a philanthropist, a teacher, and a radical. Harper openly supported John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859 and stayed with his wife, Mary Brown, during until her husband's imprisonment and execution. During the antebellum period, Harper was an outspoken advocate of the free-produce movement, an international boycott of goods produced by enslaved people. She was on the editorial board of the *Anglo-African Magazine* and was dedicated to the Women's Suffrage and Temperance Movements after the Civil War.

Harper, Delany, and Griggs devoted their lives to authorship and activism and splitting their oeuvres into literary and nonliterary categories misses the ways individual works fit into evolving practices of authorship. Often, their book-length works were the culmination of years of extra-literary writing. Treating Griggs's major literary text, *Imperium in Imperio*, for example, as one node in the network of his oeuvre leads to a reading of the novel that is sensitive to Griggs's employment and rejection of genre. This contextualizing practice decenters the novel in the study of African American literature without marginalizing it in an attempt to weigh multiple genres of writing against each other. In this way, my project aims to

⁵ This moniker comes from the introduction to *Minnie's Sacrifice, Sowing and Reaping, Trial and Triumph: Three Rediscovered Novels* by Frances Smith Foster.

read the archive of nineteenth-century Black print with respect to the ways Black writing was, as Eric Gardner has written, "much more diverse" than the slave narrative "in terms of genre, approach, aesthetics, venue, and language." (*Black Print Unbound*, 12-13)

Chapter Summaries

Each of my chapters focuses on a well-known literary author and a particular objective of nineteenth-century African American self-determination. As V.P. Nelson has argued, these objectives involved a range of cultural and juridical, concrete and abstract goals, from raising young people to be both literate and spiritual, to securing civil rights beginning with abolitionism, to countering anti-Black narratives in the press, and including the many Pan-African and African American sociopolitical movements in between. Each of the authors I analyze has produced significant bodies of writing-both in literary and nonliterary formaround immediate objectives involving their communities. By focusing on the way well-known literary authors used print to promote and actualize goals around self-determination, I aim to intervene in a literary, book-centered approach to African American writing that has limited our understanding of activist authors and their cultural impacts. Revisiting African American authors traditionally known as novelists or poets reveals that we have only scratched the surface of their writing practices in focusing on literary work in bound books. Further, the authors in this dissertation were more than prolific—their works were syndicated. They often circulated multiple different texts-novels in serial or book-form, poems, and nonfiction works like petitions, pamphlets, or correspondence—at the same time. As such, each of this project's chapters reads an author's oeuvre holistically and across the genres within it to begin to account for this intertextuality.

Of the many objectives of the early Black press, one of the most immediate was the end of enslavement. As such, this dissertation begins in the antebellum period and explores how authors like Frances Ellen Watkins Harper structured an early African American reading public around recruiting readers in the fight for abolitionism. While a study of early Black print would be limited by a focus solely on the abolitionist movement, we cannot ignore the role that abolitionist rhetoric played in developing an antebellum African American reading public. My first chapter close reads Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's antebellum newspaper writing to understand how print was used to both inform and form early readerships bound by shared principles. I argue that Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's newspaper correspondence addressed readers of the *Weekly Anglo-African* newspaper as coconspirators in the radical acts of self-emancipation covered by the early Black press.

In 1860, the *Weekly Anglo-African* newspaper published one of Harper's letters to the editor on its front page. In it, Harper urges readers to donate money to the defense fund of a group of men referred to as the Philadelphia rescuers who were imprisoned under suspicion of trying to aid a fugitive enslaved man named Moses Horner. I read Harper's letter as part of a series of correspondence that constituted subscribers of the *Anglo-African* as members of a public responsible for resisting tyranny. By defining the contours of audience through republican rhetoric and using collective forms of witness, *Anglo-African* correspondents signaled a Black reading public connected by shared beliefs and urged readers to respond in multiple registers—epistolary, emotional, and political. I argue that Harper's "Appeal" participates in this broader constitution of subscribers as complicit in the resistance of the Philadelphia rescuers by addressing them as coconspirators. Harper's contributions reveal that

the nineteenth-century Black print sphere was both a counterpublic and an intimate public⁶ and it offered numerous common grounds on which to connect with its readers.

The next phase of this project analyzes the role of security in self-determination during the mid-nineteenth century. Martin Delany's fundraising projects prior to the Civil War evidence that Black leaders viewed economic independence and financial security as crucial to self-determination. As such, security, as both a measure of protection–physical and financial—and a state of being wherein one has access to basic needs, remained the focal point of many of Delany's writings. My second chapter uses Martin Delany's political writings to theorize how his speculative novel, *Blake; or, the Huts of America*, both models speculation as an economic practice of investment and uses features of speculative fiction, such as a fabulated historical plot, to speculate narratologically. Reconceiving speculation itself as both a discursive tool for producing antihegemonic cultural frameworks and a practicable exercise of investment, I argue, gets closer to Delany's ideas about the value of both capital and fiction in the development of an independent African American economy.

The chapter first locates Delany's nonliterary writings within a tradition of Black speculative performances that both archived and embodied theoretical knowledge. In other words, Delany's speculative writings were always more than theoretical, and reading his speculative work for the ways it both envisioned possibilities and solicited investments from readers shifts our attention to the practicability of his writings. I then apply this developed concept of speculative writing to contemporary debates about Delany's most famous work, the speculative novel *Blake*. Critics often disagree about whether or not *Blake* perpetuates

⁶ I am referring to Lauren Berlant's definition of an intimate public from *The Female Complaint*. According to Berlant, intimate publics foreground recognizable feelings in a print to bind readers through emotions. Intimate print publics, specifically, also frame everyday experiences in relation to the elements of the political world to stress the political origins of unpleasant emotions.

discourses of power: In traditional readings of the novel, scholars assert that by fabricating historical timelines, the novel creates the possibility of a revolutionary consciousness for African American readers; others argue that the novel's plot produces this revolutionary consciousness not by refusing colonial temporalities, but by emphasizing the value of Black labor, and thus the novel is ultimately unable to escape the logics of capitalism Ultimately, my reading of the novel argues that it effectively contributed to the project of self-determination without having to refuse the logics of capitalism: by modeling speculation as a practice of various kinds of investment—monetary, spiritual, and temporal—*Blake*'s main character does not refuse, but instead appropriates the terminology of finance capitalism. This reveals that Delany used the economic imaginary rhetorically to link concrete practices in the present to the guarantee of an ideal future.

This dissertation's last chapter explores historiography and representations of Blackness in the media through the perspective of Sutton E. Griggs. Griggs's relationship to newspapers and publishing illustrates relevant contentions around newspaper culture during the period of commercialized journalism in the late nineteenth century. The chapter first considers Griggs's nonliterary writings about the relationship between journalism and historiography. One year before he published his most famous novel, *Imperium in Imperio*, the United States entered the Spanish-American war, marking the beginning of America's imperialist age. During this time, African American newspaper editors urged each other to memorialize the deeds of Black soldiers who served in the war because the white press either ignored them or portrayed them as inferior to white soldiers. In his nonfiction work, *Guide to Racial Greatness; or The Science of Collective Efficiency*, Griggs argues that the ideal press would play a critical role in historiography by consistently seconding, or, affirming, the deeds

of others, writing "One man performs and another records, and thus we get history." (132) This chapter articulates a theory of Black historiographical practices based on Griggs's writings about journalism and reads it onto *Imperium in Imperio*, ultimately asserting that Griggs employed the novel as an alternative mode of historiography. For Griggs, the novel was a tool used to counter anti-Black historical narratives circulated within or ignored by the white press.

Imperium in Imperio tells the history of an underground all-Black government working to secure the rights of Black people in post-Reconstruction America. By building on John Ernest's research on African American historical writing, which begins "with the recognition that history is not limited to the argument or effect of any single work," this chapter considers the ways Imperium's confusing narrative framework productively represents the process of recording history. (Liberation Historiography, 47). I argue that the novel both emulates a historical record by presenting itself as a found manuscript and undermines its own authenticity by employing multiple narrative frameworks that present contradictory accounts of its characters. These formal elements work to make historical writing, circulation, and interpretation transparent for readers to warn of the dangers of single-authored histories and destabilize our notion of historical knowledge as fixed.

Griggs's novel revives the 1847 Troy Convention's vision of an African American press that would record "[their] acts, [their] sufferings, [their] temporary defeats and [their] steadily approaching triumph" through the Imperium's establishment of its own successful national newspaper. ("Proceedings" 258) The mission of the Imperium's newspaper was to "chronicle every fresh discrimination, every new act of oppression, every additional unlawful assault upon the property, the liberty or lives of any of the members of the Imperium." (*Imperium*, 223) During Griggs's lifetime, Southern white newspapers regularly incited violence against Black

communities and the widespread suppression of African American newspapers frustrated Griggs because of the resulting difficulties of delivering his message to the public. Considering this context, *Imperium in Imperio*'s depiction of a prosperous national Black newspaper expresses anxiety around the newspaper's role in self-determination during the late nineteenth century. This is not to suggest that the idea of the newspaper as a vehicle for self-determination was no longer viable for Griggs, but to underscore that authors like Griggs were regularly thinking through the political advantages of multiple modes of historical writing at once. Together, the authors I study in this project thread their ideas both in and out of literary genres, crossing the boundaries of aesthetic categories, abandoning venues when they are no longer viable, and generating new modes of reading and writing that serve them best.

I also wish to present a narrative of a nineteenth-century Black print counterpublic that increases in momentum and ferocity as opposed to framing a history that arcs. The extent of Harper, Delany, and Griggs's influence is yet unknown; their oeuvres are prolific but incomplete because of racist archival practices that have ignored the preservation and evaluation of their works. For example, I have already mentioned that it was only discovered in the last thirty years that Harper published 4–not 1–novel-length works and few scholars have studied them in depth. Of Delany's newspaper, *The Mystery*, which Delany ran from 1843-1847, only one issue has been preserved. Further, the last chapters of his novel, *Blake*, wherein readers should learn of the fate of its main character's global revolution, are also missing. The study of Black print in America is indeed frustrating because of inaccessible or limited archives and inadequate critical frameworks, but it is also generative. Viewing archives as exclusionary repositories allows us to respond to the perceived unevenness of African American literature—generically or archivally—with the understanding that nineteenth-century Black authors articulated their own ideas about

the production and preservation of print. It also teaches us about our expectations for reading; that fragmentation, confusion, contradiction, and unfamiliarity are productive feelings that signal the limits of our established beliefs about writing, beliefs instilled in us by institutions. This mixture of writing genres and reading experiences indexes mixed political subjectivities that, as Ivy Wilson has said, are "yearning for [something] on the horizon that is not quite yet here." (Sawallisch)

Chapter 1

To: "Every Hater of American Despotism": Frances E. W. Harper and the Performance of African American Newspaper Correspondence

"My voice is not wanting in strength, as I am aware of, to reach pretty well over the house." – Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, from a letter to William Still (1854)

In a July 30th, 1859 issue of *The Weekly Anglo-African*, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's poem "Be Active" appeared at the top of the first column of the front page. The opening stanzas read:

Onward, onward, sons of freedom, In the great and glorious strife; You've a high and holy mission On the battle field on life.

See oppression's feet of iron
Grind a brother to the ground
And from bleeding heart and bosom,
Gapeth many a fearful wound.
Sit not down with idle pity,

Gazing on his mighty wrong;
Hurl the bloated tyrant from him—
Say my brother, oh, be strong!
See that sad, despairing mother

Clasp her burning brow in pain; Lay your hand upon her fetters— Rend, oh! Rend her galling chain! (*A Brighter Coming Day*)

The speaker's use of the second-person perspective names its audience, subscribers of *The Weekly Anglo-African* newspaper, "sons of freedom," who are destined to vanquish the tyranny of oppression. The poem instructs readers to engage in the repeated gesture of seeing and responding; to "See oppression's feet of iron" and "Sit not down" to "Gaz[e] on his mighty wrong," "See" that mother, and subsequently "Clasp," "Lay [a] hand" on, and "Rend" (twice)

her fetters. Its explicit didacticism and emotional scenes of bleeding hearts and burning brows situate this poem within a nineteenth-century genre of sentimentalism. Shirley Samuels defines this capacious noun-sentimentality-as a "set of cultural practices designed to evoke a certain form of emotional response, usually empathy, in the reader or viewer" which "produces or reproduces spectacles that cross race, class, and gender boundaries." (The Culture of Sentiment, 4-5) In light of Samuels's definition, "Be Active" is sentimental in that it re-casts spectacles of enslavement, including acts of self-emancipation, as a series of battles within the larger war against oppression personified to inspire readers to be active in the political work of abolitionism. "Be Active" was also printed in *Frederick Douglass' Paper* in 1856. The poem's multiple appearances on the front pages of two of the most widely read African American newspapers of the antebellum period speak to its capacity for representing the mission of the early Black press, which was to structure and instruct a national Black reading public. In *The* Early Black Press in America: 1827-1860, Frankie Hutton characterizes antebellum Black newspapers as innovators of journalistic social responsibility, a broad practice that involved publishing "intelligent accounts of events in contexts that give them meaning." (41) Hutton's definition suggests that we read African American newspapers for the ways they sentimentalize, or recast, events and ideas to invoke a psychological response.

I compare Harper's sentimental poetry to the mission of the nineteenth-century Black press to underscore a shared imperative between these two cultural practices: Both sentimentalism in its many manifestations and the early Black press aimed to instruct and affect as many readers as possible, regardless of identity, and specifically, through strategies of de- and re-contextualization. This chapter asserts that sentimentalism as a set of cultural practices intended to invoke an emotional response was a strategy utilized by contributors to the early

Black Press. By turning to the most prolific African American female contributor to Black and white antebellum newspapers (that we know of) this chapter also analyzes how Frances Ellen Watkins Harper practiced sentimentalism to inspire activism. In Harper's newspaper poetry, the practice of sentimentality involved recontextualizing culturally specific scenes by representing them with symbolic language. For example, in her poem, "Be Active," life becomes a "battle field" and chattel slavery is figured as a "bloated tyrant" whose "feet of iron" represent a centuries-long history of racial violence. This act relies on symbolic language to represent enslavement and emancipation as anti-American. In this way, the system of enslavement is contextualized as a national tragedy that anyone opposed to tyranny should also logically oppose. Yet, as this chapter will also discuss, recontextualization as a strategy for affecting as many readers as possible also occurred at the level of format. Harper's poetry, for example, was often made to appear particularly vague, or "elusively general," as Meredith McGill argues, when formatted within the generically diverse, multivocal pages of the newspaper. McGill's work speaks to the ways abolitionist editors regularly de-contextualized newspaper contributions to maximize their relevancy for a range of Black and white abolitionist readers.

Lastly, Harper's practices of sentimentalism also expanded beyond the poetic genre with which she is associated. As the last section of this chapter will argue, her regular newspaper correspondence worked similarly to poetry as a mode of address by contextualizing the reading public within specific political frameworks. Here, I explore Harper's contributions to *The Weekly Anglo-African* and argue that she—and others—experimented with the letter to the editor as a means of promoting an activist response in the largest possible reading audience.

Correspondence in *The Weekly Anglo-African* was sentimental because it was simultextual, a term I borrow from Gabrielle Foreman's *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the*

Nineteenth Century. Simultextuality refers to textual objects capable of signaling and engaging with multiple audiences at once, often, by engaging with readers in multiple social registers (6). I apply this concept to the genre of correspondence in the Anglo-African because of the ways these letters functioned as a form of public relationship structuring. Specifically, I read newspaper correspondence as a genre that regularly establishes and re-establishes relationships through both its form and content: salutations (as in, "Dear, Anglo-African") imply varying degrees of intimacy between a correspondent and either the newspaper or its subscribers; closings and closing signatures offer an opportunity to abdicate, camouflage, or promote a writer's identity and messages could appear to come from a collective voice. By employing sentimental tropes such as symbolism, metaphor, and an emphasis on emotion in their content, these letters signal different readerships depending on the rhetorical registers they tap. As my reading of Harper's letters will demonstrate, correspondents often utilized a register of early republican ideals, contextualizing African American readers within, not against, an imagined American polity that viewed them as citizens equal to their white counterparts. By explicitly and implicitly asking addressees for a response in various registers-whether political, emotional, or epistolarycorrespondence prioritized the role of subscribers and the multiple forms of work they performed through reading.

The Early Black Press and Practices of Sentiment

The constraints and shared mission of the earliest African American newspapers made their success and the strategies by which they made themselves appealing, a particularly urgent

⁷ Correspondents of *The Weekly Anglo-African* addressed their letters to various living and symbolic recipients: See Belisaire's letter addressed, "Dear Anglo," as well as numerous fascinating closing signatures ("Ladies Friend," "Pillar," "Cataract," and "Populus") in the June 23rd, 1860 issue of *The Weekly Anglo-African* in Figure 2. These formal decisions worked to anchor the content of the correspondence within specific discursive registers.

matter. As such, these publications frequently employed practices of sentimentality to frame messages to readers in meaningful ways. The earliest secular newspapers began in New York in the 1820s and 30s and were operated and read almost entirely by middle-class, free Black readers. In *The Early Black Press in America:* 1827-1860 Frankie Hutton writes that this middle-class readership was "not defined by financial standing and connections comparable to the white upper crust" but instead, that its members "aspired almost constantly to respectability through education, temperance, industriousness, upright living patterns, and involvement in a variety of self-elevation organizations." (x) Further, they "assumed more and more responsibility for the advancement of the race, both socially and educationally." (x) Thus, the earliest newspapers explicitly intended to instruct a nation of African American readers and, importantly, citizens; to establish a national mass reading public whose members learned how to move in society by reading the paper.

Though the early Black press projected a readership that spanned the nation, it consistently faced obstacles that led either to the widespread suppression or discontinuation of Black-run newspapers. Frederick Douglass, one of the most successful editors of the antebellum period reportedly poured thousands of dollars from his personal finances into his multiple newspapers. In a June 23rd, 1860 issue of *The Weekly Anglo-African*, one correspondent wrote to the paper's editor, Thomas Hamilton, inquiring about missing issues, explaining that its "ever welcome coming," elicits a "thrill of pride in [his] race." The bottom of the letter features a response from Hamilton informing the correspondent that "his paper has been regularly mailed, with the postage prepaid, but has probably been stolen by Southern officials, who will steal newspapers as well as men." (Belisaire) This example of correspondence speaks to the cultural importance and political potential of newspapers like the *Anglo-African*, as well as the financial

and social constraints that contributed to the ephemerality of many newspapers. Many papers would disappear and reappear under new ownership, such as *The Weekly Anglo-African*, which was originally intended as a supplemental newspaper to the *Anglo-African Magazine* but only survived two years before resurfacing again briefly as *The Pine and the Palm*. Of Martin Delany's short-run paper, *The Mystery*, only a single issue has been preserved. These constraints occasioned strategic publishing practices designed, in part, to establish readerships both financially and emotionally invested in the success of the paper.

The earliest African American newspapers worked to structure a reading public with shared political interests: namely, Black self-determination. To this extent, their drive for popularity was not based on commercialization for the sake of profit or dominance in the print world, but on the belief that newspaper proliferation would directly contribute to the elevation of a national African American community, and they employed a range of strategies in the service of this mission. Frankie Hutton characterizes antebellum Black newspapers as innovators of journalistic social responsibility, a concept that would be codified over 100 years later in the 1947 Hutchins' Commission Report on a Free and Responsible Press. Hutton writes that "Long before the Hutchins' commission issued its report, antebellum black editors used their publications as clarions of "press responsibility," a broad practice that involved "intelligent accounts of events in contexts that give them meaning." (41) To this extent, newspapers relied on strategies of de- and recontextualization at the level of both format—meaning, the particular arrangement of content on the page—as well as at the level of discourse to produce and reproduce subject positions open to readers with diverse identities.

The impetus to reach and emotionally affect as many readers as possible resonates with early work on the political potential of sentimentalist writing practices. In *Activist Sentiments*:

Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century, Gabrielle Foreman argues that sentimentalist tropes and genre features associated with Black women's writing were often used to make their writing appeal to the broadest possible audience. This writing is "rarely identified with the intersectional positionality associated with twentieth and twenty-first-century subjectivity." (Foreman, 7). Foreman asserts that sentimental writing is especially suitable for activism because it is uniquely simultextual, or, capable of signaling and engaging with multiple audiences at once, often through representative language. Considering the simultextuality of such texts helps readers to "hear and harmonize the seeming dissonance between early texts' 'univocal' sentimental affiliations and the dialogic complexity they engage to articulate messages in various social registers." (6-7) Foreman interprets sentimentality's popularity with the middle class because of its nearly universal accessibility; the genre's predominance, therefore, makes it an effective vehicle for delivering political messages to broad communities.

In addition to the ways sentimental writing can appeal to readers from diverse historical, temporal, and sociopolitical subject positions, sentimentality was also used by Black writers to critique gendered and racializing representations of those ignored by the abolitionist movement. In "Forget Me Not: Free Black Women and Sentimentality," Jasmine Nichole Cobb studies African American friendship albums as a means of connecting both free and enslaved Black women to the language of feeling at a time when abolitionists focused solely on enslaved Black women as emblems of empathy. Cobb traces how the tropes of sentimental writing, including its nature metaphors, were incorporated into Black women's symbol systems through friendship albums to assert freed Black women as worthy of sentiment: In this way, African American women writers "made productive use of sentimental affect even in the context of slavery and amid explicit limitations on black women's writing." (30) Overall, Cobb proves that

sentimentalism was employed during abolitionism by African American writers from diverse experiences for the express purpose of managing intraracial and gender politics.

Hansen, Foreman, and Cobb position sentimentalism as a critical activist discourse.

Their contributions respond to contemporary calls for scholars to reevaluate the role of sentimentalism in 19th-century Black women's writing. In an essay called "Gender, Genre, and Vulgar Secularism: The Case of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the AME Press," Foster addresses the false correlation between popular and derivative writing in nineteenth-century African American literary criticism: "Since the turn of the century, literary critics and scholars have been embarrassed, offended, or perhaps merely disconcerted by literature that is unabashedly sentimental, religious, or didactic." (49) White genre descriptions rooted in European literary production have led critics to consider African American writing that reads romantic but does not explicitly defy "romantic" genre aesthetics as imitation. Such a comparison ignores one of the central principles critics like Foster have come to associate with nineteenth-century African American writers: functionality. "They believed good art must be functional," Foster writes. "It must serve to educate, inspire, and correct the people. It was not elitist but was constructed to reach the largest possible audience." (51)

Many antebellum Black writers wanted to make their content emotionally resonate with as many people as possible for political purposes. This often involved utilizing dominant writing genres, like sentimentalism, and the universalizing tropes they circulate, to tap multiple registers, or symbol systems, simultaneously. Reading for their rhetorical reach, then, is an approach that also necessitates publishing vehicles—primarily newspapers—in the close reading process because of their accessibility, circulation, and predominance during the nineteenth century. Newspaper writing, specifically, was meant to be read in a paratextual sense, or, in tandem with the editorial

features of the newspaper so that it may take on new meaning in multiple printed contexts. In addition to remaining as accessible as possible, African American newspapers sought to generate a nationwide African American identity; to collectivize and bind subscribers through content. In this sense, these newspapers were part of a Black intimate counterpublic because they prioritized affective attachments, or, as Lauren Berlant in *The Female Complaint* argues, they foregrounded recognizable feelings in a print to bind readers through emotions:

An intimate public opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires. When this kind of culture of circulation' takes hold, participants in the intimate public feel as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions." (22)

Berlant's articulation of the magnetizing potential of intimate publics helps to explain how developing and accessing a register of feelings in print can collectivize. Intimate publics also engender everyday experiences with meaning by assuming their proximal relationship to the attentions of power that cause disappointment. Here, Berlant is stressing the relationships between textual objects—those framed as everyday experiences and their proximity to those that read as explicitly political. In other words, intimate publics, such as the Black press, stress the political origins of emotions such as disappointment. Conventional sentimentality as a strategy of the Black press frames the political within representational discourses—affective, symbolic, or rhetorical—to validate the emotional experience of political dissatisfaction.

The E(A)ffects of Formatting on FEWH's Early Newspaper Presence

This section reads Frances E. W. Harper's antebellum newspaper contributions as practices of sentimentalism that contribute to the political project of abolitionism. Reading for Harper's mass emotional appeal as an abolitionist also means reading for the ways she signaled both Black and white audiences simultaneously by making her poetry and correspondence open to multiple intended readerships at once. Many of her activist poems were published across the American abolitionist print sphere, and she often submitted work to Black- and white-owned abolitionist newspapers at the same time. Harper regularly submitted to William Loyd Garrison's The Liberator, the National Anti-Slavery Standard, and the Anti-Slavery Bugle, making her presence among white abolitionists as well-established as that among the Black press. Frances E.W. Harper's newspaper poetry, specifically, maximized its emotional appeal through both its generalizing symbolic language and the ways it was formatted by editors. Harper experimented with genre and apostrophe in her early newspaper poetry to craft an unfixed subject position in relation to readers despite being a celebrated figure. This allowed her poetry to establish and reestablish relationships with different readerships, depending on where her poems were published. Here, I am building on work on nineteenth-century (primarily lyric) modes of address written by Johnathan Culler and Meredith McGill about how poetic address constituted social relationships. Culler describes the self- and other-orienting power of poetic apostrophe in *The Pursuit of Signs*: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction, writing that apostrophe is "a device which the poetic voice uses to establish with an object a relation that helps to constitute him." (141) Harper often used forms of apostrophe to minimize her subject position as a famed orator and speaker of a poem, and in turn, left her lyric voice available to represent as many experiences as possible. In "Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and the Circuits of Abolitionist Poetry," Meredith McGill plots

the relationship between poetry and media by reading Harper's popular poetry through the lens of its published format. Format is a term originally used by bibliographers which, McGill writes, is useful for the study of print culture because it "directs our attention to the set of choices printers and publishers make in publishing a work with the potential field of a book's reception in mind. (*Early African American Print Culture*, 54) McGill ultimately reads Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's abolitionist poetry with attention to the ways newspaper formats can determine readers' receptions of it:

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's identity as a black woman poet was crucial to the role she played in the antislavery movement, but her poems' publications in cheap pamphlets, their frequent appearance in abolitionist newspapers, and the structures of the poems themselves all suggest that they were not intended to be read as lyrics, but rather as instruments of exhortation, nodes for the condensation and transfer or oral authority, and vehicles for collective assent. (63)

McGill's work analyzes newspaper formatting as a way to contextualize or decontextualize poetry that would otherwise signal specific speaker and reader identities. Newspaper editors could replace or remove the relationship established by a poem's initial apostrophe, for example, depending on how they formatted the poem on the page. This allowed Harper's poetry to be easily recontextualized and circulated across newspapers and readerships.

In 1860, Harper published "To Charles Sumner," in both *The Weekly Anglo-African* and William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*. The poem commemorates the Massachusetts senator's speech, called "The Barbarisms of Slavery," through an outpouring of general praises and symbolic language ("Thy words were not soft echoes,/ Thy tones no syren song;/ They fell as battle- axes/ Upon our giant wrong). Importantly, the only contextualizing information the poem

provides that explicitly associates it with Sumner is its title. It was printed alongside reports of Sumner's speech but does not reproduce the material of the speech itself. McGill writes that the poem is "nearly content- and contextless," which allows Harper to claim the right to publicly reply to Sumner's speech: "The conceit that this poem is itself speech—a direct address to the heroic senator— creates a sense of intimacy without the individuation we are accustomed to find in lyric poems." (66) Here, McGill is referring to the intimacy of shared emotions that bind the constituents of this print public; Harper's depersonalized but emotional address to Sumner performs a transportable expression of intimacy applicable to a range of historical contexts.

McGill's work explores how formatting influences the reception of Harper's poetry in significant ways. When her poems appear as an edited collection of utterances unified by a single voice, as in a bound book, Harper's authorial identity as abolitionist heroin, her widely recognized name, tethers Harper to one end of the poetic address. Alternatively, when Harper's poems appear alongside news reports and are written in the plural form of the lyrical "I," readers can constitute themselves as active in the public events of the day. This simultaneously public and intimate, but not individualizing, mode of address is created when we read Harper's poetry in its original formatting and involves Harper displacing herself through the combination of direct address and what McGill terms "elusive generality." (74) This mode of general poetic address necessitates the symbolic representation of experience we associate with sentimentalism in Harper's ability to collectivize her poem's apostrophe. Ultimately, the effects of this figurative displacement within the context of the abolitionist movement were powerful: They allowed Harper to become a stand-in for the public, to circulate herself across space and outside of time, represent collective forms of witness and activism, and ventriloquize Black popular opinion.

The extent to which Harper intended the emotional reach of her writing to be complimented, even enhanced, by the unique formatting effects of the newspaper is not limited to her poetry. McGill's work on the way poetic apostrophe can be collectivized in newspapers suggests that newspapers could similarly expand the range and nature of relationships established by newspaper content once formatted on the page. For example, a personal letter published in *The Liberator* on April 23rd, 1858 describes Harper's experiences touring Philadelphia on the lecture circuit. Harper contextualizes her difficult time in Philadelphia within the romantic language of an ode and juxtaposes a romantic, lyrical address to New England against a straightforward account of her personal experience. Both the form and tone of the letter shift dramatically between its two brief sections, hailing multiple intended audiences. Further, Garrison's formatting of the letter within *The Liberator* exemplifies how Harper's experiment with the genre of letter-writing produced a textual object that could function as an intimate and public form of address.

The correspondence is featured on page 3 of *The Liberator*'s 4-page issue. Titled "Extracts from a letter of Frances Ellen Watkins to a friend," it appears between a report of the meeting of the Worcester County North Antislavery Society and a brief excerpt discussing the benefits of a literary organization called "The Histrionic Club." The latter report praises the work of the club, writing "May the examples set by the members of this organization be followed by the colored people in other places; for after all the most efficient work that the people of Boston can do for the Southern slave is to educate themselves. . . " ("The Histrionic Club") Garrison excises Harper's letter from its original context to signal a broader community of addressees. Garrison writes that it was addressed to "a friend" in the title of the piece, though how *The Liberator* came into possession of the letter is unstated. Most other correspondence in this issue

is addressed to a specific person or entity (as in "Editor Liberator," "Mr. Garrison," or "Friend Garrison"), and features an individual signatory at its close. Harper's addressee, paraphrased as "a friend" with a lowercase "f" omits the letter's original intended reader, suggesting that the role of friend remains open to everyone who subscribes to the paper. Further, Garrison credits Harper as the author but does not include Harper's close or signature at the end, leaving her ideas without a conclusion. They flow almost uninterrupted into the following report about the Histrionic Club, with only a typographical glyph and a single space to separate them. It is likely that William Still, one of Harper's long-term friends and the conduit of most of her personal letters, sent the letter to the paper, however, Garrison formats Harper's letter so it appears to be addressed to the general reading public. The content of the letter anticipates Garrison's formatting changes. It reads:

'Oh how I miss New England,--the sunshine of its homes and the freedom of its hills! When I return again, I shall perhaps love it more dearly than ever. . . Dear old New England! It was there kindness encompassed in my path; it was there kind voices made their music in my ear. The home of my childhood, the burial-place of my kindred, is not as dear to me as New England.. .' ("Extracts")

Readers find Harper's direct address within the body of the letter: "Dear old New England!" functions grammatically as both a hailing of readers and a declaration of fondness for New England. Harper repeats the name of the region four more times throughout the two-paragraph letter; through this emphasis on the name "New England," and by assigning it an anthropomorphized state of possession ("its homes," "its hills") Harper portrays emotional intimacy with a broad geographic area, the capital of which is home to *The Liberator*, to stress her relation to the region. The subject of New England is romanticized through rhetorical choices

such as repetition, anthropomorphism, and parallelism, which result in the paragraph sounding like a lyrical poem through its internal syntactic rhythm and overall focus on abstract feelings of love and longing.

The second half of Harper's letter shifts dramatically in terms of tone and subject matter. Harper discusses her mistreatment at the hands of Pennsylvanians, specifically, detailing that she had been "insulted in several railroad cars" while lecturing there. On one such occasion, Harper writes that she was asked to move seats. She refused, and upon exiting the train "the [conductor] refused [her] money and [she] threw it down on the car floor after riding as far as [she] had wished." Next, she writes "On the Carlisle road, I was interrupted and insulted several times. Two men came after me in one day." ("Extracts") In stark contrast to the generalized feelings of affection articulated in the letter's first paragraph, this section functions more to report on Harper's individual experiences, which contradict the hyperbolic praises of New England in the letter's opening. Almost devoid of implicit undertones, this section articulates a first-hand account of Harper's negative experiences in New England. "Such impudence!" she writes in an explicit declaration of displeasure. Harper's voice shifts to embody an individualizing first person-perspective and short, simple sentences ("I did not move, but kept the same seat." "Two men came after me in one day.") make this section appear significantly less stylized than the previous one.

Still, Harper frames the letter with the symbolic language of sentimentalism, writing "... all is not dark in Pennsylvania; but the shadow of slavery, oh how drearily it hangs!" Overall, Harper uses the form of the letter to make the generalized, emotional content of the letter appear as an intimate relaying of personal experience. In occupying the position of a nameless correspondent, as opposed to a famous poet, Harper can posture as a member of the public with

Garrison's formatting changes. In attempting to attach the universalizing, abstract articulation of emotion to a firsthand account of her experience, Harper can access multiple subject positions as the author of the letter. She is both familiar and relatable as a Pennsylvania transplant whose first-person account of her experiences in the area validate her imagined status as a member of the community, yet the letter's form—somewhere between a personal letter, an ode to New England, and a rhetorical essay—produces an expanding range of addressees that also allows her to speak to all who might identify with the binding language of emotion.

The letter seems suitable for publication in *The Liberator*, and Harper probably intended for many of her letters to friends to be published. It stresses New England's unique value to Harper, elevating the region above even "the burial-place of [her] kindred" and differentiating it from other areas. Harper positions New England and its people as surrogate family members through this reference, contributing to the community- and nation-building effects associated with nineteenth-century newspapers. The letter also links the state of Pennsylvania to the larger nation through its firsthand account of racial terror there, a product of enslavement, whose nationwide shadow touches even the most beloved states. By omitting the elements of a letter that particularize its addressees, such as a typical salutation and signature, and separating the letter from the rest of the paper's traditionally formatted correspondence, Garrison exercises editorial liberties to refashion Harper's letter into an open one addressed to the public without sacrificing the implied intimacy of personal correspondence.

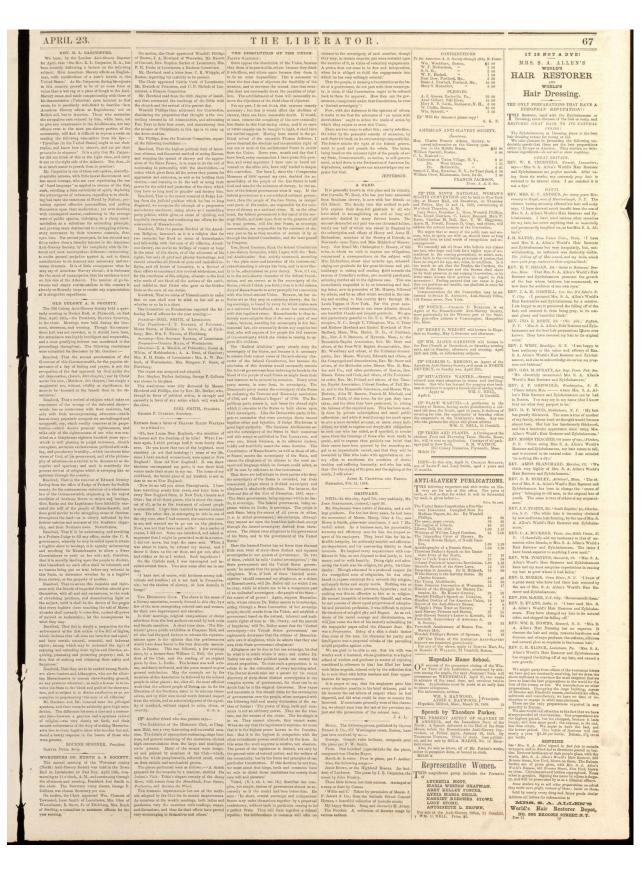


Figure 1. Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. "Extracts from a letter of Frances Ellen Watkins to a friend." *The Liberator*. Massachusetts, 23 April 1858, p. 3. *Digital Commonwealth*.

Abolitionist newspapers like Garrison's *The Liberator* utilized correspondence toward multiple ends: to provide firsthand accounts of the fight for abolitionism on the ground in the traditional sense of the practice, but also to figuratively perform the communication of a message about antislavery in an effort to impact as many people as possible. "Extracts from a letter of Frances Ellen Watkins to a friend" is re-signified to address all readers of *The Liberator* when Garrison recontextualizes it within a specific issue, facilitating a friendship between Harper and *The Liberator*'s subscribers in the process. This resignification, however, relies on the rhetorical ambiguity of the letter's content to reach such a broad readership: Harper's use of sentimental features throughout imbues her unique, firsthand experience in New England with symbolic language accessible to white readers who cannot personally relate to the anecdote she describes. Most importantly, Garrison and Harper can emphasize the need for readers to literally and figuratively "respond" to the content of the letter by framing it as a two-way communication between friends, ultimately conflating an anticipated epistolary response with abolitionist action.

The Role of Correspondence in the Early Black Press

The next sections will analyze Harper's newspaper correspondence in the antebellum Black press, specifically. Her numerous letters to newspapers like *The Weekly Anglo-African* exemplify a tradition of public letter writing that utilized features of the epistolary genre to deepen the subscriber/newspaper relationship in meaningful ways, often making it one of emotional and ideological attachment, as opposed to being solely transactional. Specifically, correspondents wrote sentimental letters to be read by the public; they incorporated various rhetorical registers within their messages to appeal to a wide array of reader identities and took

advantage of the conventions and expectations characteristic of the epistolary genre to explicitly and implicitly encourage readers to respond to their messages through political activism.

Of the hundreds of Black-owned and operated newspapers active throughout the nineteenth century, only a few dozen have been preserved, and for many of those, a significant number of issues are missing. Pervasive financial issues left African American newspapers precarious and therefore short-lived, and problematic historical attention to early African American print spheres has left many publications ignored or understudied because of the significant ways in which Black newspapers diverged from white ones in terms of their mission and editorial practices.8 As such, there are not enough book-length studies devoted to individual African American publications that offer a narrative of their lives in print, which we might use to theorize a practice of correspondence as it relates to the early Black abolitionist press. Eric Gardner's Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture is one such recovery effort, which offers itself as a model for reading African American print culture through a single publication. Gardner devotes several chapters to the practice of correspondence in the *Christian Recorder*, one of the longest-running and most influential newspapers of the nineteenth century operated by and for African Americans. Gardner writes that correspondence was a key element in the structure of the *Recorder*. Many editors explicitly called for letters from the public, many of whom would ultimately enter the public literary realm because of newspaper correspondence:

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⁸ "Trajectories in Black Atlantic Print Culture Studies: A Virtual Roundtable" (2021), Frances Smith Foster's "After you, my dear Alphonse;" Or, when politeness and good intentions are not enough," and Eric Gardner's "Accessing Early Black Print" discuss Black periodical issues of access in both print and digital contexts and offer invaluable insight into the cultivation of ethical archival practices.

Importantly, the title of correspondent was accessible to anyone who subscribed to the paper. Editors laid out broad submission requirements and frequently acknowledged worthy submissions that did not make it into an issue because of the persistent financial constraints of printing. In an 1867 piece called "Write to Us" in the *Christian Recorder*, an editor called for correspondence from "all parts of the United States. . . We like, and welcome a good communication no matter who it comes from." (168) Overall, correspondence made up a publicly accessible space for all African Americans interested in communicating a message, whether subscribers to the *Recorder* or not; such messages "marked and challenged not only ... geographic boundaries," but also the metaphysical spaces of African American cultural expression. (167)

Correspondence in *The Weekly Anglo-African* was featured in a variety of ways and focused on a broad range of subjects, from news of the day from all over the world to personal inquiries addressed to whole communities, to decontextualized narrative accounts of people and events (whether fictional or not is sometimes difficult to determine). It comprised at least one-third and often *more than half* of any given issue. Derrick Spires' analysis of Black periodical

culture is helpful for understanding correspondence as an ongoing process of constituting Black print publics. In *The Practice of Citizenship*, Spires writes, "In so far as they record thoughts, events, and proceedings, black print culture—the creation, circulation, and consumption of these texts—constitutes an ongoing performance that we can read as a repertoire." Thus, newspapers involved, "varying vectors into print and into variously constituted print publics." (11). This section adopts Spires' premise that *The Weekly Anglo-African* functioned as a performance space for newspaper contributors. To this end, we can understand correspondence as a capacious practice that involved a range of communicative, and relationship-constituting acts in print performed by correspondents, occurring on both national and interpersonal scales, and utilizing multiple discursive registers. Such textual acts were achieved through various rhetorical and formatting techniques, which often involved collaboration between editors and correspondents to take shape. Further, elements specific to the form of a letter to the editor, including its salutation and closing signature, or the explicit defining of an intimate relationship between two communicators, were repeatedly employed by correspondents to orient and reorient themselves and their readerships within a print public.

Taken together, Gardner and Spires center periodical culture in a narrative of nineteenth-century Black print, broadly defining print spaces to include literary and nonliterary matter, and emphasizing differing, multivocal perspectives. They model reading practices attuned to the ways newspaper writing, specifically, moved in and out of representational spaces and the ways Black journalists and editors viewed newspapers as instruments of political and community organization and agents of activism. I assert that the heterogeneity of the African American newspaper was constructed in large part due to the open parameters of correspondence, as Gardner notes in his work on the editorial practices of *The Christian Recorder*. As such, we

should treat analysis of these letters acutely, or as Ivy Wilson writes in "THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF THE ANGLO-AFRICAN MAGAZINE: Or, Antebellum African American Editorial Practice and Its Afterlives," "think synchronically as well as diachronically," within the archive of Black print studies, considering how each correspondent engaged with the genre of the letter uniquely to facilitate one communication—of dozens per issue—to the public. Whether events of the day are decontextualized through a correspondent's abstract and figurative language, or re-contextualized by editors to be read in relation to other elements of an issue, newspapers consistently contextualized what they featured to add significance to their content. Viewing newspapers as performances that involve "the creation, circulation, and consumption of these texts," as Spires writes, also emphasizes reader engagement in the performance of print, which means readers were expected to do more than just subscribe to a paper: they should be emotionally moved to action, either by internalizing a lesson meant to contribute to the education or upliftment of the community or responding to specific appeals with moral or financial support.

To: "Every Hater of American Despotism"

The final section of this chapter builds on the reading practices discussed in earlier sections by contextualizing one of Harper's antebellum newspaper letters within a broader discourse of activism. Harper's "An Appeal For the Philadelphia Rescuers" appears on the front page of a June 23rd, 1860 issue of *The Weekly Anglo-African*. In it, Harper urges readers to donate money to the defense fund of a group of men imprisoned for attempting to aid a fugitive enslaved man named Moses Horner. Her letter, I argue, is part of a practice of correspondence that constituted subscribers of the *Anglo-African* as members of a public responsible for resisting tyranny. By defining the contours of its audience through republican rhetoric and utilizing

collective forms of witness in formatting their correspondence, *Anglo-African* correspondents signaled an American Black public connected by shared ideological beliefs. Harper's "Appeal" participates in this constitution of subscribers as complicit in the resistance of the Philadelphia rescuers by addressing readers as coconspirators. When read alongside other reports on the status of Horner's rescuers in adjacent issues of the *Anglo-African*, Harper's letter helps to implicate the *Anglo-African*'s subscribers within a codependent relationship with the Philadelphia rescuers, one which ties their financial aid to the success of American abolitionism.

Harper's "Appeal" is the culmination of a multi-issue story following the fate of Moses Horner and six men charged with attempting to help him escape re-enslavement. Nearly three months earlier, on March 31st, the news of Horner's attempted escape and capture made up a brief report in *The Weekly Anglo-African* called "Another Fugitive Slave Case": "A young colored man named Moses Horner was carried to Philadelphia from Harrisburg last Monday, on the charge of a being a fugitive slave. . . and on Wednesday judge Cadwallader remanded him to his owner. This decision caused great excitement, and a rescue was attempted. . ." ("Another Fugitive Slave Case") "Further particulars in our next," concludes the report. In the next issue of the Anglo-African on April 7th, a report called "Mass Meeting of the Colored Citizens of Philadelphia" details the resolutions of a Philadelphia committee formed to aid in the defense of Horner's imprisoned rescuers. The call for the meeting is excerpted in the report: it invited all "lovers of freedom" to "come up to the work and show by their sympathy and 'material aid' that they appreciate the noble endeavors to put down oppression and plant firmly in Pennsylvania soil the standard of liberty." (Simpson) Dozens of attendees drafted and unanimously adopted six resolutions at this meeting, one of which reads ". . . we will stand by these men while we have

hearts to sympathize with the oppressed of our country, and ...that we will freely share with them our last dollar and our last loaf." (Simpson)

Much of American Black antislavery rhetoric sentimentalized America, referring to its foundation of revolutionary and republican ideals as a strategy for highlighting the hypocrisy of enslavement. In "The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery Newspapers in New York State," Timothy Shortell analyzes the contributions of Black antislavery rhetoric in the push for abolitionism. This study ultimately asserts that Black leaders disputed the self-evident truths of racial ideology throughout the nineteenth century and "demanded the nation live up to its republican identity," explicitly consenting to the basic terms of American civic culture by fighting to be included in it. (79) Shortell's study on Black abolitionist discourses also considers the way Black leaders established an identity for the future of free Black people by tapping into the rhetoric of republicanism. In other words, Black abolitionist rhetoric was as generative of Black futurity as it contained an antislavery message. I link this historical discursive field to Black cultural practices of sentimentalism; By contextualizing Black freedom and identity within a discursive register nostalgic for classical republican ideals, Black newspaper contributors could both point out the ideological hypocrisy of enslavement and simultaneously call on a discursive register of sovereignty in imagining the future.

Correspondence from the "Mass Meeting of the Colored Citizens of Philadelphia" uses sentimental strategies to link support—both moral and material—for the Philadelphia rescuers to the end of oppression. By incorporating the rhetoric of republicanism in articulating their resolutions, the letter invokes readers' sense of civic duty: all "freedom lovers" will be interested in supporting the cause of the Philadelphia rescuers. Further, their resolutions range from

declarations of support ("We do entirely approve and endorse the action of these noble men") to actionable intentions (that the proceedings be published in the *Anglo-African*, *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, and *The Anti-Slavery Standard*), to collective cultural beliefs ("That we regard America as our home, and that no oppression shall drive us from it, however much we may be compelled to battle against the hellish schemes of both Northern and Southern upholders of slavery"), equating the act of material aid with the affirmation of widely held American beliefs about antislavery. When written as a resolution, the statement "no oppression shall drive us from [America as our home]," suggests the end of oppression, marking its issue resolved. Overall, the Philadelphia committee's initial report addresses an audience far beyond subscribers of the *Anglo-African*. In both its physical circulation amongst the Black and white antislavery press and its support of antislavery, the report links the financial support of the Philadelphia rescuers to a victory against tyranny.

In the following April 14th issue of *The Weekly Anglo-African*, press coverage concerning the Philadelphia rescuers' attempt reached its height; three separate reports on the matter appeared in the same issue. The lengthiest was a "Letter from the Philadelphia Rescuers," featured on page 2. The correspondence is signed by "Veritas"—the Roman goddess of truth— and written in the first-person plural. It provides a column-length description of the rescuers' motives from their combined perspective. In the letter, Veritas explains that Horner was in the middle of a trial regarding his legal status when the rescue attempt occurred; that there were rumors that the court martial, in whom custody Horner temporarily resided, would secretly sell Horner back into enslavement before he had a chance to prove whether or not he had been legally declared free at one point: "Under these very critical circumstances, involving as we conceived, so much to us professing to be men worthy of your respect, at the risk of our lives, we resisted what we

believed to be a determination on the part of the person's having the man in custody to disregard any and all authority that seemed to favor or offer a chance of freedom for the prisoner."

(Veritas)

Like the letter from the Philadelphia committee in the previous issue of the *Anglo-African*, the Philadelphia rescuers structure their gratitude to those who have assisted them during their imprisonment in the form of resolutions, writing

"... we deem every such kindness, under such circumstances, worthy of our highest respect, therefore... *Resolved*, That we will ever cherish feelings of the greatest for one who has so kindly favored us in this, the most important event of our lives, it being the first time that any of us were ever imprisoned or even charged with a criminal offense. *Resolved*, That our thanks are due and hereby tendered to the many kind friends in this city and elsewhere who have sought to relieve us in a thousand different ways since our imprisonment, and who express sympathy with us characteristic of true philanthropy and fidelity to the cause of human freedom." (Veritas)

"Letter From the Philadelphia Rescuers" attempts to ratify, or make officially valid, the emotions of the Philadelphia rescuers by articulating them as the resolutions of their own committee. In this way, the resolutions of both impromptu committees—the rescuers and those trying to rescue the rescuers from imprisonment—frame feelings as political decisions. The resolutions indicate a commitment to codify the abstract beliefs or emotions expressed within them: to "plant firmly in Pennsylvania soil the standard of liberty" (Simpson) or "That we will ever cherish feelings of the greatest for one who has so kindly favored us in this, the most important event of our lives."

(Veritas) This framing of the political sphere within a context of feelings, I argue, is akin to

Berlant's articulation of an intimate public that prioritizes the attachment of political pressures to their emotional effects. The Philadelphia rescuers appropriate a genre of political writing in expressing their gratitude as resolutions—decisions approved and passed by an organizing board—in an implicit assertion of Black emotional sovereignty.

Further, the letter is titled "Letter From the Philadelphia Rescuers," but it is not signed by the group. By signing the letter "Veritas," the Philadelphia rescuers utilize a key feature of correspondence, the closing signature, to re-identify themselves explicitly as the embodiment of truth. This is an example of a regular practice of correspondents in *Anglo-African*: the abdication of authorship to an abstract idea⁹. The practice utilizes the form of the letter to the editor to perform a public exchange of news between editor and correspondent while decentering the individualizing aspect of authorship; correspondents, therefore, frequently spoke on behalf of an anonymous pluralized public. Here, it is anyone dedicated to the pursuit of truth. This practice is similar to Meredith McGill's description of Harper's ability to enact collective forms of witness by using the general lyrical "I." In this case, I assert that the Philadelphia rescuers perform an act of collective expression as "Veritas." They achieve this through a different strategy than that of Harper's newspaper poetry: primarily, by appropriating the form of the letter to the editor to resignify their authorial identity. By representing themselves as truth itself they contextualize their actions within classical Roman virtues associated with republicanism.

The following six issues of the *Anglo-African* would report on the trial of the Philadelphia rescuers, who were eventually charged with attempting to rescue someone in the care of a Marshall. Coverage of the case was steady, and correspondence frequently presented the events of the trial in meaningful contexts. As such, trial reports resembled a generic mix of

⁹See correspondence signed by "Ladies Friend," "Pillar," "Cataract," and "Populus" in the June 23rd, 1860 issue of *The Weekly Anglo-African* on Figure 2.

objective news articulated with rhetorical force to constitute readers within the radical actions of the public. For example, in the "Acknowledgements" section of a June 16th issue, Alfred Green, one of the men awaiting trial for the attempted rescue of Moses Horner, reported collecting a total of \$175 to aid in the defense of the Philadelphia Rescuers: "This, sir, is about the amount I have received up to this time, and for which my numerous friends who have so kindly responded have my sincere thanks. I am now writing as I run, not from, but to, prison." (Green)

Green highlights the irony of running toward prison in the clarifying clause "not from," to emphasize the regularity with which Black bodies were policed, whether legally enslaved or not. Further, Green's voice echoes earlier perspectives published in the Anglo-African, which rhetorically contextualized the event of Horner's failed rescue attempt in a larger historical narrative of a racist American "justice" system: "Veritas" reasoned that they-the Philadelphia rescuers-raided the carriage containing Horner in an act that "resisted what we believed to be a determination on the part of the person's having the man in custody to disregard any and all authority that seemed to favor or offer a chance of freedom for the prisoner." Together, these correspondences frame the attempted rescue of Moses Horner as a revolt against legally sanction systematic oppression, reported, in part, by the men who participated in it. By literally delivering donations of financial aid to the rescuers, Alfred Green symbolizes the correspondent's facilitation of a direct relationship between the reading public and the revolutionaries in the Anglo-African. In this way, Green embodied a radical, a reporter, and a donor at once. This suggests that the relationship between the newspaper and its readers was more fluid than fixed and revolved around the collective efforts toward racial uplift. Thus, its print performances, as Derrick Spires writes, involved a collaboration on, as opposed to an exchange of, meaningful information between correspondents and subscribers.

Correspondents writing about the status of the Philadelphia rescuers also de-emphasized fixed, individual identities by implicitly defining a readership based on collective beliefs. On May 5th a Philadelphia correspondent for the *Anglo-African* wrote:

Recent events in our city and in Troy, have made me feel a sublime contempt for those who do not love liberty enough to die for it. Life is dear, and so is liberty—but sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice the former for the latter. A few weeks ago Moses Horner was brought to this city, tried before a partial judge, and delivered to the Bloodhounds of the South. Several generous hearted men attempted his rescue, but failed. ("Our Philadelphia Letter")

Like the correspondence from the Philadelphia committee, whose meeting, they claimed, would be pertinent to anyone who loved freedom, this letter apostrophizes to a general public defined as anyone who loves liberty enough to die for it. These features of "Letter From the Philadelphia Rescuers" aestheticize the letter to the editor to make it relevant to anyone with a moral compass, suggesting that correspondents frequently spoke to and for the public. The letter articulates feelings of gratitude as resolutions, as decisions to which one commits, to emphasize emotion in the projects of organized action. Thus, those who could not donate, but could *relate* in feeling, became complicit in the rescuers'—and their supporters'—mission to protect freedom.

To summarize, correspondence on Moses Horner and the status of his rescuers constituted its subscribers as radicals by contextualizing events of the day within larger historical narratives about antiblackness. This practice reflected the motto of the *Anglo-African*: "Man must be free; if not through the law, then above the law" and its plans for circulation amongst an international population of Black readers. They also employed the genre of letter writing to abdicate individual authorship and perform an ideal, unified public voice. In this way, the

correspondent often became indistinguishable from the public: they acted in local events, reported on them, and reacted to their outcomes. In performing public forms of witness and expression, correspondents used sentimental strategies to create simultextual activist messages and structure relationships with readers based on shared emotional and/or historical experiences. This allowed for correspondents to implicitly address their letters to a range of diverse readers who need only relate to each other or the paper in their commitment to republicanism.

Constituting readers in relation to each other and to the Philadelphia rescuers through shared feelings and beliefs validates sentimentalism in representing collective experience, but also suggests simultaneous readerships, making room for a white abolitionist audience as well.

By June 16th, 1860, six of the Philadelphia rescuers were convicted of attempting to rescue someone in the custody of the Marshall, including Aflred Green, Henry Knockson, Jeremiah Buck, Basil Hall, St. Clair Burley, and Richard Williams. Moses Horner was sold back into enslavement. "Thus ends the trials of the Philadelphia rescue cases, so far as the first trials are concerned," writes a June 16th Philadelphia Correspondent (Banneker). The guilty defendants were sentenced to 30 days in prison and fined \$25. In the following June 23rd issue of the *Anglo-African*, two letters are featured—one of which is Harper's—in an attempt to solicit donations to relieve the convicted rescuers of their fines. The first, "Letter From Harrisburg," writes:

Men of undaunted courage have led the people of this place to successful and unsuccessful rescues, and throughout the State the Anglo-Africans have not only responded with appreciation, but with means when necessary. It becomes the duty of the people of Harrisburg to throw off their indifference, and rally, as they have done, around the standard of self elevation. This case appeals particularly to the

charity of the people of this place, as the man Horner was taken from this neighborhood to Philadelphia for trial, and they attempted to redeem with their courage what we have lost with our lack of vigilance. (T.M.C.)

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's "An Appeal for the Philadelphia Rescuers" appeared on the front page of the same June 23rd issue of the *Anglo-African*:

I saw in a late number of your paper an appeal from one of the Philadelphia rescuers, and I would ask through the columns of your paper if this appeal does not find a ready and hearty response in the bosom of every hater of American despotism? It is not enough to express our sympathy by words; we should be ready to crystallize it into actions. Let the hands of toil release their hold upon their hard-won earnings, feeling that there is no poverty like the poverty of meanness, no bankruptcy like that of a heart bankrupt in just kind and generous feelings. Brethren and sisters of the East and West will you not rally around these men? Theirs is a common cause; they bear a common standard. . . Do not stop to cavil and find fault by saying they were rash and imprudent and engaged in hopeless contest. Their ears were quicker than ours; they heard the death-knell of freedom sound in the ears of a doomed and fettered brother, and to them they were clarion sounds, rousing their souls to deeds of noble daring-trumpet tones, inciting them to brave and lofty actions. ("An Appeal For the Philadelphia Rescuers")

The Weekly Anglo-Afniganz

V OL. I-NO. 49.

NEW YORK, JUNE 23, 1860.

PRICE FOUR CENTS

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Figure 2. Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins. "An Appeal For the Philadelphia Rescuers." The Weekly Anglo-African. New York, 23 June 1860, p. 1. The Portal to Texas History.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

Figure 3. T. M. C. "Letter From Harrisburg." *The Weekly Anglo-African*. New York, 23 June 1860, p. 2. *The Portal to Texas History*.

T.M.C. and Harper use similar rhetorical strategies to articulate a relationship of dependency between subscribers and the Philadelphia rescuers: T.M.C. writes "they attempted to redeem with their courage what we have lost with our lack of vigilance," using plural pronouns to both conflate the identities of the rescuers into one unidentified "they," and make readers complicit in the behavior of the "we" who were not vigilant enough to perceive the risk of re-enslavement to Moses Horner. Further, T.M.C. uses syntax to imply that readers are not only connected to but dependent upon the actions of the rescuers: "to redeem with *their* courage what *we* have lost," structures both subjects—"they" and "we"—in a grammatical relationship of mutual possession: both possess "what" was almost lost if not for their bravery.

Similarly, Harper writes primarily in plural pronouns, which works to generalize the deeds of the rescuers and minimize their identities as well as promote public deeds of good faith: "Theirs is a common cause; they bear a common standard. . . Do not stop to cavil and find fault by saying they were rash and imprudent and engaged in hopeless contest. Their ears were quicker than ours. . ." Here, the repetition of "they/theirs" and "common" both implicitly and explicitly emphasize the importance of generality, or, that which affects most people. Harper identifies a difference between the rescuers and the public only through a seemingly arbitrary anatomical quirk: "their ears were quicker than ours." In a similar grammatical move to the letter by T.M.C., Harper also uses syntax to create clausal proximity which suggests mutual dependence. In emphasizing the common nature of both the rescuers and readers, these letters base their appeals on subscribers' *likeness* to the rescuers, not on the rescuers' exceptionality.

Like previous correspondence on the Philadelphia rescuers, Harper also constitutes her audience based on their shared feelings of hate for despotism ("I would ask through the columns of your paper if this appeal does not find a ready and hearty response in the bosom of every hater

of American despotism?") However, unlike most other correspondence, Harper also capitalizes on her popular name to solicit donations for the rescuers. Instead of abdicating authorship to ventriloquize public opinion, Harper's name is boldly printed at the end of her letter. By 1860, Harper was a regular contributor to both the Black and white abolitionist press, and as discussed earlier in this chapter, her name became synonymous with the abolitionist movement during the antebellum period. Unlike nearly half of the contributors of this issue, Harper signs her real name at the end of her correspondence; of the eight pieces of correspondence featured on the front page of this issue, only Harper's name—which was Watkins at the time—is printed unabbreviated at the close of her letter. Further, "FRANCES ELLEN WATKINS" is granted a substantial amount of valuable line space beneath the body of the letter, especially when compared to the rest of the correspondence on the front page. While other signatures share a line with the last sentence of their respective letters, Harper's boldly contrasts with the negative space surrounding it. In this sense, Harper signifies on her famous name in a public endorsement of the deeds of the rescuers, yet, she still maintains a familial relation to readers, addressing them as "Brethren and sisters of the East and West."

Harper's romantic portrayal of the Philadelphia rescuers—their "deeds of noble daring" and "brave and lofty actions," customarily recontextualizes the deeds of the rescuers within a symbolic register of sentimentalism. Rather than ultimately decontextualizing the event by rearticulating it as a lyric poem, as in her 1860 poem, "To Charles Sumner," however, Harper uses the form of correspondence to report on the men in a context that provides emotional significance. She mythologizes by alluding to bygone battles, writing, "they heard the death-knell of freedom sound in the ears of a doomed and fettered brother, and to them they were clarion sounds, rousing their souls to deeds of noble daring—trumpet tones, inciting them to brave

and lofty actions." Like her 1859 poem, "Be Active," which I discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Harper's "Appeal" models a similar process of experiencing, being emotionally moved by, and responding to the political world. Harper decontextualizes the deeds of the Philadelphia rescuers by explicitly emphasizing the gesture of hearing (the "death-knell of freedom sound") and being "roused"—which denotes feeling anger or excitement—to action. Further, in romanticizing the actions of the rescuers in a dramatic portrayal, Harper's letter to the editor suggests that sentimentalist expression and local journalism both work as methods, often, in tandem, for archiving the physical and emotional experiences of the broader Black community. In fact, Harper explicitly elevates the sentimental over the material in her letter to persuade subscribers to donate, writing, "there is no poverty like the poverty of meanness, no bankruptcy like that of a heart bankrupt in just kind and generous feelings."

These experiments across the correspondence section of *The Weekly Anglo-African* exemplify Frankie Hutton's description of Black practices of early press responsibility, or "intelligent accounts of events in contexts that give them meaning." They also exemplify a creative cultural practice of activist sentimentalism, to borrow from both Shirley Samuels and Gabrielle Foreman, because of the way their meaningful acts of contextualization utilize multiple discursive registers, renegotiate symbol systems, and address distinct readerships simultaneously. The form of the letter to the editor was crucial to the simultextuality of these messages as it required correspondents to explicitly identify a relationship between addresser and addressee. As such, the generic conventions of the letter–its customary salutation and closing and expected epistolary response–were made to function in both practical and aesthetic ways: to orient readers within a relationship to the *Anglo-African*'s mission, to magnify the urgency of a particular appeal, to identify and affirm readers as political activists, or to implicate subscribership firmly

within the act of political resistance. In structuring relationships through the language of feeling and strategically minimizing individual authorship, correspondents also structured a print public around collective emotions and ideologies, apostrophizing to "every hater of American despotism" to affect as many readers as possible.

The results of these experimental writing techniques were both successful and complicated. As Timothy Shortell writes, Black abolitionist rhetoric effectively influenced the success of the abolitionist movement, which resulted in the ratification of the 13th Amendment in 1865. However, Shortell also notes that Black abolitionists "legitimated" the hegemonic view of race as a biological category by asserting that they would achieve "equality with whites." (105) Shortell situates their criticism of slavery through the discourse of republicanism within an emerging liberal capitalist worldview. (105) Shortell, though, also writes that rejecting American society entirely would have meant certain defeat. Thus, accessing a dominant discourse—be it republicanism or sentimentalism—is undeniably helpful for appealing to a 19th-century mass American public, and Black authors strategically worked to preserve radical social critiques even while working within dominant discourses.

As far as Harper's "Appeal," money for the Philadelphia rescuers was quickly raised thanks to the chain of correspondence that emerged on their behalf and their legal fees were paid in full. Moses Horner was sold back into enslavement. The trial of Horner and his rescuers is mentioned in an anti-slavery tract published in 1861, titled, *The Fugitive Slave Law and Its Victims*. The authors of the tract call the rescuers' attempt to help Horner "ineffectual." (133) The publication of his story establishes Horner as one of the last high-profile victims of the Fugitive Slave Law. Indeed, other reports within the *Anglo-African* similarly frame his re-

enslavement as a sacrifice made for the inevitable life and liberty of Black people throughout America:

"Life is dear, and so is liberty—but sometimes it is necessary to sacrifice the former for the latter. A few weeks ago Moses Horner was brought to this city, tried before a partial judge, and delivered to the Bloodhounds of the South. Several generous hearted men attempted his rescue, but failed." ("Our Philadelphia Letter," *Anglo-African*, May 5, 1860)

The above letter appeared six weeks before Harper's "Appeal." It speaks to the extent to which sentimental strategies can influence the reception of a message. When compared to Harper's urgent questions ("[will this appeal] not find a ready and hearty response in the bosom of every hater of American despotism?... will you not rally around these men?"), The Philadelphia correspondent seems resigned to close the history of Horner in an attempt to make a positive example of his life (and those of his rescuers). In this sense, Horner's case becomes a symbol for the victims of the Fugitive Slave Act. Harper's letter revives public interest in the Philadelphia rescuers by calling on the press to solicit donations. She reminds readers there is still work to be done, both within and outside of representational spaces: "It is not enough to express our sympathy by words; we should be ready to crystallize it into actions." Taken together, both letters exemplify acts, as Derrick Spires puts it, within the repertoire of Black print performance. Newspapers like *The Weekly Anglo-African* employed explicit, implicit, formal, and discursive contexts to solicit a variety of responses from as many readers as possible, even at the risk of misrepresenting those, like the Philadelphia rescuers, relegated to the periphery of a political agenda like abolitionism. Harper's sentimental practices play a crucial role in the goals of the Black press; by recasting events in contexts that give them meaning, her poetry and letters work

in simultextual ways: as interventions into historical narratives, as portals to diverse readerships and discursive registers, as attestations to the role of affect in a political world, and as open questions calling on readers to respond however they can.

Chapter 2

The Thing Carried Out: Speculation as Praxis in the Work of Martin R. Delany
In January of 1859, chapters 28, 29, and 30 of Martin Delany's serialized novel, *Blake;*or, the Huts of America, appeared in the Anglo-African Magazine, marking the first of four
discrete publishing instances of the text. Carefully selected by Delany out of 78 extant chapters,
these selections follow the main character, a West Indian fugitive enslaved man named Henrico
Blacus (a.k.a. Henry Blake), during an expedition through the antebellum American South.
Henry has escaped the plantation of Colonel Stephen Franks, enslaver of Henry's wife Maggie,
her parents, and their young son. Chapter 28 opens with a party of escaped enslaved people led
by Henry on their way to the northern United States. In this chapter, called "Studying Head
Work," Henry will impart information crucial to the group of self-emancipators: multiple
methods by which to find true North. During the scene the sky is too cloudy to see the stars, so
Henry draws the group a map, explaining:

Now then. . . for an explanation by which you can tell the North Star, when or from whatever place you may see it. The two stars of the Dipper, numbered 6 and 7, are called the pointers because they point directly to the North Star, a very small, bright star, far off from the pointers, generally seeming by itself especially when the other stars are not very bright. (132)

Henry dawns a small compass here, teaching the group about the four cardinal directions and ensuring they will always know where to go because it will always point North. Chapters 29 and 30 follow the self-emancipators through Missouri and along the Mississippi River as they narrowly escape slave catchers, bribe ferrymen, and assert that free papers are no different than a five-dollar piece to a white man. These chapters make up an excerpt that illustrates some of the

novel's themes about resistance and economic mobility, which dovetail with Delany's calls for a free Black labor force to rival the Southern plantation economy.

"Studying Head Work" is also a significant chapter because of the ways it illustrates a practice of nineteenth-century Black speculation that both envisions and embodies an alternate reality through a print performance. The group must speculate in discursive and physical ways in this scene: they intend to observe the night sky, as in the Latin origin of the word speculation—"speculārī,—meaning to spy out, watch, examine, or observe. (*OED*) However, because of the weather, the group must also speculate, or, envision the North Star in the psychological denotation of the word. Further, this envisioning is facilitated by the production and circulation of Henry's impromptu diagram of the sky, which depicts the obscured North star. In this case, Henry must verbally explain, textually represent, and physically gesture toward the North star (despite its temporary absence) in his transfer of spatial knowledge, making his printed record of the night sky just one act in what Diane Taylor calls a repertoire of embodied knowledge¹⁰.

Interpreting historical texts—like maps—as acts within a social performance allows us to expand our understanding of knowledge beyond the privileging of written information and consider the ways knowledge can be both embodied and narrated. This chapter adopts Taylor's concept of embodied knowledge to analyze the cultural work of speculative writing in nineteenth-century African American Studies. In this field, speculative fiction has been long understood as a proto-science fiction literary genre pioneered by canonical writers that include Martin Delany. Speculative fiction utilizes a particular discursive apparatus to narrate events that cannot exist in reality; it affords a "particular intensity and range of images;" what critic and

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¹⁰ This comes from *The Archive and the Repertoire*, in which Taylor argues that archival knowledge is not just textually represented but also embodied. This approach is helpful for the study of Black print in the nineteenth century because it guides our attention to the ways writing was linked to organizing practices.

science fiction writer Samuel Delany described as a "word-beast" that creates counterhegemonic discursive frameworks. (The Jewel-Hinged Jaw, 15) Yet, recent scholarship on nineteenth-century Black Print Studies treats early Black writing as coterminous with collective political organization, meaning the archive of Black historical records—speeches, pamphlets, literary and nonliterary writing alike—convey only one aspect of African American cultural knowledge; each text must be contextualized within a range of embodied practices—reading, circulating, deliberating, commodifying, etc.—which accompanied their initial publication.

In light of new approaches to writing that treat it as one part of a larger performance, this chapter argues that nineteenth-century Black speculation involved and transcended the realm of fiction. I argue that contextualizing speculation within the economic imaginary gets us closer to Delany's definition of it as a praxis. In *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* Delany asserts that "speculations are not enough; that the *practical* application of principles adduced, the thing carried out, is the only true and proper course to pursue," yet his most famous novel, *Blake*, is considered one of the earliest speculative novels in the history of African American literature. (46) We can account for the apparent dissonance between Delany's commitment to practicability and the canon's heralding of his novel as paradigmatically speculative by expanding our analysis of speculative writing to include the behaviors that surround its development and publication.

In light of Delany's lifelong beliefs about the importance of an independent African American economy both within and outside of the United States, I read Delany's writings as both speculating a particular alternative relative and as speculations themselves; meaning his writings both produced the possibility of counterhegemonic frameworks at a discursive level and also actively solicited investments, in the form of time or money, from community members. First,

this chapter historicizes Delany's early work within a tradition of African American speculative print performances which suggests that speculation was a practice of imagining, investing, and actualizing, that began, but did not end, in print. I ultimately read Delany's most famous novel, *Blake*, as a speculative performance that evidences various forms of speculation: its fabulated history illustrates a global Black revolution to orient Black readers within a liberatory cultural consciousness, but the novel also thematizes the practice of financial speculation itself, modeling for readers how to participate in an African American economy. By reaching beyond the aesthetic confines of fiction in conceiving of speculation, this chapter develops new readings of Delany's work that reconcile his novel's conflicting themes about the value of both finance capitalism and revolution.

Theory and Praxis in Nineteenth-Century Black Print

Black Print Studies resists traditional theory/praxis binaries that temporally distinguish between theory and practice, or, as Catherine Bell has described it, the "thought-action dichotomy," because this paradigm assumes that knowledge production is fixed and its archived records are static. 11 Alternatively, studying print as performance accounts for the self-generative nature of Black nineteenth-century writing because it stresses the origins of print in organizations and asks that we read texts for the ways they organized people around shared beliefs and desires, as opposed to reading them as unidirectional conveyers of information. In this way, initiating a Black print tradition led to self-actualization through the establishment of what Joanna Brooks called a Black print counterpublic: a collective public presence existing outside of white government-sanctioned public spaces. In "The Early American Public Sphere and the

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¹¹ From *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*; "thought-action" refers to the fused processes of theorizing and practicing, which can be observed, argues Bell, in ritualization practices.

Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic" Brooks historicizes the origins of an African American print sphere, which date back to the late eighteenth century with the establishment of Masonic lodges and churches. These counterpublic sites "erect[ed] protective boundaries against white appropriation and supervision by establishing enclaves of black self-governance" and often organized themselves through the circulation of texts, ranging from church-owned periodicals and newspapers to masonic manuscripts and convention documents. (70) Such sites, argues Brooks, foster activities for disenfranchised persons to reclaim a measure of subjectivity and the act of publication is one of several practices that allowed early African American writers to both create their own public sphere and critique the dominant public sphere. By adopting print "as a medium for the enactment of a self-determining, collective political present," early Black authors theorized about the world and organized their own at once, using the circulation of print as both a vehicle for thought and the occasion for collectivity. (75)

One way to analyze texts as ongoing performances is to split critical attention between the textual object and the lived contexts in which it was circulated; This approach treats print as a tool used for social organization and seeks to understand the unique conditions—social, material, ideological—that inform our understanding of its cultural significance. In *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* Derrick Spires explores the history of the Black convention movement as a counterpublic space recorded and enacted through print practices. Spires reads the state conventions of the early nineteenth century as performances, writing:

This performance extended beyond the meetings themselves to include conversations about the conventions in print and local gatherings, the choreographed presentation of convention documents to the public in the form of

proceedings, and the ongoing discussion of the convention and its documents, again, in print and in local gatherings. This complex interaction between print and embodied action constitutes a unique performance that is different in each instance." (11)

Spires's work asserts that Black theorizing, or knowledge production, relied on both embodied expression—the presentation, circulation, discussion, and debate that took place around particular texts associated with state conventions, for example—as well as print; the two, writes Spires "were always enmeshed." (11) Spires's reading of state convention documents as dynamic texts that work like windows into African American social organization also helps to clarify what it means to practice print: the word denotes the performance of an activity or the actual application of a theory. Practicing print, then, draws our attention to the ways print was used by both authors and audiences, which privileges communities, their members, and their behaviors as opposed to the information print conveys. It also suggests a repetitive behavior, understood as either commonplace or imperfect, which encourages us to read texts and their contexts as reflective of phases in the history of African American knowledge production that involved developing intellectual strategies. Katherine Clay Bassard's work reimagines an approach to African American cultural production that prioritizes the functionality of expressive forms, asking what culture is for, as opposed to what it creates, which emphasizes the active processes that are part of collective organization. In Spiritual Interrogations: Culture, Gender, and Community in Early African American Women's Writing, Bassard argues that the pre-emancipation African American community is made up of a collection of expressive forms and community building practices more than it reflects "passive indicator of race/group identity." (146) Bassard's work similarly asks that we investigate expressive forms like print as part of an ongoing process of performing

community. Bassard argues that this process comes out of the need for building and maintaining institutions that define themselves outside of white legal definitions of identity.

This approach to nineteenth-century African American print, which emphasizes the social behaviors that surround texts, implies that we should also contextualize African American speculative writing within the local sociopolitical projects in which its authors were involved. For Delany's oeuvre, this involves interpreting Delany's relationship to speculation as both a written and embodied practice. Delany's early writings portray his understanding of speculation as a collaborative print performance that ideally resulted in a measurable temporal or financial investment from audiences. In 1853, Delany published *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration*, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States. The work famously carves out Delany's separatist views, arguing that Black people in America make up "a nation within a nation," both a part of and separate from the population, deprived of political equality with others. (11) The latter part of the work calls for Black emigration to South America (though Delany would change his mind later and advocate for emigration to Africa instead). After systematically disproving white supremacist myths about the current condition and essential capabilities of the enslaved population, Delany utilizes the rhetoric of finance to link the history of Black labor and military service in America to an inherent right to citizenship. He writes:

The legitimate requirement, politically considered, necessary to the justifiable claims for protection and full enjoyment of all the rights and privileges of an unqualified freeman, in all democratic countries is, that each person so endowed, shall have made contributions and investments in the country. Where there is no investment there can be but little interest; hence an adopted citizen is required to reside a sufficient length of time, to form an attachment and establish some

interest in the country of his adoption, before he can rightfully lay any claims to citizenship. (56)

Delany is asking readers to materially speculate here, referring to the process of investing in stocks, property, or other ventures in the hope of gain (*OED*). He provides historical examples of this by recording the service of Black soldiers during the War for American Independence and encourages it to continue in the form of a united Black workforce. Delany's usage of "interest" is also complicated in this excerpt in that it connotes a collective financial endeavor made up of cultural investors. He includes the term to develop the metaphor of investing in one's country, likening it to the desire for (or interest in) something. This usage also redefines interest as the collective benefit of a larger enterprise. Instead of denoting a profit earned by lenders, Delany makes interest signify a gradually solidifying relationship expressing itself in the behaviors that create community.

By repurposing financial terminology in predicting a path to self-determination, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* poses speculation as both theoretical and practicable; it is the belief, or "interest" in the capacity for self-determination whose real-world potential grows in relationship to its popularity. Here, Delany uses the language of capitalism to describe African American citizenship. However, the text also uses the rhetoric of financial speculation in a literal sense, teaching its readers that speculative practices—whether it is the investment of capital or the ideological investment in political projects (e.g. abolitionism, emigration, revolution)—are crucial to African American self-determination. Delany's multiple engagements with speculation—as a cultural and financial practice of investment as well as a rhetorical tool for conjecture, portray an developing attitude about the path to African American citizenship practices that, as Jeffrey Clymer has written,

relies at least in part on a discourse of capitalism to take shape. ("Martin Delany's *Blake*")

Delany's emphasis on speculation as investment comes out of an economic imaginary that is a product of capitalism, and in the context of the above excerpt, the world for African Americans he imagines is a capitalistic one. However, Delany also modifies the language of finance capitalism in important ways: he portrays participation in organizing efforts as a kind of cultural investment. In this way, it may be more accurate to say that Delany borrows the language of financial investment to portray self-determination as practicable and rooted in actionable practices. As such, reading his speculative writings as purely conjectural or theoretical can miss the way he positioned readers to participate in their communities in practical ways.

I argue that viewing speculation as investment–temporally or financially–guides our attention to the practices that accompany Delany's speculative writing. Understanding speculative texts as attached to action helps to explain how Black speculative writing figuratively and literally built communities by physically bringing people together on a local and global scale. Further, attention to speculation as a practice, as opposed to a genre, highlights the way speculative fiction was not just an example of what could be, but a commodity circulated amongst a nineteenth-century Black economy intent on rivaling the Southern plantation economy; in other words, for Delany, participating in an African American literary marketplace was itself a speculative venture. Contextualizing speculation economically, then, allows us to imagine how speculative writing facilitated an investment–temporally, financially, and/or ideologically–in both an alternative reality and an emerging present. Jessica Brittan writes that, for speculative writers like Delany, to speculate *about* and to speculate *in* were two distinct but related behaviors, each of which "rely on fiction (imagined worlds and imaginary value)."

(Martin R. Delany's Speculative Fiction, 82) This distinction has helped scholars read Delany's

novel, *Blake*, in two ways: as theorizing, but not literally mapping out revolution, or as a functional text that illustrates his ideas about African American economic practices. I assert that we can read Delany's speculative writings, including *Blake*, as both radical theory and functional economic practice, by considering the ways they asked readers to both speculate in and speculate about different realities at once. The following sections contextualize Delany's writings within a history of African American speculative performances that deepens our understanding of the material impact of speculative writing in the Black print tradition. Speculative print performances, which included textual and embodied elements, implicated audiences in the work of conjecture by asking them to participate in a shared vision through a material and spiritual investment, relying on a balance of faith and capital to bring about change.

Ritual as Speculative Performance

Ritual practices in Black Freemasonry such as parades, ceremonies, and initiation speeches facilitated the organization of the African Lodge as a counterpublic space for Black people living in America. Joanna Brooks interprets these documented behaviors as the enactment of Black self-government because initiation rituals "secured the African Lodge as a space where African Americans could constitute themselves collectively beyond white regulation and supervision and then establish their own place within civil society and enact for themselves the rights of citizens." (Brooks, 85) I specify Brooks's argument and interpret these documents as part of early Black speculative performances that used ritualization to anchor a developing political present within the realm of the sacred. Catherine Bell's work stresses the distinction between ritual and ritualization and helps to frame ritualization as a speculative practice that operates at the border of behaviors and beliefs: As opposed to distinguishing a practiced "ritual"

from an ideology (a thought, belief, or myth), Bell suggests that we treat ritualization as a practice that structures societies by combining the act of believing and behaving. In other words, instead of signifying a belief or religion, ritualization creates the realm of the sacred, and not the other way around. (*Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*) Thus, I interpret ritual initiations into the African Lodge as a speculative practice that imagines a sacred future state and enacts it through the practice of initiations. In other words, these initiation rituals tethered the principles for Black self-governing to spiritual elevation. Committing to the Masonic Lodge, then, required a temporal investment in a sacred future that produced the conditions—the covert gatherings of a fraternal collective—of a Black counterpublic presence.

The initiation of a Black print counterpublic dates back to the late eighteenth century with the establishment of Masonic lodges and churches, which "erect[ed] protective boundaries against white appropriation and supervision by establishing enclaves of black self-governance." (Brooks, 80) Prince Hall, the founder of the Black Masonic Lodge in the United States, historicizes the Masonic order in his 1792 speech "A CHARGE DELIVERED TO THE BRETHREN OF THE AFRICAN LODGE." This speech was part of a series of lectures designed to facilitate ritual initiations into the African Lodge. Hall calls this collection of speeches the "two pillars" of Freemasonry, referring to Masonic lore which illustrates the two pillars of Solomon's temple as a portal "through the temple veil," indicating "a passage from the profane to the sacred." (Brooks, 85) The speech concludes:

If thus, we by the grace of God, live up to this our Profession; we may cheerfully go the rounds of the compass of this life, having lived according to the plumb line of uprightness, the square of justice, the level of truth and sincerity. And when we are come to the end of time, we may then bid farewell to that delightful Sun and

Moon, and the other planets, that move so beautifully round her in their orbits, and all things here below, and ascend to that new Jerusalem, where we shall not want these tapers, for God is the Light thereof; where the Wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest. (Hall, 13)

The profession of the Freemason, as Hall states, involves practicing love and benevolence to all mankind and resisting bloodshed, violence, and rebellion. These behaviors will guarantee members' ascent to new Jerusalem in bodily death, "where the Wicked cease from troubling." Grammatically, Hall uses both speculative and causal language, using the subjunctive mood to express a hypothetical future ("If thus... we may,") and then shifting to a more definitive future tense ("when we... we may.") This grammatical inconsistency expresses the overlap between imagined and lived realities—here, they are linked by everyday behaviors in accordance with "the plumb line of uprightness." In other words, the sacred realm of God is attainable through a combination of collective self-governing and spiritual faith: the initiation speech speculates a sacred afterlife observable just above the reaches of the solar system, envisioning the invisible light of God and establishing heaven as the ultimate payoff for living justly on earth.

Joining the African Lodge required more than collective imagining or speculation about a sacred afterlife; it also required a lifelong investment from its members. Delany was a committed Freemason and similarly invoked mythic temporalities to get members to invest their time into his visions for the future. He was the first freemason in America to publish a history of Prince Hall Freemasonry. Delany presented "The Origins and Objects of Ancient Freemasonry: Its Introduction into the United States and Legitimacy Among Colored Men" as a treatise to the St. Cyprian Lodge in 1853. Rather than speculating a sacred future as a promise to members, Delany's history fabricates a mythic, biblical past to, as Maurice Wallace writes, supply Black

men with a history different from the one associated with them. ("Are We Men?", 409) The treatise argues that the construction of Solomon's temple solidified Masonry as a practicable belief system, asserting that all Freemasons owe their history to King Solomon, a Black man. Freemasons were expected to devote every part of their lives to the cause of the craft. As Delany's treatise explains, upon their inquiry into the nature of man, ancient Freemasons determined that men must assimilate to God through moral, intellectual, and physical behaviors: "All men, of every country, clime, color, and condition, (when morally worthy), are acceptable to the portals of Masonic jurisprudence." (*Objects and Origins*, 11)

The mythic history of the Black Freemasons led to the rituals, behaviors, and expectations of its nineteenth-century members, ranging from practicing Christianity every day to the design of Masonic lodge rooms themselves. Lodge room designs were meant to reflect ancient beliefs that the earth was a quadrilateral and rooms in "any other form but an oblong square would be incorrect and unMasonic." ("Are We Men?", 409) Maurice Wallace writes that the ritual practices associated with Black freemasonry in the nineteenth century were intended to inform a particular Black masculine ideal to be replicated by African American men: "Given that the structure [of lodge-rooms] reflects Masonry's cherished, if mythic, past, it is no wonder that generations of African-American men, geographically and temporally distant from their Afrogenesis, would find the Masonic lodge-room an agreeable locus for self-creation." (409)

Masonic ritualization created an African American political present through practices of speculation. By imagining new temporalities—histories and afterlives—that operate outside of colonial time, Black freemasons created members who invested their lives in the project of African American social organization. In this sense, Delany's speculative masonic writings worked to, as Tao Leigh Goffe has argued, pose "a challenge to the fixity or inevitability of

capitalism" by allowing him to "create worlds beyond coloniality." ("Stolen Life, Stolen Time," 111) These writings still, however, incentivized readers to invest their time and labor into the cause of Black Freemasonry, which reflect early African American strategies to reappropriate the logics of capitalism in early organizing efforts. We see Delany's speculative temporalities as incentivizing the investment of individual labor in his fiction as well. *Blake* explicitly links Henry's success as a revolutionary hero to his participation in ritualization. During travels throughout the South, Henry arrives in New Orleans in the midst of Mardi Gras celebrations:

This was the evening of the day of Mardi Gras, and from long-established and time-honored custom, the celebration which commenced in the morning was now being consummated by games, shows, exhibitions, theatrical performances, festivals, masquerade balls, and numerous entertainments and gatherings in the evening. It was on this account that the Negroes had been allowed such unlimited privileges this evening. Nor were they remiss to the utmost extent of its advantages. (98-99)

Here, Delany invokes the sacred temporality of Mardi Gras, which is "time-honored" and "long-established," and distinct from the colonial temporality of every day. Delany also links speculative performances like the customary rituals of Mardi Gras to the success of Black self-determination. In this sense, collectively practicing a ritual that establishes a sacred space is also a practice of radical political independence. Staging these practices outside of a legally sanctioned white public heightens this spatial distinction, i.e., the sacred-political counterpublic of Mardi Gras versus the surveilled streets and plantations of Louisiana. Henry covertly meets with a local Black radical leader, Seth, only asking for his whereabouts by identifying him as "a friend." (101) The two can host a large gathering of rebels without attracting suspicion due to the

holiday: "there was evidence of an anticipated gathering, but the evening being that of the Mardi Gras, there was nothing remarkable in this." (102) In fact, it is because of the celebration of Mardi Gas that Henry and Seth can effectively plan for an insurrection against New Orleans. Because each of the rebel leaders possessed a day pass because of the holiday, Henry, Seth, and leaders from fifteen different plantations can successfully flee and escape imprisonment.

Blake illustrates ritualization as an investment in anticolonial temporalities with political consequences in the present; by conflating ritualization with radicalism, the novel suggests that the speculative practice of ritualization guarantees not just a sacred, far-off future state, but also a more immediate political futurity. Henry's time in the mystical Dismal Swamp similarly works to entangle the seemingly distinct temporalities of the sacred and the colonial, suggesting that Delany is interested in speculation in both contexts as a practice of investment in cultural projects, as much as he is interested in speculation in a subjunctive sense. While touring North Carolina, Henry takes shelter in the company of a group of high conjurers with direct links to famous African American radicals. Gamby Gholar, a conjurer who has lived in the Swamp for thirty years tells Henry he predicted his visit long in advance: "Now da see!" he says, "Dis many years I been seein' on yeh. (113) He presents Henry with the bone of a treefrog; a mystical symbol meant to keep keep Henry safe during his travels. Delany affirms that mythic, anticolonial temporalities can overlap with colonial ones when Gamby assures Henry that his charm will keep him safe, but that it is also worth money (if need be). (114) In this context, Gamby represents Delany's views about the practicality of an investment into sacred realms; the treefrog bone is multifunctional, depending on what Henry may need, and can serve as currency or charm.

Rather than clearly distinguishing between high conjurers and political radicals, Delany joins the deep histories of both to suggest that speculation is a practice transportable across different realms:

In this fearful abode for years of some of Virginia and North Carolina's boldest black rebels, the names of Nat Turner, Denmark Veezie, and General Gabriel were held by them in sacred reverence; that of Gabriel as a talisman. With delight [the high conjurers] recounted the many exploits of whom they conceived to be the greatest men who ever lived, the pretended deeds of whom were fabulous, some of the narrators claiming to have been patriots in the American Revolution. (113)

In this excerpt, Black rebel leaders are explicitly elevated to the level of biblical angels, "that of Gabriel as Talisman," and the telling of their histories is itself a practice of ritualization "held" by the high conjurers, "in sacred reverence." (113) The multiple behaviors practiced by Gamby and his companions in the Dismal Swamp–predicting, laying charms, giving financial aid, telling biblical stories, telling documented histories—are tied to both ancient rituals and African American political self-determination. As opposed to positing a temporality alternative to coloniality, this overlapping of the political and the sacred, I argue, validates ritualization as an effective tool for political organization. In the context of Black print counterpublic spaces, like religious and fraternal organizations, the repeated, documented practice of ritualization was both sacredly and politically motivated. As such, it produced concrete investments from practitioners and relied on faith, a practice of spiritual speculation, to get members to commit to certain causes.

Fundraising as Speculative Performance

The practices of ritualization in Freemasonry helped to structure an early Black counterpublic presence. Initiation rituals simultaneously enacted a speculative sacred realm and helped to forge a political present existing outside a white legal system. Members invested their time into the African Lodge, committing to its expected practices and obligations which led to immediate changes: one of which is the inauguration of an African American print network. Like Masonic ritual documents, the earliest independent African American newspapers both speculated and enacted a Black counterpublic presence through print practices. Frankie Hutton describes the early Black press and the newspapers it circulated as innovators of journalistic responsibility. They explicitly espoused a commitment to public good and adamantly refused to slander or serve anyone other than the community at large. (The Early Black Press, 41) Martin Delany wrote that his paper, *The Mystery*, would "ever combat error, and repel every species of usurpation and tyranny and never be found compromising..." and that it would be "untrammeled." (Hutton, 45) Scholarship on the history of the Black press shows that African American newspapers viewed print as an occasion for organizing the African American community and theorizing about self-determination. One way newspapers literally enacted the sociopolitical ideas they broadcasted was through regular fundraising tours. This section asserts that fundraising, or the practice of seeking funds to implement projects, is also a dynamic speculative performance that similarly operates in the overlap of envisioning (thought) and enacting (action) with origins in Black counterpublic spaces. Delany's history as a fundraiser for the North Star newspaper exemplifies a speculative performance by everyone involved: Delany regularly assessed risk and potential in seeking out leaders from African American communities while touring and subscribers were asked to financially and ideologically invest in the

speculative futures he promised. The multiple practices of speculation that surround Delany's early fundraising efforts deepen our understanding of speculation as both a genre feature and theme in Delany's *Blake*. Reading Henry's fundraising efforts, for example, as akin to Delany's, shows that the novel is as interested in speculating futures as in modeling what it means to engage in economic practices that offered a path to African American citizenship.¹²

Most African American newspapers ran limited advertisements and editors often pooled from their own finances to keep papers afloat. Frederick Douglass reportedly poured over \$12,000 into the operation and circulation of the *North Star*. To keep papers in circulation, editors relied almost entirely on financial support from subscribers, meaning the communities that supported the earliest Black papers expressed their commitment to self-determination through donations, monetarily investing in their political projects. One of the most welldocumented fundraising efforts is Martin Delany's Western Tour for the North Star. When Delany agreed to co-edit Douglass's paper, he embarked on a tour of free states to acquire subscribers to the paper. Delany wrote Douglass a series of letters detailing his progress during the 13 months he was on tour from 1848-1849. These letters reveal that fundraising involved a dynamic practice of observing and identifying potential and established community leaders, lecturing at various political conventions, hosting local antislavery meetings, circulating extant issues of the North Star, and finally, accumulating a list of new subscribers. This required regular public acts of community engagement to generate interest in the North Star and the abolitionist movement more broadly. Delany's fundraising tour has been regarded as the first African American travel narrative, but his efforts also evidence the ways speculation is enacted in both theoretical and financial ways: by Delany, who helped listeners envision collective advancement

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¹² This articulation of the relationship between economic practices and civic engagement comes from Derrick Spires's *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States*.

through his lectures, as well as by subscribers of the *North Star*, who invested in the *North Star* and its mission, putting up capital at the risk of loss.

In a letter from Pittsburgh dated November 5th, 1848, Delany synthesizes his goals for the "Western Tour":

I intend everywhere to induce and urge the necessity among our people of the formation of Anti-Slavery Societies, for the assistance of newspapers and competent lecturers among us. While we do not mean to be exclusive, it is necessary to make our people dependent upon themselves, and cease to look to others to do for them. I would that they could all see and understand this principle as they should." (Levine, 122)

This excerpt necessitates antislavery meetings, recruited lecturers, and other Black newspapers in the work of fundraising, which shows that this practice explicitly linked financial support of the *North Star* with the actualization of racial uplift. The anti-slavery meetings Delany both facilitated and participated in during his "Western Tour," advertised a particular future for Black Americans. Delany pairs "induce"—to bring about—with "urge,"—to try to persuade—in the opening remarks of this excerpt, emphasizing immediate support via financial investment as a practicable path to economic independence. As Delany's other letters illustrate, an "investment" can be exhibited in multiple different ways, a subscription to the *North Star* being just one of them.

Delany practiced a form of speculation himself while fundraising by meticulously gauging the level of antislavery support exhibited by each city he visited during his tour. This involved assessing the political potential of communities by recording the participation of Black community members in their local economies. Of Cincinnati, Delany stresses the need for

education in guiding community leaders toward the path to advancement, writing "the aged generally are the capitalists, but not having had in their youth the advantages of education, cannot make much investment, and enter into such enterprises with their money, as are necessary for the advancement of society." (Levine, 93) He also praises the potential of the Cincinnati women, who, "of the colored class, are far in advance of those of any other place that I have visited. Nearly the whole of them have trades, and have continually as much employment as they can attend to." (Levine, 98). "There are quite a number of respectable colored mechanics in Chillicothe," he writes on April 20th, 1838, "all industriously employed; also, a large number of free-holders; and more farmers round about in this neighborhood than I have ever yet met with This is highly creditable to the colored inhabitants, and will do more towards elevating us, than all other human efforts this side of Mason and Dixon's line." (Levine, 92)

We see a form of speculation through assessment in Delany's *Blake* as well. While visiting with southern plantations in the first half of the novel, Henry gathers a dizzying array of data from everyone he meets: "Being a scholar, he carefully kept a record of the plantations he had passed." (70) To one enslaved woman, Henry inquires about a plantation in rapid succession: "What are the usual allowances for slaves?" "How about eating?" "What about weekly privileges? Do you have Saturday to yourselves?" (74) Henry parallels Delany's fundraising efforts for the *North Star* in his evaluation of community potential in organizing a rebellion. As scholars have noted, readers are purposely left in the dark with regard to how, exactly, Henry manages to convince the enslaved plantation leaders to invest in his national rebellion—all we know is that it works. Of Henry's plan for an uprising, Jennifer Brittan writes "Because [Henry] reveals his plan to all his allies except us, the readers, we can only speculate about the conspiracy plot (imagine what it might be) and cannot assess its risk." ("Martin R. Delany's Speculative

Fiction," 95) Here, Brittan emphasizes that Delany's novel relies on the genre of speculative fiction to suggest that Henry's rebellion has immanent, undisclosed value. Henry's plan, then, can only be theoretical. In this way, Brittan's reading affirms that the novel is meant to envision a revolutionary framework in broad strokes rather than offer a blueprint for rebellion. I interpret this crucial (missing) part of the plot as evidence of the novel's twin themes about Black revolution and Black labor as capital: The novel's refusal to reveal the inner workings of Henry's rebellion emphasizes the practice of speculation in planning for the future—as opposed to the plan itself— which involves both acquiring funds and reasonably assessing potential and risk. By stressing the prep work over the logistics of the rebellion, the novel can simultaneously promote radicalism and model how to be a responsible agent in a growing Black economic sphere at home.

Another key element of Delany's speculative practices during his Western Tour was his performance at the weekly, often daily, meetings held across the midwestern states. His speeches served to motivate listeners to participate in their local economies and pledge support for the *North Star*, which Delany explicitly identifies as a "medium" for delivering the message of antislavery. His rhetoric in one report of back-to-back antislavery meetings held during his tour of Philadelphia illustrates the fall of slavery as the slaying of a monster who "must soon fall." (Levine, 119) In utilizing a proleptic future tense and hyperbolic language, Delany effectively exaggerates the success of his (and others') antislavery efforts, carefully bracketing their successes within a period of accruing interest for the paper and its message. This letter illustrates an overwhelmingly successful tour to Douglass, who published Delany's letters in the *North Star* for all its subscribers to read. Delany writes:

... never was there a time before in the history of our people, when so much interest was felt and manifested by themselves in the antislavery movement. . . with the host of noble men and women at their backs, with the feeble aid that I shall render, the monster now staggers, and must soon fall—yea, shall fall, to rise no more! Could a place be obtained large enough to contain ten thousand people, at present, it could be filled, such is the interest manifested. A proud day indeed will it be for us, and a terrible day for slavery, when the colored people—when we shall stand up in the might and majesty of manhood, and declare by our strength, that slavery shall cease. (Levine, 119)

It has been determined that Delany's subscription efforts were far less successful than he led on. In 1848, before Delany's departure from the North Star, Douglass published a plea to readers, writing that he and Delany were "reluctantly compelled to call upon you for pecuniary assistance." (Levine, 71) Robert S. Levine writes that Delany remained "an essential, if not terribly effective fund-raiser for the financially struggling paper;" that his implicit rivalry with Douglass as "the" Black antislavery leader distracted him from continuing his efforts as a subscription agent after his initial tour. (69) Delany's certainty that "ten thousand people" would attend his antislavery meeting based on the interest he garnered if a large enough space were procured and the reality that his tour did little to solve the *North Star*'s financial issues suggests that Delany is speculating a degree of Black antislavery financial support that does not exist. For the purposes of this argument, it also reveals the limits of speculation as a mode of rhetorical envisioning; While he may not have raised much money by predicting the demise of enslavement, Delany's fundraising efforts document a range of speculative behaviors that informed his beliefs about how African Americans could move in an independent economy.

Delany's fundraising tour reveals that his speculative performances paid off, even if they didn't pay out. In touring the Midwest, he occasioned dozens of gatherings and prompted heated discussions and debates about abolitionism and the practices he believed would build an African American economy. His other fundraising efforts similarly work to encourage audiences to invest in his ideas both financially and ideologically. Delany's timely publication of *Blake* evidences a practice of imaginary and financial speculation as soon as it enters the literary marketplace. Blake's significance as a performance of speculative historiography, then, becomes more clear when we consider the ways it contributed to African American organizing efforts in its contemporary moment, not just in the long-term imaginary. The impetus for the initial publication of *Blake* was, in Delany's words, to "make a penny by it," ("Letter from Dr. Delany") as Delany hoped profits from the novel would finance his project of establishing an African American settlement in the Niger region of Africa. Delany's calls for emigration to South and Central America, and later Africa were controversial because of the formation of the American Colonization Society in 1816, which sought to send Black people living in America to Africa as an alternative to emancipation. As a result, many Black activists were uncomfortable with the undertones of African colonization, though proponents of emigration insisted that the collective decision to settle in Africa it relied on Black agency.

Though it was initially conceived in 1853 or 1854 as a direct response to Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Delany published an excerpt of *Blake* in 1859, just six months after founding the Niger Valley Exploring Party. This expedition sought to examine the Niger River Valley of Africa in the hopes of eventually establishing an industrial colony. On February 19th, 1859, Delany wrote to William Lloyd Garrison of *The Liberator*:

I beg to call your attention to the Story of "Blake or The Huts of America" now being published in the "Anglo-African Magazine," . . . I am anxious to get a good publishing house to take it, as I know I could make a penny by it, and the chances for a negro in this department are so small, that unless some disinterested competent persons would indirectly aid in such a step, I almost despair of any chance. The Story as it proceeds increases naturally in interest, there being no dull nor tame sameness, and whilst I have studiously guarded against harshness and offensiveness, I have given truth its full force in the pictures drawn. I have maturely and carefully written this work, and hope that it so far may meet your approbation and approval, that you may recommend it to the consideration of some publisher. ("Letter from Dr. Delany")

Delany's intentions, to use profits from *Blake* to fund his expedition to the Niger Valley, suggest that the novel's publication evidenced a short-term act of fundraising that asked readers to engage in speculation as much as its content used speculative writing to produce historical possibilities in the long-term. Patricia Okker's *Social Stories: The Magazine Novel in Nineteenth-Century America* argues that Blake's serialization in the *Anglo-African Magazine* must be contextualized within the rest of the issue in which it was published. Delany's first go at publishing *Blake* in 1859 showcased only the first 23 chapters, which take place in the American South. The second half of the novel wherein Henry makes his way to Cuba was published for the first time in 1861. Okker's work posits that we treat the novel's initial publication—its first 23 chapters—as a distinct publishing event. Specifically, Okker argues that "[t]he 1859 *Blake* proved to be a novel deeply engaged with the immediate and often local concerns facing African Americans." (103) Indeed, Delany's request that the white abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, advertise his latest novel

suggests that he intended the earliest version of his novel to appeal broadly to abolitionists—both Black and white—and immediately produce a profit. In addition to this context, Delany's plans to fund a colonizing expedition to Africa confirm that we can read the novel in differing ways: as a reflection of local, immediate concerns of Black leaders such as abolitionism and emigration and a foundational African American-authored vision of Pan-Africanism.

In addition to his advertisement in *The Liberator*, Delany published the 1859 *Blake* in the traditionally anti-emigration *Anglo-African Magazine*. While this version is not typically associated with the Pan-African vision fleshed out in the latter half of the novel, Okker also argues that publishing the novel in a traditionally anti-emigration magazine with the intention to actualize a version of emigration represents how the periodical itself showcases intense, timely debates within the black community: "Delany may have chosen the side that would prove less popular, but when he began serializing *Blake*, both in 1859 and 1861, the debate about emigration was anything but predetermined." (101) In this way, *Blake*'s publication in the *Anglo-African Magazine* re-enacts the debates about the path to racial uplift in print by inviting readers to take issue disagree with its content and Delany's well-known position on emigration.

Blake's different versions, audiences, and publications complicate any single reading of the novel's themes; these distinct contexts continually revise and refute what literary scholars have come to articulate as its speculative vision. Analyzing the novel, instead, for the ways it produced engagement from readers about a variety of local and global, immediate and anticipatory concerns shifts the focus from speculative fiction as a reflection of an author's particular political stance and allows us to consider how speculative fiction produced readers willing to speculate in contemporary debates. In other words, the publishing history of Blake suggests that Delany, along with publishers, welcomed debate about the novel. In this sense,

engaging with the novel by either supporting Delany's intended expedition or outright denouncing emigration, as correspondence of the same issues often did, evidenced that African American speculative writing indexes, in addition to a coherent vision, a variety of speculative behaviors that invest in potential futures.

Fiction as Speculative Performance

Scholars view *Blake* as an example of Black speculative writing specifically because of the ways it fabricates history. In this sense, the novel has been read more as "a product of the subjunctive imagination rather than the "actual" world," making it more hypothetical than functional. (Brittan, 85) African American speculative fiction works similarly to African American historiography, which, as John Ernest has written, entails a critical mode of historical writing that manipulates historical records to shape social formation. In this context, speculative writing means tapping into nondominant modes of historical representation by fabricating details to produce cultural knowledge capable of motivating one to take action. Ernest writes "In their reflections on history, [African American historiographers] try to use the tools of consciousness and the materials of record to liberate consciousness and resituate their readers in a newly envisioned community of faith and moral duty." (Liberation Historiography, 8) One of the main features Ernest identifies in liberatory historiography is a reliance on multiple genres of writing, both apparently objective and subjective, in narrating historical events. This creates tension in the work which narrates history and critiques the politics that necessitate how historical knowledge is made.

Liberation historiography as a critical mode of fabulating history necessitates fiction writing in the historiographical process, urging us to consider the immediate and long-term

implications of African American historical fiction, like Delany's Blake. The novel's fabulation of historical timelines and global Black rebellions acts, as most critics have argued, as a liberatory cultural framework that intervened in the cultural imagination of African American readers by illustrating a Pan-African vision. Blake's depiction of Black violence and global insurgency has also solidified it as an early Black nationalist novel whose ambitious plot illustrates what Eric Sundquist has called a "revolutionary ethos." (To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature) This refers to the "historical characters and events to which Delany alludes" throughout the novel, including the Dred Scott Decision of 1857, the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, Cuban political events throughout the 1840s, and the portrayal of the famous revolutionary poet, Placido, whom Delany reimagines as Henry's cousin despite having been executed in 1844. (184) Sundquist asserts that the historical and geographical scope of the plot makes this novel the first "comprehensive, literary treatment of Pan-Africanism" from the perspective of an African American author. Delany's historical fabulation of Cuban Independence also exemplifies liberationist historiography. As Ernest writes, fabulating history is a writing practice meant to equip readers to re-produce cultural knowledge about historical events to facilitate liberatory practices. Blake's two-part plot, the first taking place in the United States and the second in Cuba, ultimately serves to "accentuate the fact that the Cuban situation was a kind of twin, a shadow play, of the American South. . . " (Sundquist, 185). In other words, Blake's historiographical inaccuracies produce the novel's themes about Pan-Africanism by historicizing Cuban Independence, fabulating a national slave revolt, and writing Henry's narrative through the center of it all.

In reading Henry as a mythic hero, as Jo Anne Marx suggests, we can explore how the novel portrays a mediated attitude toward religion. ("MYTH AND MEANING") Henry's

interior monologue necessitates Divine aid in the task of global revolution, though the tenets of Christianity do not prevent him from killing overseers—one such murder was narrated just pages before Henry's renewal of faith and more would occur after. This shift in Henry's beliefs reimagines an attitude toward Christianity that believes in Divine intervention without subsequently abdicating individual or collective agency: Henry can reassert his faith in Christianity—the enslavers' religion—without sacrificing the cultural "responsibilities" of insurrection. Thus, this scene represents the embodiment of two prominent, often opposed cultural frameworks that Blake asserts are not irreconcilable. Sundquist and Marx both argue that Blake exercises a kind of collective envisioning, representing contemporary cultural frameworks through which to contemplate self-determination. This is facilitated through the novel's mythic main character, impossible setting, and rich plot. As has been argued, *Blake*'s balance of historical fabulation and mediation of cultural values theorizes a pan-African vision shared by both Henry and Delany himself. These readings analyze the way the form of the novel-its narrative structure and characterization of Henry-produce its themes about global Black revolution; however, they can miss aspects of the plot that illustrate Delany's less overtly radical beliefs about the importance of Black economic practices at home or portray them too generally. I read the novel as engaged with speculation at multiple levels: holistically, *Blake* speculates in the traditional sense of fabricating history to produce new liberatory cultural frameworks, but it also thematizes speculation as a practice of cultural and financial investment by prioritizing Henry's preparatory work as a speculator in Black labor.

Throughout the novel, Henry encourages each person he meets to hoard their money, consistently inquiring of their finances by asking, "How much?" (*Blake*, 42). In one scene, Henry

also employs the laws of independent labor in justifying how he acquired his savings. Mammy Judy asks if he has stolen money from Colonel Franks, to which Henry responds:

"No, mammy, I'm incapable of stealing from any one, but I have, from time to time, taken by littles, some of the earnings due me for more than eighteen years' service to this man Franks, which at the low rate of two hundred dollars a year, would amount to sixteen hundred dollars more than I secured, exclusive of the interest, which would have more than supplied my clothing, to say nothing of the injury done me by degrading me as a slave. 'Steal' indeed! I would that when I had an opportunity, I had taken fifty thousand instead of two." (*Blake*, 31)

Henry's actions here represent him reclaiming his labor from Colonel Franks by taking "some of the earnings due [him]." He reinterprets the experience of enslavement through financial terms, equating the moral degradation of being a slave to the financial logic of depreciated or damaged property, and assumes an accrual of interest any lender might expect with the repayment of a loan.

Jeffrey Clymer has written that Henry's practices suggest that Delany appropriates a nineteenth-century discourse of power and insists on the power of Black blood, arguing that Henry's attempts to mobilize an international army of enslaved people are filtered through a nineteenth-century lens that recognizes humans as property and celebrates Black property as superior in value. ("Martin Delany's Blake") In this sense, Henry's insistence that a global revolution involves actively participating in, as opposed to dismantling, the logic of humans as property. Thus, Clymer writes that "in *Blake* [Delany] is more interested in theorizing the relationship between holding property in land and holding property in humans" than changing the terms of the nineteenth-century discourse of power." (716) Clymer's argument resonates with

that of other scholars, like Jessica Brittan, who contextualizes speculation within a nineteenth-century slave economy; in this sense, speculation becomes as Brittan writes, "a practice of betting on imagined futures." (80) These readings reimagine speculation as a set of behaviors, or an approach to futurity, that, for writers like Delany, informed speculative fiction in both its form and content. However, when we consider recent scholarship on nineteenth-century economic practices as citizenship practices, we can read the novel as reworking, as opposed to perpetuating colonial discourses of power. Derrick Spires's *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* poses an important argument about the economic priorities of African American reformers during the mid-nineteenth century, which contextualizes Delany's local commitments to economic mobility. Spires writes that economic citizenship through financial security and community investment practices offered laborers a path to citizenship despite being disenfranchised:

In the absence of political representation and amid a growing sense that market capital was replacing political capital, black activists searched for economic representatives, men and women who could earn "credit" for their communities in the civic economy, advocating for them in a market that was increasingly figured as the space for, rather than threat to, citizenship practice. (121)

Spires articulates a dialogic model of black economic citizenship, referring to the active, revisionary role Black community members negotiated between market interests and community responsibility. Community leaders viewed the economic world as one of several spaces within which to practice the citizenship legally denied them. At the heart of this debate, Spires argues, is the contemporary belief that in the 1840s and 50s, activists claimed their labor as a part of their identities and recognized meaningful labor as a path to equality. (121) The economic policies

debated and discussed in newspapers and state conventions during this period theorized a path to citizenship that did not rely on the white supremacist juridical institutions that suppressed Black citizenship through disenfranchisement.

Viewing the economic sphere as a productive space for exercising citizenship helps us understand Delany's commitment to labor as a viable social and capital investment. For Delany, co-opting an extant labor force by first claiming ownership of the property in oneself combines ideas about self-determination and self-sufficiency and grounds them in everyday practices: business enterprises, trade knowledge, education, and financial investment encompass some of the concrete steps by which one changes the conditions of everyday life. We see these citizenship-building practices, which involve an independent Black economy, throughout Henry's travels in *Blake*: The Dismal Swamp, a self-sustaining community of African American rebels operates both within and completely distinct from the white plantation slave economy of South Carolina. The community operates on an economic exchange system that combines charm symbols and cash, making it both a product and reappropriation of labor-based practices, which stretches our understanding of the concept of value to include metaphysical currencies. While these practices do not overtly dismantle discourses of power on a global scale, they are important to understanding the intellectual strategies Delany used to empower Black communities before emancipation. In *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration*, he refers to these behaviors broadly as "business and social, or voluntary and mutual" policies, phrasing which, again, confuses hegemonic political ideologies that separate behaviors as either labor or leisure, collaborative or independent, political or private. Further, they suggest that nineteenth-century economics offered itself as both a practicable path to self-determination for African American leaders as well as a

discursive imaginary for theorizing citizenship practices that borrow the logics of finance capital in the pursuit of self-determination.

Blake's final chapters are missing, meaning readers may never know the fate of Henry's planned global rebellion-we can only speculate. Yet, as Delany himself said, "Speculations are not enough." (Condition, Elevation, Emigration, 46) The novel as a work of speculative fiction whose own envisioning is cut short underscores the need to reimagine speculation as both a product and a process of investment. Contemporary readers who are invested in the novel's conclusion through its formal promise continue to have a psychological stake in the way it ends. Further, the novel's diverse range of nineteenth-century readers, who subscribed to *The* Liberator, The Anglo-African Magazine and the Weekly Anglo-African, had vested interests in the novel's success in markedly different ways depending on their politics. At every step, Delany's writings suggest that he viewed speculation as a practice of investment that contributed to a performance of ideological support and dissent as well as financial and temporal commitments. These behaviors were important to Delany's goals for the African American community despite speculation's relationship to finance capital. Some scholars have suggested that Delany intended to leave Blake unfinished to de-emphasize its Pan-African vision. On December 27th, 1859, Delany signed a treaty with Alake of the Abeokuta tribes of Nigeria, which established his settlement of African American emigrants on African soil, but in 1861 his emigration project abruptly collapsed when the agreement was rescinded. Regardless of what, exactly, happened to (and in) this novel's conclusion, it remains central to African American and Afrofuturism reading lists, meaning as a speculative investment within the literary marketplace, *Blake*, to this day, continues to accrue interest.

Chapter 3

Re-markable Print: Historiography and A Seconding Instinct in the Work of Sutton E.

Griggs

Sutton Griggs was an African American novelist, pamphleteer, activist, and Baptist minister, best known for writing one of the earliest African American novels to suggest radical Black militancy. Published in 1899, *Imperium in Imperio* tells the story of an underground all-Black government working to secure the rights of African Americans in Post-Reconstruction America. Two prominent members of the Imperium, Bernard Belgrave and Belton Piedmont espouse conflicting beliefs about the road to racial uplift: Bernard is militant and calls for a violent war against the United States, while Belton argues for accommodationism, urging the Imperium to work with, even admire, white sympathizers. Their disagreement ultimately leads to the execution of Belton and the dissolution of the Imperium before the secret government can achieve its purpose. In 1914, Griggs published *The Story of My Struggles*, an autobiographical account of his writing career. Of *Imperium*, Griggs writes that his lofty expectations for the novel's capacity to garner a substantial readership were dashed:

As the days dragged slowly by and my earlier hopes were bruised and then fully crushed by a perfect silence, nation-wide in scope, and including all sections of the race, I slowly drifted to the conclusion that I had somehow failed to deliver the right message of the needed kind. (10)

Between 1899 and 1930, Griggs would publish six more novel length works of fiction and dozens of nonfiction books and political pamphlets aimed at rallying Black Americans toward upliftment through literacy, making him one the most prolific Black authors of the early twentieth century. To disseminate his novels, Griggs continually called on the press to publish

endorsements of his newest work in prominent newspapers. In *Story of my Struggles* he writes, "With the comments [about *Imperium*] that came in from these leaders and from the public press, appeals were framed and given to the Negro public. And here I received my second great shock. The masses of our people were as unresponsive to these written appeals as the leaders had been."

(9) To Griggs, print would "deliver the right message of the needed kind" to his race by conveying his vision for social upliftment, but his call for support of the novel–financial, political, instrumental, or otherwise–would not be answered as urgently as he had hoped.

Twenty years later Griggs published his Guide to Racial Greatness; or, The Science of Collective Efficiency, a theoretical guide to racial uplift that lays out the necessary attributes of historically prosperous societies. Of them, the spirit of seconding, which all people must possess, is emphasized. Seconding is defined as "the ready support of another's deeds;" every member of a "great race" must possess the urge to lift one another up. (132) I explore how seconding as a print practice represents an important aspect of African American self-determination utilized to correct racializing national myths during the highly competitive Gilded Age of the American press. Not only does an emphasis on support through seconding reflect his earlier frustrations with attracting a readership for *Imperium*—i.e., the disappointment of a call unanswered—but imagining seconding as a practice of contributing to the dominant historical record helps to inform our understanding of postbellum Black historiography. As John Ernest discusses in his Liberation Historiography, Black historiography after Reconstruction was a multimodal process, involving both newspapers and novels, which worked to shape and circulate historical knowledge through a variety of intellectual strategies. Reading Imperium in Imperio through the lens of seconding, and its many iterations—to support, to endorse, to repeat or add to, to recordreveals a perspective on historiography deeply concerned with the ways historical narratives were recorded, circulated, and remembered at a time when print possibilities exploded.

This chapter will explore how the work of Sutton E. Griggs contributes to our understanding of the form and purpose of historiography in late nineteenth-century Black print sphere. Seconding as a print practice encourages the collaborative control of Black historical narratives through the creation of literature and the practice of journalism. Considering communications history alongside *Imperium* helps to contextualize Griggs's ideas about Black newspapers as instruments of historiography: Griggs believed they were critical recordkeepers in an era of sensationalized news that misrepresented or outright denied Black historical actors. His novel, written at the height of commercial journalism in the nineteenth-century, emphasizes the instructional value of historical information, asking "to what extent can a record empower, as opposed to enthrall, a reading public?" I argue that his first novel, *Imperium in Imperio*, imagines a powerful Black print counterpublic through the metaphor of a secret society. It blends literary genres such as the found manuscript novel and elements of African American realism, which Andreá N. Williams writes was intended to not only "reflect social conditions with a near ethnologic accuracy," but also "contemplate solutions to race and gender relations." (Literary Realism, 1865-1914, 189) Imperium's generic unevenness destabilizes our notion of what constitutes a historical record and makes transparent the continuous process of narrativizing histories, revealing the ways journalism and fiction borrowed from nineteenth-century literary genres to shape historical knowledge. Lastly, through the novel's unrealized rebellion, *Imperium* in Imperio suggests that the lasting work of insurgency lies in the instructional value of the historical record and its afterlife.

Sutton Griggs articulated his ideas about Black print practices in his *Guide to Racial Greatness; or The Science of Collective Efficiency*, a nonfiction guide to racial uplift published in 1923. It defines collective efficiency as "the crowning work of the co-operative spirit in a race," and that a group "possesses collective efficiency when it has the capacity for, and the habit of concentrating all of its potential and necessary forces behind the joint tasks of mankind." (23) For Griggs, individualism is antagonistic to collective efficiency because it has no perception of the joint nature of tasks. As a result, cooperation cannot exist in individualist societies. A significant portion of *Collective Efficiency* details essential traits possessed by those within a collectively efficient group, including a keen sense of personal responsibility, honesty, reliability, self-control, and a "ready tendency to second." (126) Seconding is an unselfish act of support for another enacted most successfully in print. *Collective Efficiency* places a seconding instinct above all others, describing it as inherently associative. This means that individuals within a collective always understand themselves and their roles in relation to their fellow group members. Griggs writes:

Regardless of what one may be doing in his own chosen line, he should have the feeling that he owes a debt of some sort to every worthy activity of his group; and though leading in a single sphere only, he should be a ready seconder in all other spheres. Observation will demonstrate that the life of any group is decidedly unhealthy, regardless of the ability and the success of individuals, if these individuals are devoid of the seconding tendency and keep their eyes fastened only on their respective tasks. (132)

More than a vocalized act of agreement, seconding plays a crucial role in Griggs's thinking about historiography: "One man performs and another records, and thus we get history... But in groups

where the units are characterized by the individualistic outlook on life, each fellow is so intent upon what he himself is doing that he has not the heart of a historian." (132) This definition of historiography insists that the seconding instinct is at the core of the process of historical recognition. Historical writing becomes the latter part of a joint task: one individual seconding—by recording—the deeds performed by another. Thus, "The seconding spirit," writes Griggs, "will insist on finding a way to convey in some form tokens of remembrance." (153)

Griggs also carves out the role of newspapers and journalism in societies dedicated to collective efficiency, writing that newspapers should be social institutions that function based on the cooperation between the publisher and the public. A newspaper run by individualists will seek financial success at the cost of public welfare by "giving prominence to noted individuals, without regard to their services to the public," as opposed to what a cooperative publisher would strive toward, namely, honoring "individuals in proportion as they serve the public." (69) By linking the goal of newspapers—to honor public servants in print—and the goal of the historian—to second the deeds of others through a written record—Griggs connects newspapers to historical writing by emphasizing the need for publicized forms of esteem.

A seconding instinct is helpful for studying early African American historiography for several reasons: Firstly, seconding is a written process of recording, or concretizing in print what has actually occurred. This acknowledges the challenge of early Black historians to create and control their own historical narratives and insert themselves into the dominant historical record. John Ernest's Liberation Historiography dates some of the earliest African American historical writing back to the eighteenth century in various Black-authored petitions to Congress questioning laws that forbade the manumission of enslaved people. These petitions were usually sent back to the petitioners unanswered: "In addition to avoiding the issues the petitioners

addressed, by returning the petitions Congress maintained control over the historical record. . . the sealed and returned petitions speak today of the untold stories, the hidden lives, to which nineteenth-century African American literature is devoted." (Ernest, 43) In short, seconding tends to the problem of historical *omission* by printing and circulating a historical record, which acknowledges the ways Black historiographers have fought to establish African American life as a historical fact.

Seconding as an act of social endorsement also signals a tradition of African American historical writing that insists on multivocal perspectives, narrative fragments, and the productivity of public debates. In the early nineteenth century, Black-run newspapers acted as recordkeepers of national convention meetings, routinely publishing both sides of delegate debates with which readers could engage. When we imagine seconding not as an act of overt agreement, but social support through public engagement, we acknowledge the value of ideological conflict and open debate in the African American print tradition. Newspaper editors, many of whom were convention delegates with staunch viewpoints of their own, often broadcasted debates to invite readers to take a side, well aware of the catalyzing power of political disagreements. Publicly opposing another's viewpoint with counterpoints embodies, then, an act of public support through disagreement. The upshot of thinking through public disagreement as a form of support allows us to shift our attention from the interlocutors and our assessment of their ideas to the impact debates made on the reading public. In this sense, when paired with *Imperium*'s refusal to resolve its established tensions, Belton's death becomes symbolic of the ways debates outlive their original hosts. In other words, Belton's execution does not result in Bernard's ideological victory. Instead, Belton's accommodationist ideas so affect

Berl Trout that they are recorded in the manuscript he produces, only to be iterated again, and differently, by Griggs.

Seconding also allows us to think through the processes of historical writing and interpretation temporally as well. Second, meaning, "constituting 2nd in a sequence," or seconding in an *additive* sense, such as, "additional to that already existing," helps us visualize the ways historical narratives reproduce themselves, whether they represent or misrepresent, agree or disagree with, their subjects. (*OED*) "African American historical writing," writes Ernest, "begins, in other words, with the recognition that history is not limited to the argument or effect of any single work." (47) Ernest adds that Black authors were aware of the ways historical records had lives of their own (47), continuously shaping and being shaped by written memory. When print technology advanced in the late nineteenth century, the momentum with which newspaper records could be produced and reproduced in both white and Black print spheres sped up and spread out, resulting in intertextual efforts by Black authors that worked across genres. These efforts both intervened in whitewashing historical practices and imagined alternative histories through fiction.

In the Southern U.S. especially, the postbellum period produced a wave of particularly damaging portrayals of Black men in print as African American newspapers repeatedly intervened in American journalism to correct white supremacist myths about Blackness. W.E.B. Du Bois criticized national historical narratives for omitting Black actors from their records. In the final chapter of *Black Reconstruction* (published 12 years after *Collective Efficiency*), called "The Propaganda of History," Du Bois defines the role of the historian in his critique of racist histories of Reconstruction:

In the first place, somebody in each era must make clear the facts with utter disregard to his own wish and desire and belief. What we have got to know, so far as possible, are the things that actually happened in the world. Then with that much clear and open to every reader, the philosopher and prophet has a chance to interpret these facts; but the historian has no right, posing as a scientist, to conceal or distort facts; and until we distinguish between these two functions of the chronicler of human action, we are going to render it easy for a muddled world out of sheer ignorance to make the same mistake ten times over. (722)

There are several parallels between Du Bois and Griggs in their definitions of historians: both reject the notion of the historian serving their own interests—Du Bois calls this one's "wish and desire and belief," while Griggs labels it "individualism"—and both position historians as empiricists. Du Bois calls on objectivity and explicitly compares the historian to a scientist, while Griggs quantifies historiography through a ratio of public service to recognition in print. Regardless of their differences, both perspectives highlight an approach to Black historiography which fought to establish historical records in print.

Ida B. Wells famously anticipated Du Bois's plea to know "the things that actually happened in the world." Her journalism in the 1890s not only pointed to the importance of recordkeeping but demonstrated that newspapers had the power to intervene on false histories in the making. Wells's famous 1892 editorial in the *Memphis Free Speech* worked to register the lynching of innocent Black men as a historical fact. Her article blatantly called out the false narrative of Black men inflicting sexual violence against white women. Resultantly, a white mob destroyed the office of the *Free Speech* in the following days. Wells, who posthumously received the Pulitzer Prize in journalism for her reporting on the violence against African Americans

during this era, is a compelling example of how Back newspapers daily fought to record what the white press both ignored and outright falsified. Wells inserted a historical record of racial violence into a white-controlled narrative in the spaces between its issues. "[T]he African American periodical press could eavesdrop on the presentation of history in white publications," writes John Ernest, and in turn, editors could reveal historical inconsistencies by reframing southern publications in their papers. (*Liberation Historiography*, 288)

Like many activists, Griggs entered the Black print sphere at precisely the moment the white American press famously became "the fourth estate." A separate entity from government branches with similar power to influence public sentiment, the American press was known as the voice of the people which upheld their right to information. Educational and technological expansion allowed newspapers to reach readers across the country, and a new age of imperialism led journalists to frame national politics against a global background. By 1898, one year before Griggs published *Imperium*, the press became a vital instrument of imperialism when the United States officially entered the Spanish-American War. James Creelman, a reporter-turned-soldier for *The Journal*, claimed to have led troops on an attack of the fort at El Caney. He wrote of the experience, "I thought of the [Spanish] flag. . . It was the thing I had come to get. I wanted it for the Journal. The Journal had provoked the war, and it was only fair that the Journal should have the first flag captured in the greatest land battle of the war." (Smythe, 190) Creelman's pseudo battle story proudly centers the American newspaper within the narrative of the Spanish-American War; it also illustrates the extent to which reporters would exaggerate their own experiences. Luckily for Creelman, the fort at El Caney had been all but destroyed by the time American troops arrived. Similarly, Richard Harding Davis and Theodore Roosevelt furnished autobiographical reports from Cuban soil and attained celebrity status because of their

publications; Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" was based on his experience in a shipwreck as a newspaper correspondent while traveling to Cuba. "The Open Boat," published in Scribner's Magazine in 1897, elevates the war correspondent to the level of archetype, portraying him as an all-knowing, rational, heroic white man.

This type of journalism often documented the deeds of African American soldiers by portraying them as inherently inferior to White soldiers. As Amy Kaplan writes in "Black and Blue on San Juan Hill" from *Cultures of Imperialism*:

Roosevelt's narrative was involved in the struggle over writing the history of that [the Spanish-American] war, a struggle in part against an African American narrative that had gained some currency... Roosevelt's account raised special outrage for its blatant distortions of those accomplishments [of black soldiers] which had entered the public limelight. (227)

The "African American narrative that had gained some currency," refers to the possibility that African American soldiers, who would risk their lives in serving the country, could rightfully "challenge the internal coherence of . . . [the US] empire by demanding participation and representation as equals." Roosevelt's account raised the white fear that the imperial war would require the U.S. to permanently heal the internal rifts caused by the Civil War. (Kaplan, 225) Several leaders in the African American community anticipated this healing, like Edward E. Cooper, who ran the *Colored American* in 1898. Cooper listed the benefits to be reaped by the Black community because of their men's' proven soldierly qualities, including better representation and more financial capital. At the Chicago Peace Jubilee in the same year, Booker T. Washington called for unity between Black and white soldiers, arguing that the "trenches

which [they] forever dug around Santiago shall be the eternal burial place of all which separates [them] in [their] business and civil relations." (Gatewood, 108)

Willard Gatewood Jr.'s *Black Americans and the White Man's Burden, 1898-1903* charts the responses of Black Americans to the nation's quest for imperialism. Gatewood's study details the treatment of Black soldiers by the white press during the Spanish-American war, arguing that it was virtually nonexistent when it wasn't working to stereotype them in print. By August of 1898, despite twenty-six Certificates of Merit and five Congressional Medals of Honor given to Black soldiers for their performance in Cuba, many civilians and soldiers expressed their disappointment with the treatment of Black soldiers by the white press. (Gatewood 104) When they were recognized in print, Black soldiers were made anonymous, described by Calvin Chase, editor of the *Washington Bee*, as "nameless beings," often identified only as a "Negro soldier[s]." Edward E. Cooper vehemently called for a Black war correspondent to be sent to Cuba during the wake of the Battle of San Juan Hill, and when attempts failed to produce an individual for the post, soldiers "bombarded the black press with communications detailing their role in the Santiago campaign" in an effort to record themselves. (Gatewood, 104-105)

Because of the efforts of the African American press, and with the return of the army from Cuba, Willard writes that Black soldiers "enjoyed the status of national heroes" for a few brief weeks. (Gatewood, 106) Black newspapers published stories and editorials extolling the gallantry of their service, and volumes of poetry including work from Paul Lawrence Dunbar celebrated the virtues of soldiers during this time. His 1899 poem, "The Conquerors: The Black Troops in Cuba," promises that the historical truth will reverberate despite current evidence to the contrary:

Far through the cycle of years and of lives that shall come,

There shall speak voices long muffled and dumb,

Out of fear.

And through the noises of trade and the turbulent hum,

Truth shall rise over the militant drum,

Loud and clear. . . (13-18)

Despite the period of print accolades that circulated primarily within newspapers, the tone of the Black community remained largely disappointed concerning the impacts of the war on race relations back home. The great social healing which Washington and Cooper had hoped would occur was slow, and in light of increasing racial terror in the South and continuous Jim Crow machinations, many felt that "as long as lynchers such as those who murdered Postmaster Baker went unpublished, all official rhetoric about humanitarianism in Cuba would continue to smack of hypocrisy." (Gatewood, 106) Du Bois wrote that "the Spanish War and its various sequels have greatly increased some of our difficulties in dealing with the Negro problems" alluding to the rise of Negrophobia fed by the martial patriotism of the period. ("The Twelfth Census and the Negro Problem") South Carolina's Wilmington Massacre of 1898, a political coup designed by white supremacist editors of the town's newspaper, the Morning Chronicle, which resulted in the massacre of hundreds of Black residents, was branded as a race war by the white press. Charles Chesnutt's fictional portrayal of the event in his *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) was motivated by Chesnutt's disappointment in the federal government's failure to record the events as an orchestration of racial terror.

With the rise of the commercialized press after the Civil War came new incentives for recording and publishing news; instead of pushing explicitly partisan agendas subsidized by political leaders, individual financial competition, increases in literacy, and an explosion of

politically independent papers across the country ushered in a new age of the press. This era of New Journalism produced reporters who sought out the news because papers needed to sell themselves to survive. In 1895, Charles A. Dana, journalist, editor, and part-owner of the New York *Sun*, published a series of lectures called *The Art of Newspaper Making*. They defined the role of the American editor and journalist at the dawning of the free press:

The first thing which an editor must look for is news. If the newspaper has not the news, it may have everything else, yet it will be comparatively unsuccessful; and by news I mean everything that occurs, everything which is of human interest, and which is of sufficient importance to arrest and absorb the attention of the public or of any considerable part of it. (22)

Charles Dana's capacious definition of "news" as "everything which is of human interest" reflects the rapid momentum and resulting ephemerality of newspapers during this period. Contrastingly, Sutton Griggs's ideas about newspapers as instruments of historiography echo those uttered nearly 100 years earlier by the Committee on a "National Press, and Printing Establishment for the People of Color," formed at a National Black Convention in Troy, New York. Delegates argued that a periodical press was the ideal medium by which collective and continuous deliberation about Black advancement should be carried out. The 1847 New York Convention called for a national African American press, "that which shall cheer us from one end of the land to the other, by recording our acts, our sufferings, our temporary defeats and our steadily approaching triumph. . ." ("Proceedings," 19) The intended content of Black newspapers was initially articulated as *recordings* of Black "acts," "sufferings," "temporary defeats," and "steadily approaching triumph." Further, John Ernest writes that not only was the African American newspaper a consistent source of historical information, but it was uniquely suited to

the task of historical writing because its structure was inherently multivocal and multiperspectival. (*Liberation Historiography*, 279) I make the comparison between "recordings" and
"news" to point to the ways historical material could be transformed by American newspapers,
either into an ahistorical commodity to be consumed daily or a historical record anchored in a
particular local community.

Benjamin Fagan's *The Black Newspaper and the Chosen Nation* explores the ways an early Black print culture aligned itself in various ways with the belief that Black Americans were chosen to lead the world to universal emancipation. His work is helpful here because it emphasizes the didactic qualities of Black newspapers, elucidating the role historical writing played in shaping future generations. Fagan writes that Black editors expected readers to engage with their newspapers in dynamic ways, showing that newspapers were intended to both carry information and instruct. A report of an 1841 Pennsylvania state convention quotes attendees who said that newspapers "contain, besides the ordinary news of the day, much useful knowledge, which tends to enlighten the understanding and improve the character..." recommending that "every family, who can possibly afford it, take one or more well conducted newspapers." ("Proceedings of the State," 8) Speakers at an 1843 New York convention envisioned a national Black press as an "organ" that should "constantly point out the principles which should guide our conduct and our labors." ("Minutes, 258")

Fagan reminds us that the earliest conceptions of a national Black Press intended it as a guide to self-determination. This practice is rooted in early African American efforts to carve out a public space from which to socially constitute themselves. In "The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic" Joanna Brooks historicizes a Black

print counterpublic, a public sphere wherein Black voices could instruct and empower their communities. Brooks writes:

Based on their shared experiences, African Americans did not simply petition for participation in the dominant public sphere. They formed their own counterpublics, their own countercultures, their own counternarratives, and their own distinctive traditions of using print to advance the political status of their community. . . (88)

Brooks' work develops our understanding of the crucial role that the early Black print sphere played in racial upliftment, which, as Fagan suggests, relied on readers to actualize the ideas it published in their everyday lives. Frances Smith Foster's "A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture" writes that the African American press derived from the desire to record words and ideas "most precious" to their survival, and "to create and to preserve their history for themselves and for others." (723) The formation of a Black print sphere, thus, coincides with some of the earliest historical evidence of collective Black self-determination.

In many ways, American newspapers as instruments of historiography entered a state of crisis while Griggs was a young author: Southern newspapers regularly incited white violence against Black communities and national papers racialized Black soldiers serving overseas—if they mentioned them at all—in the construction of a nationalizing myth of white saviors. Griggs himself experienced a kind of failure of the press when newspapers published reviews of his books which did little to garner him a readership: "As can be seen these are among the strongest daily newspapers of the world [New York World, Chicago Daily News, The Philadelphia Press, and The Guide and Mail of Manchester, England]. Their comments were gathered and sent

broadcast by means of the Negro newspapers and otherwise. But no support came." (*Story of My Struggles*, 11) As a result, in 1901 Griggs founded the Orion Publishing Company to reach an African American reading public but found more success selling his novels door to door.

This last section will explore the ways *Imperium in Imperio* tends to this crisis of recordmaking and remaking in the 1880s and 90s, initially by empowering its secret society with a national print counterpublic that fervently records and refutes discriminatory acts against African Americans. I will also apply Griggs's notion of seconding and its theoretical valences in my close readings of the novel: Not only does *Imperium* utilize the found manuscript genre to present itself as a historical record in a fabricated act of seconding—one that acknowledges a history-but its multiple narrators also illustrate the ways historical narratives evolve based on the identity of whoever is doing the telling. These frameworks mark and at times mar the history of the Imperium by reporting contradictory information. Treating Griggs and Berl Trout as narrators transposed onto one another allows us to view the novel's narrative inconsistencies as information additional to the Imperium's factual history. As such, readers must interpret it at their own discretion. Finally, Griggs portrays seconding through public disagreement as a potentially revolutionary act with the potential for social reconstitution in "Berl Trout's Dying Declaration." Trout's decision to publish his manuscript is an act of betrayal that leads to both the dissolution of the Imperium and the possibility of something new.

Imperium in Imperio draws an explicit connection between the establishment of a Black print counterpublic and self-determination through the creation of the Imperium. Its conception was the material result of a wide-reaching print network: "In the early days of the American Republic, a negro scientist who won an international reputation by his skill and erudition. . . By the publication of a book of science which outranked any other book of the day that treated of the

same subject, this negro became a very wealthy man," who "secretly gathered other free negroes together and organized a society." (174) The Imperium's origin story illustrates what scholars of Black print spheres have described as the potential for self-actualization in print: one author's widely popular publication leads to the organization of a completely self-sufficient society with a government, constitution, army, treasury, hundreds of millions of dollars at its disposal, and over seven million devoted members.

Further, the Imperium's origin story is strikingly similar to that of the African American print sphere itself, the earliest publications of which were authored by Black Freemasons in the late eighteenth century. In 1793, Prince Albert Hall, founder of the Black Freemasonry delivered an oration addressing violence against free Black people. The speech was published and widely circulated to Black Masons in Boston. Black Freemason's regularly appealed to the American government in print, as John Ernest has documented, often addressing the U.S. government's hypocrisy by utilizing the rhetoric of the Constitution. Joanna Brooks writes that these early efforts signal a "crucial moment in the history of black thought about the public sphere, when black people articulate in practice and enact for the first time in print key principles of black counterpublicity: collective incorporation, conscious differentiation, and criticism of dominant political and economic interests." ("Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," 75) Imperium continually references the tradition of a Black print counterpublic through its conception in the late eighteenth century as well as its constitution as a secret fraternal society. Belton tells Bernard that its earliest members, "turned their eyes to the federal government for redress and a guarantee of their rights," but "[t]he federal government said: 'Take care of yourselves, we are powerless to help you" (209) in an anecdote that echoes John Ernest's retelling of early Black petitioners to the American government.

In a chapter called "Unwritten History," we learn that the Imperium has a meticulously documented political history that dates back to the Revolutionary period. Whenever a bill is introduced to the United States Congress affecting Black America, it is also introduced, debated, and voted on in the Imperium. One of the novel's main characters, Belton, congressman of the Imperium, tells Bernard that "A record of our decisions is kept side by side with the decisions of the United States" during Bernard's initiation. (217) The compulsory archival work of the Imperium described here suggests that the government legitimizes itself in print practices that range from historiographical to journalistic. The Imperium eventually forms a collective newspaper:

. . . whose business it was to chronicle every fresh discrimination, every new act of oppression, every additional unlawful assault upon the property, the liberty or the lives of any of the members of the Imperium. This was an illustrated journal, and pictures of horrors, commented upon in burning words, spread fire-brands everywhere in the ranks of the Imperium. (223)

Griggs's lengthy descriptions of the Imperium's operations—its origins in Black publishing, its historiographical legacy of painstaking recordkeeping, and its recent network of journalists devoted (solely) to documenting discrimination—historicizes the formation of a nationwide Black counterpublic space that grows in relation to its footprint on paper. In this way, the Imperium can be read as a metaphor for the relationship between early Black print culture and social formation: both entailed "a withdrawal of blackness from public ownership and the establishment of black collective spaces." ("Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," 73)

The Imperium's newspaper is a national one, suggesting a network of reporters across the United States devoted to the same cause. This aspect of the novel elucidates how Griggs

imagines a Black print counterpublic might be mobilized to unite people across space and reclaim the image of Blackness in the media. Both Belton and Bernard rely on positive newspaper coverage as they rise through the ranks of leadership. Belton is unable to afford a college education on his own, and while giving a speech at the Winchester public school upon completing his early education Belton ends up impressing an unnamed congressman. A correspondent of the *Richmond Daily Temps* then reports on the congressman's praises after obtaining a written copy of Belton's speech and sends the editorial to the editor of *The Temps*:

This was printed in *The Temps* and created a great sensation in political and literary circles in every section of the country. Every newspaper of any consequence reproduced the oration in full. It was published and commented upon by the leading journals of England. The President of the United States wrote a letter of congratulation to Belton. Everywhere the piece was hailed as a classic. (62)

The remainder of the chapter introduces readers to the editor of that newspaper, Mr. V.M. King, whom the narrator describes as "In short. . . an outspoken advocate of giving the negro every right accorded him by the Constitution of the United States." (63) Mr. V.M. is a white sympathetic voice in the novel who is so moved by Belton's oration that he writes him a check that will cover his college expenses. The stipulation is that Belton must promise to remember that there are "two widely separated classes" of white people, neither of which are "totally deprayed." (69) Belton, who suffered at the hands of his white teacher in grade school because of his darker complexion, finds his first friend in a white newspaper editor.

Mr. King is a powerful entity in Belton's politics and career. While his motives for publishing Belton are individualistic—he mostly seeks to position himself as a white savior by

paying for Belton's education—there is no doubt that without this early press coverage Belton would have never attended Stowe University, which is where he would acquire "fame as an orator and a scholar." (86) Later in the novel, Belton is lynched for helping a white girl find a page in a hymnbook at church. A mob, led by a postmaster and the evil Dr. Zackland, who is obsessed with dissecting Belton's body, hangs and shoots Belton in the back of the head.

Miraculously, Belton survives and stabs Dr. Zackland moments before he is dissected on the operating table. Belton is quickly arrested and awaits his execution, this time by the state.

Strangely, while incarcerated a newspaper reporter for a "liberal New Orleans paper" interviews Belton and is so impressed with his personality that he "promise[s] to publish any statement that Belton would write." As a result, Belton's story arouses "sympathetic interest everywhere." (181) Bernard, Belton's childhood classmate, reads the story and uses his influence as a lawyer to get Belton's case heard before the Supreme Court. After giving "the speech of his life," which "added to his fame as an orator," (181) Bernard convinces the judges to acquit Belton of all charges, thus forging the bonds of friendship between the two young men.

For both Belton and Bernard, their success as public figures and celebrity orators cannot be disentangled from the national network of newspapers which promptly promotes their achievements. In the case of the near execution of Belton, the relationship between Belton and the nameless reporter for the New Orleans paper empowers journalists who unselfishly serve their communities: they literally save lives. The initial reporting of an event in the novel routinely creates a ripple effect, not unlike an associative chain of seconding. Belton's school speech is featured in *The Temps*, which leads to its reproduction in every major newspaper in the country, which in turn results in international recognition, a direct response from the President of the United States, literary fame, and a fully funded college education. Similarly, the story Belton

gives from a jail cell travels across the country to Bernard, who elevates it to the chambers of the Supreme Court, saving Belton from an untimely death. What initially presents as an unrealistic plot device surreptitiously propelling the men to fame, even saving Belton from death in a pinch, comes to represent the invisible power of the Black press as a failsafe against many of the mechanisms of white supremacy, namely, inequity, disenfranchisement, and mob law.

Imperium's excessive narrative filters and blending of genres work to demonstrate the processes by which histories are recorded and repeated. The novel exhibits what some scholars have identified as narrative deficiencies, including an implausible plot structure and a confusing narrative framework. As Finnie Coleman notes in Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy, however, this assessment is often the product of applying only literary aesthetics to the novel. When we read across Griggs's corpus of work, the vast majority of which was nonfiction, Griggs's decision to incorporate elements of autobiography, nonfiction, and fiction into the novel becomes meaningful, particularly because of the way the novel's generic excesses burden the narrative with multiple perspectives. The story of the Imperium is filtered through two narrators simultaneously. The novel opens with a note from Griggs, in which he explains that the secretary of the Imperium, Berl Trout, has recorded the history of the Imperium's dissolution and personally delivered the manuscripts—and other unnamed documents—detailing that history to Griggs. The narrative presented to readers in the following pages is ostensibly edited by Griggs, who, in agreement with Trout, believes that the Imperium's official history belongs to the reading public. Overall, this layered narrative framework confuses our understanding of the narrator, especially because the story itself is formally presented like a novel and not a found manuscript. Griggs's opening note in the novel reads:

The papers which are herewith submitted to you for your perusal and consideration, were delivered into my hands by Mr. Berl Trout. . . Having perfect faith in the truthfulness of his narrative I have not hesitated to fulfill his dying request by editing his Ms., and giving it to the public. There are other documents in my possession tending to confirm the assertions made in his narrative. These documents were given me by Mr. Trout, so that, in case an attempt is made to pronounce him a liar, I might defend his name by coming forward with indisputable proofs of every important statement (I)

Next, readers encounter the voice of Berl himself via his "Dying Declaration," which inserts a second "I" perspective into the text. Trout writes "I am a traitor. . . I have trampled under my feet the sacred trust of a loving people, and have betrayed secrets which were dearer to them than life itself." (1) Some critics have associated this double framing, which presents as a found manuscript novel, with the ways African American narratives of enslavement were authorized by white speakers who would vouch for the accuracy of the narrative. Thus, Griggs critiques this tradition by authorizing himself to tell the story. Others posit that by inserting the fictional Berl Trout into the narrative framework, Griggs can abdicate authorship, which distances him from the politics discussed within the novel. Eric Curry's "The Power of Combinations': Sutton Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* and the Science of Collective Efficiency," writes that "The text is represented as a collection of documents, but is not presented as a collection of documents. This is done to dissociate the author from the preferential perspective of his narrator." (29) By distancing himself from the narrative through the inclusion of Berl Trout, Griggs stresses that he is not choosing a side. Curry's argument proves that Griggs emphasizes finding a middle way

forward to racial uplift by refusing to endorse neither Belton nor Bernard because they are too polarizing in their beliefs.

I want to develop Curry's interpretation that the multiple narrative frameworks allow Griggs to abdicate authorship by suggesting that Berl Trout can even be read as an authorial replacement of Griggs. Trout, we are told, is the original author of the manuscript; Griggs its editor. In a hierarchical sense, Trout is the authority on the material presented to readers. He was, after all, the Imperium's secretary, or official recordkeeper. Thus, by making his authorial presence peripheral to Trout's, Griggs can make transparent the processes by which historical records become both framed and reframed by historians, narrators, and their readership. By reading this novel not as an author's novice attempts at generic conventions, but as an experiment in the evolution of historical records—how they are made in print, narrativized, and remade in cultural consciousness over generations—we can appreciate the complexity of its narrative framing.

In my reading of this narrative framework, Griggs abdicates authorship while retaining his right to shape the manuscript Trout left behind. A third narrative voice eventually inserts itself into the novel—one that is ostensibly a combination of Griggs's edits and Trout's original written record. We know the speaker is distinct from both Griggs and Trout because it appears from within Trout's narrative but is not Berl Trout. When this third-person narrator speaks directly to readers, invoking at times the second-person perspective, we can no longer identify who is speaking. In these moments the narrator tells readers to remember what they've read, to earmark specific events recounted in Belton and Bernard's adolescence because they were particularly formative. Before closing a chapter called "Belton Finds a Friend," wherein Belton receives the financial endorsement of the newspaper editor, Mr. King, the narrator switches from

the third to the second-person perspective, saying "Belton very feelingly thanked Mr. King, and assured him that he would treasure his words. He was true to his promise, and decided from that moment to never class all white men together, whatever might be the provocation, and to never regard any class as totally depraved. This is one of the keys to his future life. *Remember it.* (italics mine)" (69) This address to readers interrupts the narrative by slipping into a proleptic point of view: readers are made explicitly aware that Belton will likely remain a white sympathizer for the rest of the novel (which he does), but more importantly, the interruption instruct readers on how to interpret the text by indicating the importance of certain information. In this way, Griggs conditions his readers to view Belton's conservatism as a product of his support from white benefactors, to "Remember" that his political views are informed by his lived experience. This allows Griggs to shape Trout's historical record in an effort to portray and emphasize Belton's complexity, therefore making him sympathetic to readers.

Imperium presents a historical record in Trout's manuscript that has been shaped by a narrator for the purpose of instruction. If we interpret these moments as explicit commands to remember, the heavy-handed didacticism of the text becomes a dramatization of the making of historical knowledge. Not only does this implicate readers directly into the cultural work of historiography, but it illustrates the multiple voices and perspectives that layer historical records as they are repeatedly reproduced in print. "African American historical writing," writes John Ernest, "begins [sic] with the recognition that history is not limited to the argument or effect of any single work." Historical records like Trout's manuscript "have a life of their own," (*Liberation Historiography*, 47) and can be shaped and interpreted in contradictory ways once circulated in print. Consider how the characterization of Bernard, the radical, contradicts Trout's descriptions of Bernard in his note to readers once the narrative is over. When Belton refuses to

support Bernard's plan to rebel against the U.S. government Bernard is required, as president of the Imperium, to execute his friend:

Bernard gazed on Belton with eyes of love and admiration. He loved his friend but he loved his people more. He could not sacrifice his race for his dearest friend. Viola had taught him that lesson. Bernard's eyes swam with tears as he said to Belton in a hoarse whisper: "Belton Piedmont, your last hour has come. Have you anything to say?" (279)

One line later the novel ends with Belton's execution, and readers are left with a personal note from Berl Trout on the following page. The note curiously picks up exactly where the manuscript itself leaves off:

As Bernard stood by the side of Belton's grave and saw the stiffened form of his dearest friend lowered to its last resting place, his grief was of a kind too galling for tears. He laughed a fearful, wicked laugh like unto that of a maniac, and said: "Float on proud flag, while yet you may. Rejoice, oh! ye Anglo-Saxons, yet a little while. Make my father ashamed to own me, his lawful son; call me a bastard child; look upon my pure mother as a harlot; laugh at Viola in the grave of a self-murderer; exhume Belton's body if you like and tear your flag from around him to keep him from polluting it! Yes, stuff your vile stomachs full of all these horrors. You shall be richer food for the buzzards to whom I have solemnly vowed to give your flesh." (281)

Bernard is portrayed in the edited manuscript as tearful; hesitant; only fulfilling his presidential duty after he "gazed on Belton with eyes of love and admiration." An omniscient narrative voice reveals that Bernard "could not sacrifice his race for his dearest friend," creating the possibility

that Bernard's actions are not only justifiable but honorable. In a starkly different characterization of Bernard in the same scene, Trout writes that Bernard's grief was "too galling for tears," that he "laughed a fearful, wicked laugh like unto that of a maniac" before shouting a series of graphic threats to all of white America. These different portrayals of Bernard– sympathetic versus maniacal-represent a legible instance of Griggs's rhetorical edits to Trout's manuscript. While inconsistent descriptions of Bernard might be understood as evidence of the novel's underdeveloped characters, the difference in these portrayals is underscored when the novel abruptly switches from one historical record (Trout's edited manuscript) to another (Trout's unedited note). This shift ensures that the history of the Imperium is concluded with Trout's original words while the scene presented to readers on the previous page is renarrativizing. Belton's execution represents, then, a singular historical event framed within the manuscript by Griggs and reframed in Trout's note to readers immediately afterward. That Griggs (the novelist) is, in fact, the only real author of the work suggests that the history of the Imperium is meant to be viewed as multiple iterations of a historical record whose framing undergoes notable change until the last page of the novel.

Critics have read *Imperio* as offering a multi-vocal counternarrative to dominant portrayals of the Spanish-American war. My reading of the novel builds on this work by considering the ways the novel undermines the notion of historical authenticity altogether. In "*Imperium in Imperio*: Sutton Griggs's Imagined War of 1898," David Kramer analyzes Griggs's *Imperium in Imperio* by reading it alongside white-authored descriptions of soldiers who served in the Spanish-American war, most famously, *The Rough Riders*. Kramer argues that Griggs rewrites the Spanish-American war by reclaiming Black masculinity within the history of Black nationalism. This allows Griggs to repudiate racializing descriptions of soldiers in the

Spanish-American war that emasculated Black soldiers by portraying them as weak links in the American crusade. This reading of the novel, however, does not account for the ways Griggs's novels also appears to emphasize the layered processes of narrating history to such an extent that it undermines its own credibility.

Griggs writes a version of the Spanish War soldier that portrays Black masculinity as potentially superior to white masculinity, but he can also deny the existence of authentically conveyed narratives altogether. By utilizing two narrative frames, one of which speaks to readers directly, Griggs calls the ostensible objectivity of his revisionist history into question. This experimentation in narration reflects elements of African American literary realism which frequently sought to demystify realism's objective to "treat life as it is." Andreá N. Williams writes that "Representations offered as 'authentic" in realist texts "could convey the embedded racial and class prejudices of a supposedly objective mediator." (African American Literary Realism, 188). African American novelists in the 1880s and 90s frequently combined elements of romanticism and realism with the understanding that truthfully portrayed narratives, what William Dean Howells described as "nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material," tended to essentialize racial differences. Imperium's intrusive narrator, who interrupts the story to speak directly to readers, embodies the didactic imperatives associated with the romance genre. Further, it subverts the authenticity of the narrative by layering Griggs's voice over Berl's, repeatedly reminding us that the narrative is a romanticized iteration of Trout's manuscript. The effect, ultimately, is the *representation* of a historical narrative, not necessarily the relaying of any specific one. In this way, the novel is made up of multiple voices; a "collection of documents presented like a collection of voices," as Eric Curry writes. ("The Power of Combinations") In addition to the ways this narrative framing makes the continuous

processes of historical narration and interpretation legible, we can also read it as a timely critique of realism's commitment to "true" material.

Griggs questions the role of narrators in his re-presentation of the Imperium's history, drawing on elements of nonfiction and realism to present a narrative that intervenes in the making of nationalist historiographies of the war. By offering multiple, often indistinguishable narrators—whose portrayals occasionally contradict one another—Griggs can also dispel the notion of any single historical authority. In doing so, *Imperium* grapples with the slippery differences between reporting and narration at a time when the border between literature and journalism was particularly blurry. "New Journalism was much more closely tied to American fiction than scholars have traditionally recognized," writes Karen Roggenkamp in Narrating the News: New Journalism and Literary Genre in Late Nineteenth-Century American Newspapers and Fiction. "A story," was "a product that was marketed and sold," with a central plot "around which drama was woven." Journalists even competed with literature for sales, marketing their work as better than fiction because it read like fiction but was, in fact, "real." (15) In borrowing from literary genres, news articles could frame historical events into familiar narratives, thereby shaping readers' responses to the news by writing familiar tropes into their stories. For example, newspaper stories of the Spanish-American war frequently romanticized Cuban women as captives compatible with white soldiers, implying that "Cuba and its citizens. . . were already practically American and therefore ready for the taking—or redeeming back into the nation." (112) Roggenkamp's assessment of New Journalism as decidedly literary emphasizes the close relationship between literature and journalism in the late nineteenth century and points to the ways historical narratives could guide the nation's attitude toward international affairs.

Imperium in Imperio ultimately asserts that historical narratives should employ narrators who have positioned themselves in relation to the historical material they relay with transparency. In other words, we should read Imperium's many narrative frameworks as signposts that interrupt readers, reminding us to remain critical of the processes by which histories circulate. It also imagines the extent to which histories can leave their mark in material ways in its dramatic portrayal of Berl Trout's death. Trout has committed the ultimate act of treason in allowing the publication of his manuscript. He states:

I am a traitor. I have violated an oath that was as solemn and binding as any ever taken by man on earth. I have trampled under my feet the sacred trust of a loving people, and have betrayed secrets which were dearer to them than life itself. For this offence, regarded the world over as the most detestable of horrors, I shall be slain. (1)

Trout also calls for his grave to be marked with a red flag, to "warn all generations of men to come not near the air polluted by the rotting carcass of a vile traitor." (1) Yet he also calls himself a patriot, writing, "It is true that I have betrayed the immediate plans of the race to which I belong; but I have done this in the interest of the whole human family—of which my race is but a part." (1-2) For Trout, who sides with Belton's middle-way politics, Bernard's rebellion against the U.S. government would jeopardize the entire project of racial uplift by resorting to violence. The only way to prevent it is to reveal the Imperium's intended rebellion by turning over its historical record to Griggs. Thus, Griggs highlights the potential reverberations of Black historiography by tying the publication of Trout's manuscript to the demise of the Imperium, which allegedly becomes antagonistic under Bernard's radical leadership. Historiography itself becomes a rebellious act; in fact, it's the only rebellion to be actualized in the novel. Trout's

contradictory language around loyalty, that he is both a traitor and a patriot, implies that by revealing the Imperium's secrets he preserves its sanctity, saving it from itself; by publicly disagreeing with Bernard he, in turn, emphasizes his commitment to the cause, making room for the implied social reconstitution of Black America.

Trout's emphatic opposition to insurgency speaks to Griggs's middle-way politics, which largely rejected the idea of separatism and advocated instead for upliftment through education. The novel's utopian undertones—its economically and politically independent depiction of African American society-belie a narrative that suggests that the work of insurgency lies in the instructional potential of the historical record left behind. David Kramer writes that "the novel cannot resolve the tension between Belton, the racial accommodationist, and Bernard, the militant mulatto" and the story's lack of a resolution leaves readers in a "no-man's zone," unable to reconcile the friction between militant and moderate ideologies. ("Imagined War," 18) Eric Curry reads the novel's conclusion as a plea for collective re-organization, writing "Griggs shows his readers that revolutionary politics need not work towards revolt as traditionally understood but may also be seen in the development of new and innovative forms of community organization. ("The Power of Combinations," 38) In response to Curry's call for new ways of thinking through revolt, I read Trout as a radical character in the novel. By circulating his manuscript, Trout both registers and condemns the Imperium in African American history; and by including Trout's first-person act of betrayal alongside the Imperium's history, Griggs illustrates the spectrum of possibilities that come from historiography.

In Sutton E. Griggs and The Struggle Against White Supremacy, Finnie D. Coleman writes that Griggs's oeuvre represents a collection of intertextual intellectual strategies used to battle white supremacy. Cultural mythmaking, enacted by novels like Thomas Dixon's *The*

Leopard's Spots (1902) and the yellow journalism of the Spanish-American War, pushed a public image of Blackness based on a combination of pseudoscientific "studies" of Black intelligence, eugenics, and fear. As such, Griggs and his contemporaries make up an "especially fecund period of growth and development of ideas and philosophies concerning Blackness." (Coleman, x-xi) Studying this tradition, then, requires us to seek out ways the late nineteenthcentury print public vied for the images of Blackness that would contribute to dominant historical narratives. By not limiting our assessment of Griggs to literary parameters, we can read across his place in what Coleman calls the "quilt" of African American cultural history, noticing the "pieces of cultural fabric that are delicately stitched together with subtle and then not-sosubtle strands of intertextuality" which correspond to his ideas. (xvi) I argue that Imperium in Imperio, a novel Griggs scholars frequently use to underscore Griggs's nascent political identity, demonstrates an impressive awareness of the momentum and trajectory of historical interpretation. It incorporates elements of nonfiction and fiction to create narratological problems that scar the history it portrays, producing an excess of narrative frameworks, a multivocal historiography that tells what happened in an effort to produce something more.

Conclusion

Digital Print and Accessible Archives

Today, archivists of Black print are dedicated to making the story(ies) of African American history as accessible as possible. In light of recent administrative attempts to historically erase the violence of enslavement, the concept of archives as instruments of power is no less relevant-or terrifying-today than it was to Griggs in 1899 or Harper 50 years earlier. Just last month, the Florida State Board of Education released a 200-page document detailing the state's new academic standards in the field of Social Studies. During the African American History unit of social studies classes, sixth-eighth-grade teachers are now required to instruct students on "the various duties and trades performed by slaves" including "how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit." (Planas) Just seven months prior to this, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis's administration blocked the adoption of an Advanced Placement (AP) African American Studies class, citing that the proposed content of the course "significantly lacks educational value." (The Associated Press) The College Board, the organization responsible for facilitating AP tests, has been developing an African American Studies AP class for over a decade, which would teach African American literature, arts, political science, geography, and science. (AP Central) While DeSantis's education officials refused to specify why they deemed the proposed course both "unlawful" and "historically" inaccurate, the course description from the AP website promises to offer students an "evidence-based" introduction to African American history and is already being piloted in 60 schools across the country. (The Associated Press)

This legislation joins recent rulings¹³ that have contributed to an upsurge of white nationalism in recent years in the United States. As a scholar of Black print, a historian, and a born Floridian, I am more than disturbed by the discursive similarities between Florida's 2023 educational standards and the rationalizations of nineteenth-century proponents of enslavement, who argued that the system benefitted both the enslaver and those enslaved. These latest measures underscore the relationship between historiography and power and point to a continuing need for Black-authored and operated historical archives accessible to the public. One of the most exciting contemporary efforts to contribute to the archive of African American history is the Colored Conventions Project, a free digital hub of nineteenth-century records that emphasizes the organizational efforts of Black leaders throughout history. The website has quadrupled the number of digitized documents from the Black Convention Movement; in addition to its archiving efforts, the CCP features a collection of intertextual digital exhibits. These curations of nineteenth-century texts, illustrations, and other images narrate critical organizational efforts enacted by nineteenth-century Black leaders. One such exhibit, "The Early Case for A National Black Press" tells the story of the 1847 Troy report and the debate for a national African American newspaper with links to related convention documents and newspaper clippings that reported on the convention. (Colored Conventions Project) The CCP is one of the best examples of a contemporary Black print project that reflects the spirit of collaboration and community integral to early African American organizing efforts. It is part of a larger public-

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¹³ Earlier this summer the Supreme Court eliminated affirmative action in college admissions. In an article in The New York Times, Anemona Hartocollis quotes college officials who fear the decision will make the college application process more susceptible to racist selection practices and lead to a significant drop in Black and Hispanic students. (Hartocollis) Further, many know that the teaching of Critical Race Theory in schools has been under attack for years. The vehement rejection of CRT, as Kimberly Crenshaw has remarked, speaks to the capacity of educational institutions for reversing oppression. (Alfonseca)

facing research center, the Center for Black Digital Research, which houses multiple other free digital archives of historic Black print—and there are dozens more. In fact, I accessed nearly all of them while writing this dissertation. The digitization of print has not only changed what it means to study Black print by allowing us to easily work with a wide variety of texts, but in resurfacing documents like convention reports it has helped to reshape what we thought we knew about African American history and historiography itself. Such projects are crucial to contributing to a much more complex understanding of African American communities and their values, and thanks to the ubiquity of the internet, free digital Black archives can circulate cultural knowledge in ways that outpace and outreach anything nineteenth-century proponents of a national African America newspaper could have imagined.

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