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Earwitnesses in America: Listening Literatures in the Nineteenth-Century U.S.

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

Jené Michele Pledger

2025

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2025

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Earwitnesses in America: Listening Literatures in the Nineteenth-Century U.S.

by

Jené Michele Pledger

Doctor of English

University of California, Los Angeles 2025

Professor Carrie Leah Hyde, Chair

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century United States, the art of oratory and rhetoric was held in high esteem as a powerful force of culture, politics, and nation building. But to what extent did the impact of the spoken word in this period depend on the listening subject? To what degree were there common listening practices or cultural investments in listening? *Earwitnesses in America* recovers "listening literatures," a term this dissertation uses to refer to a body of U.S. literature that engages significantly with listening as a behavior and contains rich depictions of aural experience. By analyzing the writings of William Apess, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Charles Brockden Brown, this dissertation shows that authors often invoked listening in their writings to imagine forms of knowledge and attentions that could enable social reform. For these writers, the power of eloquence and the spoken words was inherently conditional and dependent on access to a listening audience. What really mattered was the right to be heard.

The dissertation of Jené Michele Pledger is approved.

Alexander M. Mazzaferro

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Carrie Leah Hyde, Chair

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For my family, who believed in me every step of the way.

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Acknowledgments

So many people helped me imagine and complete this dissertation that adequately expressing my gratitude feels impossible. I am profoundly grateful to my advisor, Carrie Hyde, whose support and counsel kept me moving forward when it felt hard to do so. Carrie believed in me and my work from the very beginning, and her unwavering faith in me as a scholar has helped me believe in my own power. This project wouldn't be the same without Carrie's intellectual generosity and dedicated mentorship. Chris Looby was my first advisor at UCLA, and his guidance has been indispensable to my progress through the program. I thank Chris for being my advisor, mentor, and teacher. I will carry Richard Yarborough's words of wisdom about teaching and academia with me. I was Richard's TA my first quarter teaching at UCLA, and his pedagogy and research has shaped my understanding of what true scholarship should be. I thank Alexander Mazzaferro for joining my committee with enthusiasm. His sharp insights and generous feedback on my writing have at many times helped me see more potential in my work. I'm grateful for Cristobal Silva's support and guidance. Cristobal advocacy for his students, undergraduate and graduate alike, is truly inspiring.

I am grateful to so many in the UCLA English department. I thank Mike Lambert, whose help navigating the administrative side of this program has been essential to my progress. I thank Chris Mott, who is the best of the best teaching mentors; his advocacy for UCLA TAs is unparalleled. I am grateful to the readers and writers of The Americanist Research Colloquium, who have shown me what meaningful scholarly exchange and collegiality can be. I am especially grateful to the participants who read my work on Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*, offering important insights and feedback that allowed me to strengthen my ideas.

I cannot adequately describe the magic of my UCLA cohort. I thank Oriah Amit, Kristen Cardon, Averyl Dietering, Misho Ishikawa, Bethany Johnsen Creed, Vivian Delchamps Wolf, Kersti Francis– I could not have dreamed up a better community of friends and intellectuals. Thank you to the many UCLA graduate students who have been my friends and mentors. Thank you to Claire Stanford, Kate Bolton Bonnicci, Will Clark, Sam Sommers, Caitlin Benson, Sydney Miller, Jordan Wingate, Ben Beck, Elizabeth Crawford, Jennifer MacGregor, and Kim Calder.

This PhD journey really started at California State University, Los Angeles. I am eternally grateful to my peers and mentors there who supported me in pursuing my PhD. Thank you to Andrew Knighton, Maria Karafilis, Benjamin Bateman, Bidhan Roy, and Lise Buranen. Thank you to Efren Lopez, Abraham Encinas, Robert Mendoza, and Gabriela Valenzuela, whose continued presence as intellectual peers at UCLA gave me a sense of belonging in academia.

I am deeply grateful to friends and chosen family, Kelsi and Will, who have not only listened patiently and attentively as I talked about this dissertation but have also helped me navigate all of life's biggest challenges. They have been my biggest supporters, and I will always aspire to believe in myself the way they believe in me.

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, without whom this dissertation would not have been possible. My parents raised me to accept my authentic self and pursue the things in life that matter to me. My mom has instilled in me a deep love for intellectual curiosity, while my dad's philosophy of "quiet strength" continues to sustain me through challenges. To Sue and Bernie, thank you for making me feel loved and accepted like one of your own. I will always be grateful to my siblings, who are my best friends. Jamie's and Jonathan's love, friendship, and laughter make my life rich and fulfilling. Their wholehearted support and belief in my ideas made writing this dissertation possible. I am grateful to my bonus siblings and best friends, Nick and Ellie, whose encouragement and unwavering faith in me kept me moving forward. Finally, I also dedicate this project to my nephew, Oliver, and my little niece on the way. I cannot wait to discover all the books and stories we're going to love together.

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Introduction

When Alexis de Tocqueville visited America in 1831, he described the new democratic nation as one with a surprising lack of writing. In *Democracy in America*, the book he published after his travels through America, Tocqueville wrote that aside from the written record-keeping of the newspapers, most public affairs in the new republic were handled through speech, and thus, American society did not have much of a paper trail. He stated that "[t]he public administration is, so to speak, oral and traditionary. But little is committed to writing, and that little is wafted away forever, like the leaves of the Sibyl, by the smallest breeze…American society seems to live from hand to mouth, like an army in the field" (244). Tocqueville's book is a first-hand account of the cultural and political importance of the spoken word in the early U.S. and how little of public life seemed to be mediated or recorded through the written word. Many historians and scholars of America from the revolution through the nineteenth century have explored ways in which oratory, public speech, and ideas about the power of rhetoric significantly shaped culture and politics. For example, scholars such as Christopher Looby, Jay Fliegelman, and Sandra Gustafson have contributed important work on how the spoken work engendered ideals of American nationhood, democracy, and revolution.[1] Resonances of this time period are still observable today: The voice is often recognized as a significant literal and metaphorical vehicle of American democracy, citizenship, and representation. To "have a voice"

[1] In *Voicing America*, Looby writes that "despite the recent demonstrations by a number of scholars of the ideological importance of print culture in the early national years…there is a distinct countercurrent in the literature of the period that valorizes the grain of the voice in addition to, or instead of, the silence of print" (3). Also see Gustafson's *Eloquence is Power* for a nuanced discussion of oral and written literacies in early America. See Fliegelman's *Declaring Independence*, James Perrin Warren's *Culture of Eloquence,* and the collection of essays, *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America,* edited by Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran.

in America is to be a recognized and active participant in the political system; addressing or illuminating a problem is referred to as "speaking up"; and experiences of disenfranchisement are often interpreted as being "silenced." This dissertation, *Earwitnesses in America*, builds upon scholarship on oratory in the early U.S. but shifts the paradigm to consider the voice's common counterpart: the ear.

The following questions guided this dissertation: if the early U.S. was a cultural and political moment significantly shaped by speech actions, to what extent did the impact of the spoken word depend on the listening subject? How did individuals imagine themselves as listeners? What were the prevailing social expectations of listeners in different discursive contexts? To what degree were there common listening practices or cultural investments in listening? How does the speaker-listener relationship illuminate the power dynamics between people in the young American democratic nation? How did listening orient people's social and political realities? How did authors in this period write about listening, and to what extent did they attempt to capture a listening sensibility in their writings? In investigating these questions, I analyze representations of listening in American literature from the late 18th century into the middle of nineteenth century. The primary texts of my projects include the following: Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* (1798), William Apess's *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts* (1835) and "Eulogy on King Philip" (1836), Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1853), and Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). These texts are the focus of this project because of their rich engagements with listening as a behavior and their abundant references to aural experiences. Each of these authors write in detail about how listening shaped their life experiences. My project analyzes nineteenth-century American aurality, the practice and sense of hearing.

I begin my analysis of listening in nineteenth-century American literature at the turn of the eighteenth century because it was a time in which people were deeply invested in the idea that public oratory shaped social and political realities. As Looby argues, the literature of eighteenth century reflects the idea that oratory brought into being the United States. This was a self-conscious moment in which people imagined the new nation as being enacted and authorized through language, and more specifically, the spoken word.[2] The value of oratory did not disappear after the American Revolution, and many scholars have written about the importance of oratory throughout the nineteenth century. By turning the focus to listening rather than speaking, *Earwitnesses in America* flips the script on many dominant narratives about the role of the spoken word in early America. I do not ignore the subject of oratory in this project. Listening and speaking are, as I argue, connected in inextricable way. However, I do prioritize the significance of listening in the oral-aural culture defining this period and its literature. In doing so, I argue that an integral part of American literature and oratorical culture has been ignored: the listener. In conceptualizing this period as an oral-aural culture, I insist that it was not solely a time period filled with voices; listeners—as a broad category of hearers, interpreters, and receivers of sound—were integral figures who experienced, participated in, and shaped these socio-political realities. I use the term "listening literatures" to refer to texts with frequent and dynamic representations of aural experience. These listening literatures comprise a range of authors who captured in their writings the varied meanings and practices of listening that shaped their lives.

Scholars have been thinking about the significance of sensory experience—and of

[2] In 1857, Edward G. Parker published *The Golden Age of American Oratory,* an account of rhetoric as art and power in the early American nation.

listening, specifically—since classical antiquity.[3] A scene from Plato's *The Republic* forms the opening of political scientist Susan Bickford's book, *The Dissonance of Democracy,* in which Bickford theorizes the importance of listening to civic participation and democracy. The scene that Bickford invokes is one in which Socrates admits that he could not persuade Polemarchus of his argument no matter how much he tried if Polemarchus simply refused to listen. This anecdote sets the stage in the opening of Bickford's important book on listening, American democracy, and political theory, and she notes that neither Plato "nor his successors give explicit theoretical attention to the role of listening, and to a large degree, this theoretical neglect of listening extends to a contemporary democratic theory" (1). Bickford aims to correct this imbalance by arguing that listening is, in fact, central to democratic theory and practice. Since the growth of social history in the 60s and 70s, listening has become a topic of interest in many disciplines and received significant scholarly attention with the burgeoning field of Sound Studies in the early 2000s. Historians such as Mark M. Smith, Richard Cullen Rath, and Leigh Eric Schmidt have brought the inquiries and methodologies of Sound Studies to the field of nineteenth-century American culture and explored how attending to the acoustics of the past opens up new and more textured ways of understanding American history, culture, and politics. For Smith, history has been interpreted primarily through vision—by thinking about what people saw—but sight accounts for only one-fifth of the senses through which historical actors sensed their worlds. Aurality, according to Smith, "contribute[d] meaningfully and significantly to the construction of what it meant to be northern, southern, slave, or free in nineteenth-century America" (6).

[3] See Anthony Synnott's "Puzzling over the Senses: From Plato to Marx" in *Varieties of Sensory Experiences*.

In *Earwitnesses in America,* I build upon Sound Studies' attention to sound and hearing as valuable historical objects of study, but instead of focusing on sound itself, my project's analysis centers literary representations of listeners and acts of listening. I analyze representations of listening in literature and argue that auditory perception, or, the sense of hearing, has been too frequently conceptualized as a passive sense—particularly because it is often considered in comparison to seeing and speaking. By attending to the real, imagined, and symbolic American listener in these primary texts, I show that while some historical figures held up the eloquent voice as an almost supernatural form of power, many writers depicted the voice's power as inherently conditional and dependent on more than just eloquence. Take for instance John Adams's 1805 inaugural address as the chair of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University in which he describes the eloquent voice as indispensable to the new republic. In his speech, Adams invokes the power of rhetoric and states, "In the flourishing periods of Athens and Rome, eloquence was power" (Adams, 19). He goes on to suggest that rhetorical skill is not just powerful, but integral to democratic participation and citizenship. By defining oral eloquence in this way, Adams already points to conditions through which the voice can be powerful, conditions such as citizenship and political participation. In this period, these conditions alone exclude the majority of all people except white men. But in reading Adams against a writer such as William Apess, for example, who writes extensively about the injustices Native Americans suffered at the hands of white settlers, I argue that access to a listening audience becomes an important condition through which the voice can be powerful—especially in the legal system. Rereading Adams through Apess, we can add an important caveat to Adams's statement: Eloquence [is] power *if* one can be heard.

The following chapters analyze ways in which writers depicted listening as an active

behavior that impacted and shaped people and the society in which they lived. Writers such as William Apess, Frederick Douglass, and Harriet Jacobs represent aurality in ways that animate listening as an active force shaping the contours of individual experience, conceptions of selfhood, and socio-political realities. Listening in their stories is a critical epistemology, a way of knowing and practice of knowledge making. The chapters in this dissertation emphasize the capaciousness of listening as a sensory experience and way of navigating the world. As individuals who lived with oppression and disenfranchisement in the new nation, these writers also define and depict listening in ways that critique the public voice in important ways. Eavesdropping in Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* prompts us to consider how specific facts about slavery and stories of enslaved people were prevented from being spoken in public arenas—particularly in the South—forcing the insidious truths about slavery to be spoken in whispers and secrecy. In *Incidents,* Jacobs's listening is simultaneously a source of her vulnerability as an enslaved woman, as she is forced to listen to obscene words that violate conventional standards of womanhood, and a source of her power; when she has limited access to sight and movement, listening is the sense through which she surveils and controls her surroundings. In contrast to the many voices that aim to control and dominate the people and environment in which Jacobs is living—voices that the narrative frames as proxies for institution of slavery—Jacobs's listening is often what bolsters her agency and fortitude. And in "Eulogy on King Philip," Apess's calls to listen rebuke the voices of history who have constructed a false narrative of Metacomet, Sachem to the Wampanoag people in the 17th century. His calls to hear eschew sympathetic listening—a form of listening that abolitionists in the 1830s and 1840s would encourage in white audiences in order to change their minds about slavery though emotional appeals to their morality—in favor of an aural demand that mimicked how Christians imagined listening to and obeying God's

calls. The arguments presented in these chapters render aurality in the nineteenth century U.S. a dynamic sense and behavior, complex in literal and figurative meaning and apt for critiques on distinct iterations of the voice.

Earwitnesses in America contends that listening—as with other senses—is an individual experience but is also historically and culturally constructed. Thinking about listening within soundscapes, a term popularized by influential Sound Studies scholar, R. Murray Shafer, means attending to the acoustic ecology within which sound and listening is experienced.[4] Given the historical specificity of this project's time period, I offer a brief overview of some significant social and political institutions between 1798 and 1861 that relied fundamentally upon listening and shaped how many Americans listened and thought of listening.[5] By providing this overview, I hope to underscore just how important the sense of listening was for early Americans in almost all facets of their private and public lives. Religion, for example, was an area of Americans' lives that explicitly defined and called for specific practices of listening. For those within the various sects of Christianity, quiet attentive listening was tied to morality and piety. Those who were quiet attentive listeners were more receptive to God's word through prayer, silent reflection, and sermon. Sects of Christianity like the Quakers, Evangelicals, and the African American church deviated from these more mainstream forms of quiet listening by encouraging more participation from individuals in their congregations. The Quakers, for example, held strong egalitarian beliefs, and in many of their religious gatherings, each individual was treated as a listener and speaker. Each member could speak if the spirit prompted her to do so. In that

[4] R. Murray Schafer is often considered to be a pioneer of Sound Studies. See his book *The Soundscape: The Tuning of the World* and his World Soundscape Project.

[5] For an overview of different interpretations of religious listening, see Leigh Eric Schmidt's book *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment*.

way, each member was always a potential speaker and listener. Similarly, the call-and-response model of worship in African American churches meant that in religious meetings, members of the church were expected to respond—verbally and physically—to the sermon.[6] There were no members who were expected to be only listeners or only speakers; the church was a space of dialogue. Regardless of the ways these sects of Christianity differed in how they defined and practice listening, they all put a high value on listening as an action that informed their religious practice and individuals' relationships with God. Richard Cullen Rath's work builds on these insights and shows how the architecture of many religious buildings was designed deliberately to facilitate sound to the listening audience based on how respective religions imagined listeners' relationships to each other and to God.[7]

Many secular institutions also depended on a listening audience and the strong cultural connection between aurality and education. The form of the public lecture was tremendously popular in antebellum America, to which the emergence of the American lyceum attests.[8] The lyceum in America emerged in 1826 and lasted through the Civil War, though the format of the public lecture existed well outside of these temporal boundaries. According to Carl Bode, the purpose of the lyceum was educational in nature. The intent was to "provide practical scientific instruction for workmen, and to have as a result a more intelligent worker as well as a better

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[6] Call-and-response is a crucial rhetorical form attributed to African American culture and literature. See Richards-Greaves' article "'Say Hallelujah, Somebody' and 'I Will Call Upon the Lord': An Examination of Call-and Response in the Black Church." For a general discussion of listening and Christianity, see Schmidt's "Sounds Christian and Religious Hearing in Enlightenment America."

[7] See Richard Cullen Rath's "Acoustics and Social Order in Early America" in *Hearing History: A Reader*.

[8] See Carl Bode's *The American Lyceum*. A more contemporary overview is Tom Wright's *Lecturing the Atlantic: Speech, Print, and an Anglo-American Commons 1830-1870*.

product. The main methods were the use of lecture-demonstration courses organized by public-spirited citizens and the assembling of local libraries of technical books" (23). Public lectures in general were common and popular events beginning around the 1830s, as culturally many Americans were invested in bettering themselves by acquiring useful and practical knowledge. While the American lyceum had narrower parameters in terms of appropriate topics, the general public lecture in early America spanned a multitude of subjects.[9] The popularity of the public lecture shows the importance of public speaking and listening to the lives of early Americans and how speaking and listening mediated public life, self-betterment through education, and civic participation.

I bring attention to nineteenth-century American social institutions' relationships to listening to emphasize that listening was understood as more than just a sensory phenomenon, a kind of perception experienced at the level of the individual. It was a behavior that was shaped, physically and ideologically, by the cultural institutions that defined people's historical moments and local environments; listening was the mechanism through which most individuals navigated and understood their public lives; and the way individuals heard their surroundings was frequently tied to their identities. As Smith states, "[t]he heard world was a powerful but clumsy proxy for a host of ideas about self and identity" (15). My readings of listening in the following chapters acknowledge the many ways in which forces outside of the individual cultivated perceptions and practices of listening. I do not, however, subscribe to any simple reflection theory of literature and history. While I engage texts that are explicitly interested in narrating history to some degree, they all wrestle with their historical moments and often in ways that counter, complicate, undermine, and reimagine the historical record.

[9] Bode notes that the lyceum did not allow for talks on religion or politics.

Of the many cultural forces that were explicitly calling for specific modes of listening, the law and chattel slavery were two institutions that impacted the authors on which this dissertation focuses in the most overt ways.[10] The law and slavery were, of course, entwined, because the law legitimized slavery in the U.S. In *Earwitnesses in America*, I argue that the law and slavery were both institutions that enacted power, control, and subjugation in the aural sphere. The law, for example, was (and still is) a system that leveraged power through aurality. The terminology of the American legal sphere itself attests to its oral-aural operations. Terms like "hearing," "hearsay," "oral argument/deposition," "petition," "testimony," "oath," and "plea" all designate specific proceedings and behaviors in the legal sphere that depend upon speakers and listeners. Of interest in this dissertation is the gag rules of the 1830s. In the 1830s, the intensification of anti-slavery petitioning prompted Congress to enforce a series of gag rules that allowed them to minimally refuse to listen to anti-slavery petitions read aloud and in its more extreme form, refuse anti-slavery petitions altogether. While the gag rules have often been framed as a violation of free speech and the right to petition, I argue that the writings of William Apess and Frederick Douglass define it more appropriately as the legalization of not listening.

Conflicts about slavery and northern versus southern sectional identities were also often articulated through ideas about sound. The slaveholding South, for example, often romanticized its way of life within a soundscape of quietude. As Smith notes, antebellum Southerners often described the idyllic and calm soundscape of the South as a way of signaling the South's virtuous way of life in contrast to the noise and cacophony they imagined defined the North's industrial soundscape. Slaveholders in the South, argues Smith, wanted "an acoustic

[10] See Mark Smith's *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* for a discussion of how the rise of intense sectional identities from 1830 through the Civil War manifested in soundscapes.

environment that they conducted with precision. Sounds made after a certain time (often delimited by the sound of the bell) were noises, and slaves' production of particular sounds at particular times indicated Southern quietude" (34). As writers like Douglass and Jacobs illuminate, the South, with its embrace of slavery, was far from being a quiet and peaceful place despite efforts to make or represent it so. Both Jacobs and Douglass recount traumatic experiences in their childhood in which they heard an enslaved person cry out while being whipped. They both mark these experiences as ones that made them understand the cruelty of slavery and the reality of their own enslavement. Quiet could also be dangerous and disconcerting. In his 1845 *Narrative*, Douglass describes how the enslaver Mr. Covey used to hide amidst enslaved workers, crawling on his hands and knees like a "snake." Covey's "work went on in his absence almost as well as his presence; and he had the faculty of making us feel that he was ever present with us" (*Narrative* 46). Chapters Two and Three focus on listening in the antebellum U.S. and argues that Douglass's and Jacobs's writings advocate for and cultivate specific strategies of listening that enabled them to navigate the sonic treachery of the slavery.

There are many terms that I utilize to describe aural behavior and phenomena; listening, however, is the dominant term I use to describe auditory events. Hearing is an alternative term that is often a synonym for listening but is sometimes interpreted as subtly different from listening. These nuances vary and are culturally specific and ever changing, but generally, listening is interpreted as an act of hearing that involves some kind of intention or attention. Etymologically, "listen" comes from Old English and meant "to give ear, be attentive, keep silence" ("Listen"). The word "hear" also comes from Old English and means "To perceive, or have the sensation of, sound; to possess or exercise the faculty of audition, of which the specific organ is the ear" ("Hear"). The etymologies of the words illuminate a slight distinction in how

auditory perception is understood to occur within an individual. Listening is defined as a kind of hearing practice that is intentional and active, while hearing refers more precisely to the general auditory faculty of hearing. These distinctions existed culturally in nineteenth-century America, but many writers used "listening" and "hearing" interchangeably, often using additional words to qualify the kind of quality of listening or hearing they are describing. The conceptual differences between these terms are important in the following chapters, but I do not focus specifically on how the words "listening" and "hearing" are used differently by writers. Instead, I focus on the ways that different aural experiences are represented as occurring across degrees of individual control. In this project's primary texts, there are times where individuals or characters are described as actively listening or trying to listen; there are times where characters accidentally hear something or eavesdrop; and there are moments in which individuals try to not listen, to shut out words and sounds. There are also many aural moments that escape easy categorization or description. The range of types of listening provides rich material for which to consider how writers imagined the relationship between aurality and an individual's agency. In these chapters, I draw evidence from analyzing the texts themselves, but I also draw from the cultural and legal history of the U.S. to make claims about the significance of listening in this period and its literature.

In Chapter One, I analyze William Apess's writings about listening as it operates at the intersection of Native sovereignty, law, and history. I compare *Indian Nullification,* a genre-bending text that records many of the social and political dialogic exchanges shaping the Mashpee's struggle for sovereignty and protection during the 1833 Mashpee Revolt, with "Eulogy on King Philip," a text that is perhaps more familiar in its formal features—Apess explicitly calls it a eulogy—but is still multifaceted in its deployments of genre. The two texts

are quite different. As I noted, *Indian Nullification* reads like a peculiar kind of record-keeping. It is a multi-voiced account of the Mashpee Revolt of 1833-34—a marked moment of intensified conflict between the Mashpee Native people and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts—and it defies a singular genre.[11] The numerous "speakers" in the text are one of its most noticeable features, as Apess sets his first person account alongside legal petitions and briefs, public notices, speeches from the Mashpee, personal letters, and newspaper articles and editorials.. "Eulogy on King Philip" is a speech that Apess delivered in Boston of 1836 on the anniversary of the assassination of King Philip, the leader of the Wampanoag Native people in the late seventeenth century. In "Eulogy," Apess rebukes the conventional histories of King Philip and tells a radically different narrative about him, where King Philip takes the role of hero and lover of liberty, and white colonials play the role of aggressor.

Listening functions prominently in both of Apess's texts, and as many scholars have argued, it is thought that Apess actually delivered an early version of "Eulogy on King Philip" to the Mashpee Wampanoag people when he first visited them in 1833.[12] Analyzing the two texts side by side show Apess as a Pequot minister and intellectual grappling with the way in which aurality is at the core of 19th century Native American struggles for sovereignty, self-governance, and representation. At the time Apess was writing, there was no legitimized political discourse for Apess and the Mashpee—and Native Americans more generally—to work within. The Mashpee Wampanoag were at once under and outside white colonial law. They lived under

[11] Theresa Strouth Gaul explores Apess's dialogic form of writing in "Dialogue and Public Discourse in William Apess's *Indian Nullification*."

[12] In her book *The Common Pot*, Lisa Brooks notes her "thanks for Barry O'Connell for confirming [her] suspicion about the connection between Apess's pamphlet and the 'Eulogy'" (304).

a guardianship system in which they were governed by white overseers, and yet they were also outside the law; they were not citizens of the United States and therefore could not exercise their rights in the same way as their white neighbors. Their ambiguous and uncertain political status necessitated a turn to other discourses and rhetorical forms. I read *Indian Nullification* and "Eulogy on King Philip" as texts of legal and political intervention. Key to this reading is Apess's discussion of listening in both texts, where he articulates a distinct resolve for the "right to be heard" (Apess 208). But Apess's use of "hearing" is expansive, and includes not just the legal definition of hearing, a formal proceeding in court, but also a more symbolic definition of hearing that encompasses the right to tell one's own history and have that history be heard.

Chapter Two analyzes the role of eavesdropping in Frederick Douglass's only piece of fiction, *The Heroic Slave*. In paying attention to listening and instances of eavesdropping, I argue that *The Heroic Slave* is a meta-narrative about how to tell histories of slavery for which there are little facts. Douglass's novella—despite being a fictionalized account of a real person, Madison Washington—contains many gaps. There are temporal gaps in the story and events that take place off the page. Along with the reader, characters are frequently attempting to piece together knowledge with missing information, and Douglass details this process of story-making for the reader. Douglass certainly could have chosen to fill in every plot point in a piece of fiction, but he didn't. Instead, he leaves gaps and stages the act of trying to piece together a story for which there are only a "few bare facts." Chapter Two argues that *The Heroic Slave* is told in a way that parallels Douglass's own experience with writing a story about Madison Washington, a man for whom there are few extent facts because of the silences imposed by chattel slavery.

Listening is crucial in *The Heroic Slave*.[13] There are few instances of reading and writing in the novella, and characters are often depicted in conversation with one another. Dialogue brings the story to life. While many scholars have focused on the role of the voice in the narrative, I argue that listening becomes one of the most important ways through which characters come to understand the events taking place around them. Listening offers not just a way of hearing what is spoken, but also what is not spoken. Douglass details a model of listening that allows characters to hear beyond what is immediately audible in order to hear the sounds that delineate deeper meaning. When, for example, Washington is telling Listwell an account of his escape from slavery, Listwell makes an exclamation at a particular detail in Washington's story. This scene represents Listwell interrupting Washington's story and interjecting his own commentary. Listwell's interjection is notably wrong, and Washington corrects Listwell's perspective as well as his logic. I argue that this scene illuminates one of Douglass's definitions of listening as interpretation. Through Washington's critique of Listwell, Douglass presents a kind of interpretive listening that hears beyond the narrative limitations inherent in the ideology of slavery.

Building upon current scholarship that has analyzed the complexity of Douglass's use of fiction in *The Heroic Slave*,[14] I argue that a critical feature of Douglass's narrative strategy has been overlooked: eavesdropping. Eavesdropping is an important behavior, event, and symbol in *The Heroic Slave*. The plot itself unfolds across four scenes of eavesdropping. Characters are constantly overhearing words that are intended for ears other than their own and often have to

[13] See Marianne Noble's "Sympathetic Listening in Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave' and *My Bondage and My Freedom*."
[14] Robert B. Stepto, William Andrews, Carrie Hyde, and Thomas Koenigs all discuss Douglass's turn to fiction in *The Heroic Slave*.

interpret and make decisions based on the overheard information. More importantly, scenes of eavesdropping often occur at times when in the novella when information is missing. When characters eavesdrop, intentionally or unintentionally, they usually uncover critical information that they would not have found in the usual aural places. Thus, I argue that Douglass's use of eavesdropping prompts us to consider why certain ideas about slavery, and stories of people enslaved, had not been spoken in public spaces before.

Chapter Three analyzes the dialogic form of Harriet Jacobs's autobiographical text *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and focuses on the ways that Jacobs experiences listening as an enslaved woman in the system of U.S. chattel slavery. At the time Jacobs was writing, women, and specifically white women, were expected to listen in ways that were in line with the cultural values imposed by the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood. Expectations of feminine purity, piety, and courtesy dictated that women's dispositions were gentle and particularly vulnerable to defilement.[15] In the introduction of Jacobs's text, Lydia Maria Child, American abolitionist and editor of Jacobs's text, confronts Northern white women's listening practices; she implores them to read Jacobs's story even though it contains references to sensitive and explicit subject matter. She says to do so for the "sake of my sisters in bondage, who are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them" (6). For Child, if the realities of enslaved women are too difficult to hear, then they are certainly too difficult for women to experience. Important, too, is Child's emphasis on white women's delicate ears. In publishing her story, which disclosed not just her own sexual violation at the hands of her

[15] For discussion on Jacobs's *Incidents* and the cult of true womanhood, see Khattab's "The Cult of True Womanhood in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," Burge's "Disembodied Intimacies and Shadows of True Womanhood: Reclaiming Agency in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," and Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist.*

enslaver but also her decision to have sexual relations with an unmarried white man, Jacobs made herself vulnerable to judgment and the court of public opinion. She also risked alienating her readers on the charge that the details of her story could violate the purity of her white female readership.

In Chapter Three, I argue that listening is essential to the narrative form and political purposes of Jacobs's *Incidents* and has been largely overlooked and thought of as a secondary feature of its dialogic form—listening is present and important only insofar as it is a byproduct of speaking. Listening, however, is more than just a passive experience in Jacobs's narrative, and it is at many times, the action that is occurring during moments in the text that critics have read in terms of silence. Listening, however, is by no means a singular experience for Jacobs. Acts of listening are at times coerced and unwanted, and symbols for vulnerability to sexual exploitation. At other times, listening functions as a source of empowerment, a way in which Jacobs can attend to and have control over her surroundings. Listening is also a way in which Jacobs invokes a kind of gendered experience for an enslaved woman that also describes the gendered social and political experience for all women in the pre-Civil War U.S. After all, in considering who were speakers and who were listeners in the social and political landscape of the early U.S. through the Civil War, women were, despite their race, class, or economic status, far more likely to be listeners than speakers. This is of course not to say that women did not speak, did not try to speak, or did not have social or political influence. I'm also not suggesting that race, class, or economic status did not impact a woman's relationship to her voice. Instead, I am suggesting that women's access to an oral presence in the public and political spheres was significantly more limited and conditional than men's, and that cultural ideas about feminine virtue influenced how people thought of women's voices and how their voices were heard in society. In *Incidents*,

Jacobs's many references to listening underscores the richness and usefulness of aurality as a concept and as a literal experience through which Jacobs can examine issues such as the vexed gendered power dynamics of enslavement and explore how the intersections of gender, race, and enslavement impact self-representation and political influence.

In the coda of this dissertation, I turn my attention to Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland,* a novel that has been at the focus of scholarship on the politics of voice in early America. The voice in *Wieland* has often been discussed in relation to questions of citizenship, authorship, and national identity. Carwin's ventriloquism has often been interpreted as the main catalyst for events that unfold in the novel, and thus, the influence of speaking has occupied critical concern. However, Clara's listening is the primary medium through which the events of the novel unfold. Carwin's voice, the voice that is arguably the most influential voice in the novel, takes up a fraction of the novel's space in comparison to descriptions of Clara's listening. Consequently, I place aurality at the focus of my analysis of Brown's novel. Drawing upon my other chapters, I ask how listening, as it is explored and defined by the writings of Apess, Douglass, and Jacobs, might revise or complicate the way in which speaking and listening are understood in Brown's *Wieland*. I ultimately argue that the perceived dominance of the voice in Brown's novel—and the real dominance of the voice in scholarship on Wieland—represents a political concept articulated by Tocqueville. Though Tocqueville worried about the potential "tyranny of the majority" in a democracy, *Wieland* demonstrates how this might occur through a vocal minority that enacts tyranny by masquerading as a majority.

Chapter One

The Right to Be Heard in William Apess's *Indian Nullification* and "Eulogy on King Philip"

In the spring of 1833, Native American Methodist Minister William Apess visited the Mashpee Wampanoag people to hear their grievances against the Massachusetts' guardianship legal system. Rumors had been circulating about the Mashpee's discontent with Reverend Phineas Fish, the white Christian minister the state had appointed to oversee the Mashpee's religious and secular education. Apess was at the time a Methodist circuit rider, traveling every day to preach throughout New England, and given the conflicting information he heard about Mashpee, he decided to visit them in person. Upon his arrival, Apess preached to his indigenous "brethren" and at the end of his sermon, he read from a "small pamphlet that contained a sketch of the history of the Indians of New England" (Apess 174). Scholars Barry O'Connell and Lisa Brooks have speculated that it was an early draft of "Eulogy on King Philip" that Apess delivered to the Mashpee that day, a speech that he would go on to formally deliver twice in Boston in 1836. It has become one of his most well-known pieces of writing.[16] The book he published about his time at Mashpee, *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts Relative to the Marshpee Tribe; or, The Pretended Riot Explained,* is a vastly different type of text than "Eulogy on King Philip", and they are rarely analyzed together in critical scholarship. The fact that Apess was composing both texts at the same time is reason enough to consider how Apess's experiences at Mashpee may have influenced his composition of "Eulogy" and vice versa. But beyond their shared composition timeline, these texts also share

[16] See Brooks for reference to her and O'Connell's discussion of Apess delivering "Eulogy" at Mashpee.

similar rhetorical strategies and purposes. In both texts, Apess exposes and condemns the injustices Native Americans have suffered through misrepresentation, and he uses frequent aural metaphors and commands to do so. *Nullification* describes the Mashpee Wampanoag's battle to access the justice system and secure representation in the law, while "Eulogy" confronts the biased misrepresentations of Native Americans in U.S. history and literature written by white men. In this chapter, I argue that the Apess's respective concerns in *Nullification* and "Eulogy" are related through Apess's attention to listening in literature and politics. Analyzing *Nullification* alongside "Eulogy" show Apess to be a Pequot minister and intellectual grappling with the way in which aurality is at the core of nineteenth-century Native American struggles for sovereignty and self-governance. His writings challenge and qualify the notion of the voice as a powerful social and political tool by emphasizing its reliance on the listening ear. In doing so, Apess articulates a distinct resolve for the right to be heard.

Apess's career as a public speaker and minister places him amongst a diverse body of religious and political figures who embraced and cultivated the power of oratory in early America.[17] Apess's work has frequently been analyzed through the lens of the voice in early nineteenth century America. As scholars such as Robert Warrior, Drew Lopenzina, and Barry O'Connell have argued, the fact that Apess leveraged such a public and impassioned Indigenous voice to combat misrepresentations and mistreatments of Native Americans, and that he did it through oral and written language, was remarkable. Apess was working against powerful forces of marginalization. Warrior points out that the fact we have minimal information about Apess's life outside of what he provides in his own writing underscores "two particular sorts of American Indian marginalization in the American northeast in the 1830s." The first was that

[17] See Gustafson, Looby, and Fliegelman.

public attention was largely focused on Native Americans in Southern territories because of President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Acts, so the plight of New England Native Americans was not widely represented to the general public. The second was that "the last thing people in the Northeast probably imagined when they pictured Indians was an articulate Methodist minister writing books" (Warrior 7). Considering these circumstances, it is no wonder that Apess's voice has been the focus of significant scholarship. In this chapter, however, I flip the script on this paradigm and show how Apess also defined himself as a listener and incorporated his aural values into his writing. Apess's writings often extend beyond a concern with having a voice and focus on the slightly trickier subject of accessing a listening audience.

Early in *Indian Nullification,* Apess transcribes his experience listening intently to the Mashpee describe "the tale of their distresses" (173). Not only were the Mashpee dealing with white settlers in surrounding areas stealing lumber and resources from their land, but they were also being denied access to their meetinghouse by the white Christian minister Reverend Fish, who was appointed to oversee the Wampanoag's religious and educational development. Fish was accepting payment and a parsonage lot for these responsibilities while using the meetinghouse primarily to host church for local white Christians. The Mashpee were explicit in their disapproval of Fish's preaching. Apess was alarmed to learn that despite the Mashpee people having "appl[ied] for redress to the governor and the Council" regarding their grievances, they had "never been able to obtain a *hearing*" [emphasis mine] (176). While this moment in the text refers specifically to a legal hearing, it foreshadows a primary concern in the text about how listening animates justice. In *Nullification*, Apess connects the state's failure to give the Mashpee a legal hearing to a broader social and political phenomenon of not listening that animates many of the injustices suffered by the Mashpee Wampanoag and Native Americans in the U.S. I extend

this focus of analysis to Apess's "Eulogy" and argue that his experiences at Mashpee influenced his rhetoric and methodology for fighting for Native sovereignty and representation more broadly. In "Eulogy," Apess's frequent calls to listen anew and hear sounds of suffering are key to Apess's endeavor to make known a truer history of King Philip and New England Native Americans. Both texts show Apess to be a Pequot minister and intellectual advocating for Native American sovereignty and self-governance and calling for the right to be heard.

Indian Nullification

Indian Nullification is peculiar in terms of its form and genre—Barry O'Connell aptly calls it an "odd" book (165). It is a multi-voiced account of the Mashpee Revolt of 1833-34, a marked moment of intensified conflict between the Mashpee Native people and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and it defies a singular genre. The numerous voices in the text are one of its most noticeable features, as Apess sets his first-person account alongside legal petitions and briefs, public notices, speeches from the Mashpee, personal letters, and newspaper articles and editorials. Apess acts as a kind of curator, placing texts and sources next to one another and providing commentary when necessary. Scholarship on Apess's rhetoric often underscore his skillful appropriation of prevalent discourses of the time such as benevolent paternalism, sentimentalism, republicanism, and Christianity in support of Native rights and sovereignty. *Nullification* has received similar scholarly interpretation.[18] Much of this work investigates Apess's rhetorical strategies and the powerful voices he deploys to invoke Native authenticity and identity amidst the Mashpee's struggle for self-governance and self-representation. There is also important critical work that explores the collective voice that Apess

[18] See Konkle, Gussman, O'Connell.

and the Mashpee cultivate in *Indian Nullification*.[19] Given Apess's initial experiences with the Mashpee and understanding of how their frustrations were being misrepresented and ignored, it's necessary to consider how Apess, as a writer, orator, and soon-to-be adoptee of the Mashpee, represents listening and embeds aurality into his text.

Nullification begins with a scene of listening. Apess writes that he has heard conflicting accounts of how his Indigenous brethren at Mashpee are treated under the guardianship legal system. Some people stated they "were much abused," while others, who were primarily loyal to Reverend Fish, assured Apess that they were being cared for and protected. The contradictory accounts motivated Apess to visit the Mashpee and "hear their concerns and how they fared from their own mouths" (172). This anecdote speaks to a larger problem of Native American representation in the early nineteenth century. Whether in popular literature or the law, their experiences and living conditions were constantly being represented and mediated by untrustworthy white voices. Neil Meyer articulates the Mashpee's situation as one in which they were "beholden to state laws but had no political voice in shaping those regulations, which were handled through an overseer system" (6). The Mashpee's situation was similar to that of many Native American populations in the U.S. at the time.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century U.S., the subject of conflict between colonial settlers and Native Americans was extremely popular. Within this popular discourse, Native Americans were often depicted through the "vanishing Indian" trope. Lisa Brooks writes that "[a]uthors and audiences invested in the creation of American national identity…were quite willing to embrace Indians as poetic, tragic figures within a uniquely American landscape as long as they were contained by the discourse of the vanishing" (199). Rhetoric of the "vanishing"

[19] See Meyer and O'Connell.

was not limited to fiction or literature. It was also prevalent in political discourse. Lawmakers frequently justified paternalistic policies towards Native Americans by depicting them as a "vanishing" group of people who were not capable of governing themselves.[20] When Apess decided not to trust second-hand accounts of how the Mashpee Wampanoag were living, he rejected a rampant insistence that Native Americans needed to be represented by others. Apess sought to find out the truth about the Mashpee by listening to them directly.

Important too in this anecdote is that Apess performs reconciliatory action as a listener. In confronting a cacophony of speakers claiming to represent the Mashpee, Apess adjusts his own listening behavior in order to hear more reliable information. It is Apess's intention and position as a listener that determines the voices he can hear. This important difference is one that Apess continues to articulate throughout *Nullification.* Apess advocates for Indigenous self-representation, but he is also acutely aware of the problems that are caused when Native people speak but are denied a listening audience. Apess's decision to become a better listener to the Mashpee in the opening of *Nullification* sets the tone for a book about how he alongside the Mashpee strategized about ways of making themselves heard within a legal system that refused to listen.

Apess's attention to listening opens up a new lens through which we can understand the form of *Nullification*. As a "listening literature," Apess's text did not re-narrate or paraphrase the Mashpee's stories. Through a record-keeping style, he maintained the integrity of his sources, and he also included voices on all sides of the revolt, not just the arguments made by the Mashpee community. At times, Apess provides commentary on the documents or arguments he

[20] See Laurel Clark Shire's "Sympathetic Paternalism and Sentimental Racism: Feeling Like a Jacksonian."

includes, but he often just sets texts alongside one another, allowing the reader to read between the lines and infer the relationship between documents and voices. Building on Theresa Strouth Gaul argument that the text's form is dialogic because Apess "allows debate to emerge within his text by placing pieces of varying viewpoints side by side," I argue that Apess's documentary style represents his dedication to being a listener amidst the Mashpee's struggle (275). Instead of in a courtroom, it is in Apess's book that the Mashpee can make their case and have their grievances acknowledged. Apess performs in his text what the Mashpee had been seeking through the law: the space and right to be heard.

In addition to its aural form, *Nullification* includes many detailed descriptions of different forms of listening in which Apess embeds his social and political critiques. For example, the moment in the text where Apess learns of the Mashpee being denied a legal hearing also contains many descriptions of how he and the Mashpee were listening to one another. He explains that he scheduled more than one meeting in order "to hear their whole story." While they are speaking to him, he notes that he was "listening patiently" throughout the sessions. At the conclusion of the meeting, Apess expresses his desire to assist the Mashpee in their political struggle, and they "all listened…with profound attention" (173). The meetinghouse discussion stages a stark contrast between the absence of a legal hearing and the abundance of close and attentive sensory listening. The patient and attentive listening exchanged by the Mashpee and Apess evokes a kind of pious hearing that Apess was intimately familiar with. For Apess, listening was the door through which he found salvation. As a child, he would hear songs of worship and "[listen] with great attention…their songs were sweet, and as the oil of joy no doubt was in their hearts" (121). Apess was converted when during a moment of despair, he "heard a voice saying unto me, in soft and soothing accents, 'Arise, thy sins that are many are all forgiven thee; go in peace and sin

no more'" (129). I argue that Apess uses the contrast between pious listening and the State of Massachusetts' refusal to listen to the Mashpee to critique the way in which the law uses natural language to legitimize itself. Employing the term "hearing" to refer to a legal proceeding makes a highly artificial, man-made, and ideological institution appear as natural as auditory experience. In the Mashpee meetinghouse, a legal hearing does not listen, while Apess and the Mashpee perform many forms of listening—close, patient, attentive—that are legitimized through their association with Christian higher law and egalitarianism.

Apess's staging of a Christian hearing in lieu of a legal one is one way among many in which he strategizes giving the Mashpee a hearing. In another iteration of a "hearing" in *Nullification,* Apess and the Mashpee work to make themselves heard by controlling the material space in which dialogue happens. What led this time period at Mashpee to being called a "riot" or "rebellion" is primarily grounded in one main incident. A brief synopsis of the riot is as follows. Apess and the Mashpee wrote and publicly circulated three different documents: a petition to the governor regarding the guardianship system; a petition to Harvard College regarding the unethical actions of Rev. Fish; and a statement of Apess's adoption into the Mashpee tribe. They also posted public notices around their land stating that because they had been "distressed, and degraded, and robbed daily," they were enforcing a series of resolutions that would begin on July 1st, 1833 (179). After that date, two white settlers went onto Mashpee land to steal wood, a practice that Mashpee's new resolution declared illegal. Apess and the Mashpee calmly prevented the men from taking lumber that did not belong to them. Asked whether the men had read the resolution, one of the men replied that he "had seen but had not taken much notice of it" (181). Though the two men continued to try and seize the lumber, the Mashpee calmly continued to unload the wood from their carts. Incensed, the men left, and

shortly after, the Mashpee received word that the governor was sending an envoy to settle the dispute. Thus, what was labeled a "riot" in many newspapers, was a non-violent and somewhat uneventful confrontation.

When the governor's agent arrived in town, he asked the Mashpee to convene with him at a local tavern for the meeting. The Mashpee denied his request and wrote to him, stating "we will meet you with pleasure…at *our* meetinghouse [emphasis mine], there being no other place where we should like to see you for an interview" (182). Scholars have noted the importance of the meeting taking place on Mashpee land. Lisa Brooks writes, "[b]y insisting on holding the 'council' at their meetinghouse, the Mashpee were calling on an old tradition of northeastern treaty protocol…Not only had the Indians reclaimed their meetinghouse, but they filled it with the voices of the 'truth.' Where talk of 'oppression' had formerly been excluded, it now ran freely, and the captive audience was forced to listen" (185). Physical space was an important dynamic involved in the kind of dialogue the Mashpee were seeking with the government official. They worked through physical space to structure the dialogic power dynamics they desired. Thus, by insisting on meeting at their own meetinghouse, the Mashpee required the agent to travel to them and orient himself to them.

The official agreed, but when the meeting began, the overseers of the guardianship were absent. It is unclear whether the Mashpee or the government official insisted on their presence, but the text states that "it was proposed to send for them, that they might have fair play and hear of what faults they were accused" (182). The language Apess uses invokes the sixth amendment to the constitution, which states that the accused have the right to hear the arguments against them. Through his rhetoric, Apess converts the meetinghouse into a legal hearing. The overseers, along with the sheriff and a few other local white neighbors arrived and the meeting began. The

Mashpee spoke about their grievances, and Apess writes that the white audience "now heard such preaching in our meetinghouse as they had never heard before—the bitter complainings of the Indians of the wrongs they had suffered" (182-3).

Building on Brooks's argument that this scene shows the Mashpee "calling on an old tradition of northeastern treaty protocol" to create a moment in which white settlers "[come] into Native space," I argue that the Mashpee's demand that the meeting take place at their meetinghouse is also a demand to be heard that takes on legal authority in Native space (185). So long as the hearing of the Mashpee's grievances was to take place on the terms and places structuring white settler governance, the Mashpee would continue to be subjected to the dialogic hierarchies those terms and places enforced. By hosting the hearing at their own meetinghouse, the Mashpee claim their position as speakers at the same time they physically situate white settlers and officials as listeners. The effect of the meeting is powerful, and Apess observes that "many white persons present seemed very uneasy, often getting up, going out, and returning as if apprehensive to some danger" (183). Though Apess notes that these members could have been reacting to a few of the Mashpee carrying hunting guns with them, it's clear that the white residents were also so uncomfortable in the dialogic position they were placed in—their being physically rendered into listeners—they constantly moved their bodies as a means of getting outside a physical listening position.

As a testament to the power of how place could manifest a particular form of listening, Mr. Fiske, upon leaving the meeting, mistakenly referred to the Mashpee as "citizens" (Apess 183). Though the Mashpee were not considered citizens of the United States, the way in which the meeting took place—the fact that the Mashpee spoke and were heard—caused Mr. Fiske to view the Mashpee as political participants in the legal system and represent them that way in his

own speech. Mr. Fiske's error is an example of the kind of impact Apess imagines for the discursive project of *Nullification*. While legally, Native Americans were not classified as citizens, the dynamics of speaking and listening that the Mashpee's meetinghouse enacted compelled a government agent to, at least in language, address the Mashpee as citizens. Throughout *Nullification,* Apess is interested in these kinds of political interventions that are created through a careful attention to how listening operates socially and legally.

The newspapers also became an important medium through which the Mashpee created a public hearing. The middle portion of *Indian Nullification* focuses primarily on reprinting a range of local newspaper reports and opinions about the Mashpee's political plight and Apess's role in their struggle. These accounts proliferate leading up to the Mashpee's session in front of the legislature, and Apess includes in *Nullification* excerpts from a few different newspapers. The news articles serve an important rhetorical purpose. They not only act as a kind of surrogate listener for the courts, but they also help bring into being a larger public audience for the Mashpee. One editorial in the *Boston Daily Advocate* states: [A]s we verily believe that [the Mashpee] is in many respects wronged by the white, and neglected by their legal guardians, the Legislature, we are desirous of *giving them a hearing*…[The Legislature] has heretofore treated their claims too lightly, but there is a growing disposition to hear and relieve their grievances" (196-197). Another editorial makes a similar remark, and states, "we felt it our duty to give [the Mashpee] an opportunity to be heard through the columns of our paper, while all others were closed to them, or cold to their complaints… Will other papers publish this simple appeal to the justice of the white men?" (218). More than once, *The Boston Daily Advocate* represents itself as an interlocutor able to both listen to the Mashpee and materialize a larger hearing among the public. In response to the newspaper's sympathetic perspective, the Mashpee submitted their

own article, writing that "we perceive that your paper is free, not muzzled. Marshpee Indians speak for themselves. It is not to be doubted but that the public would like to hear the Indians speak for themselves" (198). The article attempts to set the record straight regarding the so-called "riot," and the Mashpee write that they "fear not" because God is their "Judge," and he will have "no regard for skins or color" (199). Similar to how the meetinghouse physically structured a hearing for the Mashpee, the newspapers also become a space that categorized the Mashpee as speakers and brought into being an audience willing to hear their case.

The newspaper accounts in *Nullification* also place the Mashpee's political agenda alongside the Cherokee Nation's conflict with the state of Georgia, a conflict that had moved all the way to the United States Supreme Court and garnered much public attention and sympathy for Native Americans. An article published on July 12th, 1833, in the *Boston Daily Advocate* states that in light of William Apess's arrest, "we trust, for the honor of the state, that while our mouths are yet full of bitterness against Georgian violence, upon the Indians, we shall not imitate their example" (192). Another article states, "[w]e have had an overflow of sensibility in this quarter towards the Cherokee, and there is now an opportunity of showing to the world whether the people of Massachusetts can exercise more justice and less cupidity toward their own Indians than the Georgians have toward the Cherokees" (196). Massachusetts, and Boston in particular, was the home of many social activists who were vocal against President Jackson's Indian Removal Acts. The news articles presented in *Nullification* show that the Supreme Court cases of *Cherokee v Georgia* and *Worcester v. Georgia,* and in general, the state of Georgia's large-scale legal assault on the Cherokee's lands, was an important proxy for the Mashpee's struggle. In absence of a formal legal hearing in which the Mashpee can participate, news discourse invoked the Cherokee's plight, a Native American tribe that had successfully accessed the legal sphere. In

Nullification, it matters that the Cherokee were heard and recognized because, as the news articles show, that representation garnered significant public sympathy and attention. The Supreme Court is one of the most significant listening bodies in the country, and it was as true then as it is today that it's extremely difficult to have a case reach the ears of the Supreme Court. The inaccessibility of the Supreme Court, and the fact that it is highly selective—most cases never make it to the Supreme Court—is a prime example of how access to specific listening bodies is an inherent dynamic of legal power and influence.

The Mashpee later referenced the Cherokee legal battle in their own news article. On December 19, 1833, the Mashpee published "An Appeal to the White Men of Massachusetts" in which they describe prevalent sympathy for the Cherokee to highlight the lack of support for the Mashpee. In representing this hypocrisy, the appeal states:

> You plead for the Cherokees, will you not raise your voice for the red man of Marshpee? Our overseers are not kind; they speak, you hear them. When we speak for ourselves, our voice is so feeble it is not heard…Brothers, our fathers of this State meet soon to make laws; will you help us to enable them to hear the voice of the red man? (Apess, 205)

This appeal is one of the most direct articulations for the right to be heard. The statement makes the case that some voices are heard more than others, and white voices always reach the ears of the state. Apess also remarks that white people who work on behalf of the government "always have the ear of the government, or rather, they *are* the government" (216). Essentially, the government's ears determine the power and legitimacy of voices.

There is an accusation here that the government is not primed to listen to the Mashpee's voices, and to circumvent the government's practice of not listening, the Mashpee appeal to white men of Massachusetts who have been sympathetic to the Cherokee to help the Mashpee

"to enable" the state to hear their voices (205). It's a peculiar turn of phrase, and I argue that its syntax reflects a specific demand to be heard. In a previous sentence, the appeal requests white men of Massachusetts to speak for the Mashpee, but in its conclusion, the appeal asks for help changing the government's listening practices so that they can finally hear the Mashpee's voices, which even if "feeble," have been there all along (205). The word "enable" also captures the power that listening enacts within the legal sphere. As a term, "enable" has a long historical association with legality, as its definitions include "to invest with legal status," "to authorize, sanction, empower; to give legal power or license to" ("Enable"). The Mashpee's plea to the public to help "enable" the state to listen to their voices is a recognition of listening as an authenticating practice. They don't just want an opportunity to speak. They want to be heard.

Petitioning and Legalized *Not* Listening

Immediately following the Mashpee's *Boston Advocate* article in *Nullification* is a transcription of a debate in the Massachusetts House of Representatives over whether the Mashpee petition should be read aloud in court. The Mashpee were finally able to secure the legal counsel of Benjamin Hallet, and in the winter of 1833-34, the Mashpee councilmen traveled to Boston to submit their petition to the State House of Representatives. In an unprecedented moment on the floor of the House, representatives engaged in a long debate precisely about whether to hear the petition read aloud. Certain members of the House were not refusing to receive the petition in writing—they were specifically objected to having the words spoken out loud in a setting that would force them to listen to the petition.

Legislators began voicing their objections to hearing the petition by citing a range of justifications. Two legislators, Mr. Swift of Nantucket and Mr. Allen of Pembroke expressed similar disapproval for the reading. Swift said that because "there was a statement to be made

from the Governor and Council on the subject of the difficulties with the Indians… [he] hoped the petition would be laid on the table without being read" (Apess 206). Allen also "hoped the motion to read the petition would not prevail" and that "nothing would be done until that was received, to prejudice the House" (Apess 206). Mr. Lucas of Plymouth also objected and said that he had made a report to the Council regarding an "itinerant preacher" who "urged [the Mashpee] to declare their independence" (Apess 207). Lucas claimed that until his report was heard, "he hoped nothing would be heard from the Indians…The petition originated no doubt, from the itinerant preacher, who had been pouring into their ears discontent until they had a riot, and the rioters were prosecuted with the preacher among them" (Apess 207). Mr. Loring of Hingham cited the length of the petition as reason to not read it aloud, as "it would take up time unnecessarily to read it" (Apess 207). Mr. Allen of Worcester did not object to hearing the petition, but instead, objected to the debate itself and stated that if the House refused to hear the petition, it would "increase the importance of the petition" and "become a subject of much more speculation than if it took the ordinary course." (Apess 207).

Many of the objections are grounded in concerns about bias, specifically a bias in favor of the Mashpee. The idea of listening to the words of the Mashpee without having first heard words from the Governor is a problem for many of the legislators. Many legislators state that they would be comfortable hearing the Mashpee's petition only if the petition is read in response to and within the context of the Governor's words. In response to the objections, many legislators commented on the unusual topic of debate. Mr. Cushing of Dorcester, the representative who agreed to present the motion to the House in the first place stated that he had never heard of objections to a petition being read aloud. He "presumed the House would not take it upon itself to refuse to hear the petition of the humblest individual, and he did not fear that

they could not control their minds so far as to be ready to give a fair hearing to the other side" (Apess 206). Mr. H. Lincoln of Boston was equally puzzled by the objections. He said it was "due to the character of the House, and to our native brethren the petitioners, whose agents were here on the floor, that they should be heard, and heard patiently" (Apess 207). Perhaps the most pointed summary of the debate was made by Mr. Chapman, who towards the end of the discussion said, "the petitioners have a constitutional right to be heard. I know not of what value that provision is which gives a right to petition, if the House can refuse to hear the petition. They do not ask for action, but to be heard" (Apess 208). All but five representatives approved the motion to read the petition aloud.

The transcription here makes clear that the House debate hinged on the question of whether a petition must be heard. The resistance to listening to the petition is odd enough that many representatives admitted they had never heard such objections before. Mr. Cushing's statement that he believed the representatives could "control their minds" enough to "give a fair hearing" provides some insight as to why there was strong resistance to hearing the petition. Having to listen to the petition, as opposed to merely reading it, seemed to make the petition more powerful, more influential. Political theorist Susan Bickford writes about the role of listening in a democracy in her book *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship*, and she argues that listening "open[s] up the intersubjective character of politics" (4). Bickford argues that in political conflict, the decision to not just speak but also listen "opens up the chance that something else will happen—a different outcome…it also means ending the possibility of control and the certain achievement of one's current goals" (4). Listening means being vulnerable to being persuaded. The legislators desire to not listen to the Mashpee's petition is grounded in their desire to not be persuaded. Not listening is an attempt at controlling the

discourse and avoiding the liminal space between speaking and listening, a space that is unwieldy and intersubjective. Preventing the petition from being read aloud created an opportunity to contain and control it within the prevailing legal and cultural discourses that had defined the Mashpee as an inherently degraded and dependent people doomed to disappear. In the end, Mr. Chapman's statement that "the petitioners have a constitutional right to heard" was the prevailing argument, and the Mashpee's petition was read aloud.

*Nullification'*s depiction of this legal debate makes it appear that not listening to petitions was unusual, and perhaps it was as this time in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. But only two years later, the U.S. House of Representatives would implement the wide sweeping "gag rule," a ruling that would prevent anti-slavery petitions from specifically being read aloud on the floor of the house; they could only be submitted and tabled. In the most extreme form of the rule, representatives silenced anti-slavery petitions by refusing to receive the petitions altogether. The gag rule remained in place for eight years and marks a moment in which sectional tensions were at an all-time high over the legality of slavery. Silencing voices and refusing to listening became legal solutions for avoiding the debate altogether. The gag rule is often viewed as an attack on free speech and the right to petition—limitations imposed on the human voice—but the gag rule is also importantly, as *Indian Nullification* demonstrates, a legalization of not listening.

Apess's *Indian Nullification* begins with the problem of ascertaining a legal hearing and proceeds to illustrates the ways in which securing a public listening audience was integral in the fight for Native sovereignty and representation. Though these battles have often been articulated as the battle over having or exerting a voice, Apess's documentation of the Mashpee's concerns and legal battles show a distinct concern with the right to be heard. And as Apess's book shows,

just because one speaks doesn't mean one will be heard. Apess's work alongside the Mashpee was aimed not just at amplifying their voices but also "enabling" white lawmakers and the public to hear their voices.

"Hear his Own Words": Listening and History in "Eulogy on King Philip"

In *Indian Nullification*, Apess documented his and the Mashpee's fight to be heard, rhetorically and legally. Reclaiming autonomy over their own land, religious spaces, and political representation involved the Mashpee doing more than just speaking out and amplifying their voices. They had to find strategies that could compel white audiences and institutions to listen. In Apess's *Nullification*, refusals to listen perpetuated the injustices committed against the Mashpee people, and thus, their fight for self-governance depended upon making themselves heard. As a skilled orator and minister, Apess brought with him to Mashpee a belief that attentive listening was necessary to hear God's word and an expertise in capturing an audience's listening attentions. These qualities enabled him to join the Mashpee's fight and view it through its aural dimensions and possibilities.

Apess's experiences at Mashpee clearly shaped his speech "Eulogy on King Philip" and vice versa. In both texts, white people's refusals to listen are portrayed as actions that inflict suffering on Native Americans. In his effort to correct these injustices, Apess's rhetoric focuses on his audience's listening attentions, and when he commands his audience to listen, he is also demanding that they participate in correcting these wrongs. In "Eulogy on King," the wrongs that Apess is addressing exist in the historical record written by white men about New England Native Americans. Specifically, Apess seeks to correct the historical record about King Philip, also known as Metacomet, who was Sachem to the Wampanoag people in the mid seventeenth century. Through this speech, Apess also sought to correct the larger history of New England

Native Americans that had been similarly mischaracterized. I use the term "hearing" to invoke its sensory and political definitions. In January of 1836 at the Odeon theater in Boston, three years after his work began with Mashpee people, William Apess delivered one of his most well-known speeches entitled "Eulogy on King Philip." At the time, it had been 160 years since King Philip, also called Metacomet, Sachem to the Wampanoag people, was assassinated after years of conflict between New England Native Americans and white settlers. The death of King Philip was often described as marking the end of the war between New England settlers and Native Americans. It was also framed as the end of New England as a Native Space. [21]

Apess's audience would have been familiar with the figure of King Philip, as narratives about Native Americans more generally were extremely popular. In the project of American national identity, Native Americans were often depicted within a few ideological and rhetorical frameworks that cast them as an already vanished people. This erasure bolstered the narrative cohesion of American national identity represented through the god-ordained agenda of manifest destiny and on an identity based on whiteness and Christianity. The story of King Philip was a particularly popular subject for white historians from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Apess directly references a few of these historians including Increase Mather, a Puritan Minister in the seventeenth century whose writings on King Philip are palpably unsympathetic about violence against Native Americans, and Samuel Gardner Drake, a white historian and antiquarian writing at the same time as Apess. In popular discourse, King Philip was often depicted as a war-hungry, vengeful, and violent aggressor destined to for his demise. Apess's audience was likely very familiar with these narratives and expected to hear a story about King Philip that confirmed their understanding of Native people as tragic figures and white

[21] See Brooks, Lepore, and DeLucia for discussion on King Philip's War.

settlers as heroic victors. Not only does Apess's embodied presence on stage refute the vanishing trope, but the content of his speech also exposes the flawed logic and distortions on which white colonial histories rely to tell the story of King Philip.[22] In his speech, Apess counters these popular rhetorical frameworks, and tells a story of King Philip using frequent calls to listen. Throughout his speech, Apess strategically guides his audience to use their listening to confront the Christian hypocrisy and factual contradictions made silent by written histories of New England.

Despite his audience's familiarity with King Philip's War and how it had been narrated in popular discourse, Apess insists that the audience has never actually heard the story of King Philip. He states that his main agenda is to correct the history of King Philip, a man whose "purer virtues remain untold" (277). The word "untold" invokes the oral-aural form of his speech and emphasizes the two-fold nature that distinguishes his narrative. His will both tell a story about King Philip that runs counter to well-known histories of him and do so through oral rather than written language. By telling his audience that they had not heard the story of King Philip, Apess is requiring a specific kind of listening posture from his audience, one that is attentive and open to learning new information instead one intended to confirm, validate, and shore up existing knowledge. By framing the "Eulogy" as "untold," Apess was tapping into a form of listening that his audience likely practiced in the settings of public lectures and the American lyceum. The lyceum was a public lecture that became popular in the 1830s, especially throughout New England, and the mode through which lyceums spread public knowledge was through speaking

[22] Lopenzina makes the claim that Apess's presence on stage negates the "vanishing Indian" myth.

and listening.[23] Scholars have speculated on a few other locations at which Apess likely delivered "Eulogy" following his appearance at the Odeon, and Daniel Radus notes that these "often secular venues" show Apess "using the infrastructure of the region's burgeoning lyceum circuit" (Radus, 82).[24] I argue that Apess was also leveraging the listening behavior that the lyceum cultivated.

The lyceum and the public lecture served many purposes and communities throughout the nineteenth century. It was often advertised as being a neutral space of knowledge and debate, and yet as it developed into the 1830s, it also became a space for social reform and activism. Tom Wright observes that "lecture culture was a phenomenon often baffling in scope and marked by internal contradictions" (2). The medium of the lyceum was oratory, but lectures were advertised and discussed through print in newspapers, and lecturers often used their speeches as opportunities to work on their writings. Both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau frequently delivered speeches through the lyceum movement. In framing his secular lecture on the history of King Philip as one "untold," Apess was calling on his audience to listen to him with a different set of aural conventions than they would have if they were hearing him preach. Despite its diverse purposes, the lyceum was widely regarded as a form of public education, and Apess used this framework to ask his audience to orient themselves as learning listeners.

Sympathetic Listening and Sentimentalism

Apess draws from many rhetorical traditions to affect his audience's listening in "Eulogy," but his various appeals to sympathy underscore his familiarity with sentimentalism, a

[23] See Bode and Ray for general discussion of the American lyceum in the nineteenth century. See Radus for discussion of Apess and the U.S. lecture-system.

[24] See Warrior for his account of Apess's life after he presented "Eulogy" at the Odeon.

prominent mode of writing in antebellum America. However, Apess knew of the dangers of white sympathy for Native people. Sympathy for the plight of Native Americans in and of itself had not effectively forced white Christians to confront their own hypocrisy and culpability for injustices suffered by Native people. In fact, sympathy as it manifested in the law was an oppressive force. The many laws in place that subjugated Native American people were often framed as paternalistic and compassionate. The guardianship legal system and the Indian Removal Acts, for example, were articulated through the discourse of sentimental benevolence. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, a court case in which the Cherokee people sought to stop the continued encroachments on their lands, Justice John Marshall delivered the following lines in his majority ruling:

> If courts were permitted to indulge their sympathies, a case better calculated to excite them can scarcely be imagined. A people once numerous, powerful, and truly independent, found by our ancestors in the quiet and uncontrolled possession of an ample domain, gradually sinking beneath our superior policy, our arts and our arms, have yielded their lands by successive treaties, each of which contains a solemn guarantee of the residue, until they retain no more of their formerly extensive territory than is deemed necessary to their comfortable subsistence. To preserve this remnant, the present application is made. (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1)

Referring to Marshall's use of sympathy and the vanishing Indian in his ruling, Neil Meyer writes that Marshall "deployed sentimental rhetoric to color the plight of Indian nations in terms of their 'remnant' status. In Marshall's telling, the contemporary Indian nation was a pale shadow of its once great past…" (3). Marshall depicts the Cherokee as a people dwindling in numbers and in doing so, casts his ruling as a benevolent one intended to "preserve this

remnant." The dangers of sentimentalism, as Lauren Mielke points out, "arises from the inherent hierarchy in and tenuousness of the relationship between sympathizer and the object of sympathy" (Mielke, 9). Thus, the law framed land removal acts and guardianship legal systems as sympathetic paternalist structures, and Native people as domestic dependents who needed the protection of the U.S. government.

Sentimental discourse outside of the law was also often leveraged to depict Native Americans as ignorant and childlike, a primitive people who could not flourish on their own. A significant number of novels at the time depicted Native Americans in ways that evoked sympathy from readers but for the purpose of confirming white readers' Christian sensibilities and superiority. The 1820s and 1830s saw a flourishing of dramatic novels and plays that narrated the plight of Native Americans as tragic and doomed. Jane Tompkins points out in her seminal book *Sensational Designs,* "between the War of 1812 and the Civil War, Americans wrote seventy-three novels dealing with Indian-white relations." Tompkins draws upon the work of Louise Barnett, observing that in these narratives, which focus on the "white domination of the continent, "[w]ith few exceptions, the white hero and heroine marry at the end, the bad Indian or Indians are killed, and the good Indian either dies, or dies out because he has no heirs." In these novels, the audience is made to feel sympathetic towards the "noble Indian," but ultimately, that sympathy is built on hierarchical difference and the tragic, yet necessary, demise of Native Americans; it is a passing feeling in the story of white colonization and domination (Tompkins, 110).

Apess describes many scenes of Native Americans' suffering in "Eulogy," but through his emphasis on listening, he guides his audience's understanding of this suffering in ways that circumnavigate the problems often created by sympathy. For example, Apess describes the

fundamental contradiction of white colonial violence being associated with a Christian and civilized people:

> There are many who are said to be honorable warriors, who, in the wisdom of their civilized legislation, think it no crime to wreak their vengeance upon whole nations and communities, until the fields are covered with blood and the rivers turned into purple fountains, while groans, list distant thunder are heard from the wounded and the tens of thousands of the dying; while a loud response is heard floating through the air from the ten thousand Indian children and orphans, who are left to mourn the honorable acts of a few—civilized men. (278)

Apess contrasts what has been "said" about the actions of civilized white men "who are in possession of [King Philip's] soil" and the sounds of suffering those actions created among Native people. In doing so, Apess directs the audience's sympathetic listening towards understanding the irreconcilable truth between the sound of orphaned children crying and the narrative of manifest destiny that elided their suffering in the name of the civilization and Christianity. The sounds Apess describes also refute the Vanishing Indian discourse, which casts the death and dispossession of Native Americans as a foregone conclusion, as if it was happening without an agent of violence. The terms "vanishing" and "disappearing" are terms that conjure up a quiet dematerialization. They are also terms that do not suggest any subject or force responsible for the disappearance. In Apess's depiction of colonial history, the death of Native Americans is not quiet or inevitable, and their suffering is tied directly to vengeful white violence. Apess brings his audience's sympathetic listening into conflict with pervasive narratives that justify white colonial violence against Native people.

A persistent feature in sentimental literature about Native Americans in this time period is an emotional encounter between Native and white people that depends on a mediating figure. In her work, Laura Mielke calls these moments "moving encounters." According to Mielke, these encounters often "proposed the possibility of mutual sympathy" through a "sentimental intermediary who provided necessary translation—linguistic, cultural, affective—and attempted to minimize the emotional volatility that so quickly led to confrontation and violence" (2). Ultimately, though, Mielke argues that the intermediary figure, who is often the author herself, upholds the belief in inherent differences between whites and Native Americans. The presence or necessity for an intermediary, a translator, suggests a bridge between cultures at the same time it suggests an essential difference between them that requires work to resolve.

Moments of ventriloquism in Apess's "Eulogy" indicate a way in which he is cultivating and transforming the sentimental genre through aurality. In these performances, he invites the audience to hear words spoken by Native Americans from the past. Acting as a kind of vessel through which others can speak, Apess performs words supposedly spoken by King Philip and those around him, positioning Philip and Native communities as the tellers of their own experiences. As an example of the history of injustices suffered by Native Americans prior to Philip's chiefdom, Apess tells the story of a Native American man in Kennebunk who was "remarkable for his good conduct" and had received land from the state of Maine. Apess notes that "common prejudice against Native Americans prevented local whites from feeling any sympathy towards him, despite many instances of him attending to his white neighbors who were suffering" (289). When he and his family fell ill, his white neighbors did not return the favor and come to his aid. Apess commands his audience to: "*[h]ear his own words. He speaks to the inhabitants thu*s [emphasis added]: 'When white man's child die, Indian man he sorry; he help

bury him. When my child die, no one speak to me; I make his grave alone. I can no live here" (289). The man then "dug up the body of his child," and carried him to be buried among other Canadian Indians.

Of note here is Apess's rendering of the Native American man's speech patterns. He does more than just relay the words the man spoke; he wants his audience to again practice a kind of aural imagination and listen to the man through Apess. The man's words are heart-wrenching, and Apess's act of ventriloquism does more than elicit his audience's sympathies for the death of a child. It also works to dissolve Apess as an intermediary figure who is needed to translate this moment to the audience. The words speak for themselves and there is no mistaking how the audience should react to the death of this man's child. The event also tells a story of failed white sympathy, and rhetorically, Apess's ventriloquism gives his audience the opportunity to respond differently. If Apess had merely described the story, his audience could easily distance themselves from the event and even cast judgment on the failures of white people in the past. Instead, Apess wants the Native American man from Kennebunk to speak directly to the audience, making the event a present tragedy instead of a foregone conclusion of the past.

Creating White Listeners

Apess's intention in cultivating his audience's listening attentions is further made clear in his descriptions of white speakers. White voices in "Eulogy" are primarily deceptive and deadly, and Apess narrates countless examples of betrayals. He tells the story of Squanto, a Native American interpreter and guide for the Pilgrims in Plymouth, who in 1625 attempted to murder Massasoit and claim power for himself. At the time, Native Americans and white settlers in New England had a treaty that demanded both parties turn over anyone who committed treason. Apess tells his audience that "the Pilgrims refuse[d] to give [Squanto] up, although by their oath of

alliance they had promised to do so" (283). Apess goes on to tell the story of Masconomo, the sagamore or leader of Agawam in Salem, Massachusetts, and how in 1630, he welcomed the Pilgrims and gave them land for "a small sum of eighty dollars" (285). A year later, "these Pilgrims of the New World passed an act in court, that the friendly chief should not come into their houses short of paying fifty dollars or an equivalent, that is, ten beaver skins" (285). Through these examples, Apess creates a stark contrast between the words of Native people and those of white people. White people consistently break their promises—severing their words from their actions—and respond to generosity with avarice. Apess then builds on these examples to challenge the historical record written by white men.

Immediately following these accounts is a series of rhetorical questions regarding the trustworthiness of written histories of New England. Apess uses the "presumed" facts of these histories against them. He states that "The history of New England writers say that our tribes were large and respectable" and then asks, "[h]ow, then, could it be otherwise, but their [the pilgrims] safety rested in the hands of friendly Indians?" He continues to ask how "large and respectable tribes" have decreased in number: "[h]ow have they been destroyed" (285). Following examples of white deceptive speakers, Apess brings up a fact of history and uses rhetorical questions to unearth the truth of what those facts elide. Importantly, rhetorical questions are not intended to be answered by an audience. They are meant to be heard and understood for the truth they are conveying. Apess answer the rhetorical questions by stating that the Native American population was "destroyed…by hypocritical proceedings, by being duped and flattered; flattered by informing the Indians that their God was a going to speak to them, and then place them before the cannon's mouth in a line, and then putting the match to it and kill thousands of them" (285).

Apess's metaphor directly challenges the ideology of manifest destiny. The history of New England consists of white voices claiming to be the mouthpiece of God and using that presumed authority to lure Native people to their demise. These are the truths that Apess claims are left out of the audience's "celebration[s]" and "speeches" (286). Thus, Apess draws a direct line from the past atrocities committed by whites against Native Americans to the current depiction of New England history. By emphasizing the history of white voices as a primary mechanism of deception and betrayal, Apess evacuates the authority of white voices who claim to offer an objective account of the past. Apess claims this authority himself in asking rhetorical questions that only he can answer.

In his attention to aurality in *Indian Nullification* and "Eulogy on King Philip", Apess articulates a distinct resolve to be heard. As an advocate for the Mashpee Wampanoag and activist for Native American rights more generally, he worked to garner public attention for his causes while coming up against the law's refusal to listen. Apess recognized that silencing the voices of marginalized people was not an act of taking away their voices but rather finding ways to systematically not listen to them. Apess's work shows him to be an expert in aurality, and when the Mashpee were denied the legal form of a hearing, they worked to secure hearings in other discourses and spaces. By utilizing the columns of the newspaper, publishing public notices, and organizing discussions to be held on their land and in their meetinghouse, Apess and the Mashpee forged their own listening audiences. In this chapter, I have argued that Apess's experiences at Mashpee, along with the expertise he gained on stage as a minister and orator, made him a sharp observer of how people's listening behaviors impacted their emotions and politics. He used this knowledge to strategize making himself heard in the political pursuit of Native sovereignty and in revising U.S. history to create a fuller and authentic record of New

England Native American history. Though there is common association between writing and voice, Apess's work reminds us that writing can also be a kind of listening, a form of attention that records voices we need to hear.

Chapter Two

Damaged Discourse: Corrupt Tongues and Eavesdropping in Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*

Amidst Frederick Douglass's escape from slavery and his rise as an abolitionist orator and writer, the U.S. saw an enormous effort by proslavery politicians and writers to silence the public debate on slavery. From the Congressional "gag" rules that barred antislavery petitions to the federal censorship of mail from travelling from the North to the South, slavery apologists wanted to combat the power of antislavery voices by damaging the pathways through which they made themselves heard.[25] In February of 1850, Douglass published an article in *The North Star* in which he wrote of Southern slaveholders' "schemes" to suppress the "principles and opinions" of abolitionists. Despite the South's efforts to fortify the system of slavery "by trampling upon the right to petition, by suppressing free discussion, by fettering the American press, by gagging the American pulpit, and by enlarging their borders," Douglass argues that the intensity of the South's response to abolitionist discourse indicates that "the judgment day of slavery is dawning" (*Selected Speeches* 153). Later that year, Douglass told an audience listening to his lecture on slavery that they were "in the midst of a great struggle" and that "the public mind [was] widely and deeply agitated." Imagining the public mind as "perturbed waters," Douglass argued that there were "many great impurities, whose poisonous miasma demand[ed] a constant antidote" (*Selected Speeches* 164). In the decades leading up to the Civil War, the dissonance of

[25] For an overview of the Congressional debates on slavery, see William Lee Miller's *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress.* For an account of the gag rule, see Scott R. Meinke's "Slavery, Partisanship, and Procedure in the U.S. House: The Gag Rule, 1836-1845." Jeannine DeLombard's book *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture* offers an account of how the legal battle over slavery permeated public rhetoric in the antebellum U.S.

public debate on slavery was loud and palpable, and despite slavery apologists' attempts to delimit and control the conversation, the subject of slavery amplified through manifold discourses. During this time, fiction writing, and sentimental fiction in particular, emitted a powerful influence on the public debate over slavery. Leveraging its claim to emotional and moral truths, sentimental fiction became part of the "constant antidote" needed to combat the poisons of the proslavery agenda.[26] Recognizing the culture's growing appetite for historical fiction and the genre's narrative power, Frederick Douglass published his first and only piece of fiction, *The Heroic Slave*.

In the novella's opening paragraphs, Douglass explains the inspiration for his historical fiction and his vision for its intervention in the discursive battle over representing slavery. *The Heroic Slave* takes as its subject the true story of the 1841 *Creole* mutiny, in which enslaved men on board a ship from Richmond, Virginia revolted, took control of the ship, and sailed to the Bahamas where they successfully appealed to the British government for their freedom. Madison Washington, an enslaved man from Virginia, became the prominent figure of the rebellion, and many abolitionists depicted him as a hero, a courageous man who fought for freedom just as the American revolutionaries did a few decades prior. Despite his heroism, Douglass reminds readers that Washington, a man who resembles his fellow Virginian heroes Patrick Henry and Thomas Jefferson in his fervent love of freedom and liberty, exists only in a small corner of the historical record. What remains of Madison Washington are a few bare facts, "a few transient incidents," that can hardly account for Washington's life and heroic actions on board the *Creole*. As far as history goes, Washington "lives now only in the chattel records of his native State"

[26] The oft-cited Ann Douglass-Jane Tompkins debate over the value of nineteenth century sentimental fiction offers an overview of how the sentimental novel engaged debates over slavery. See Douglass and Tompkins.

(*Heroic Slave* 4). Douglass calls the historical record "chattel records," and in doing so, he adds history to the list of discourses that have been corrupted and silenced by the proslavery agenda. For Douglass, there was a difference between history as it was represented and claimed by human actors vying for authority over it and history as a record of truth from a god-like perspective. In many of his writings and speeches, he refers to the latter definition and authority of history to criticize and delegitimize the former. For example, in speaking on the history of the antislavery movement, Douglass stated that it was misguided to think of antislavery as a new historical development. Though it was often treated as a recent movement, antislavery principles had existed in "nature" from the beginning. They had only been "awaiting the thoughtful discoverer, and the skillful workman to bring them forth in the varied and multitudinous forms of beauty, power, and glory, of which they are capable." For Douglass, true histories are those that already exist in nature and merely need the "skillful workman" to make them legible. The Virginia chattel records reflect neither historical truth or the craft of a "skillful workman." The truths about Washington are still in need of that "skillful workman" to "bring them forth" (*Selected Speeches* 313-314).

As many critics have argued, Douglass's turn to fiction is necessary to liberate Madison Washington's story from history's "chattel records."[27] His metaphor undermines the factual authority of the historical record by emphasizing what it lacks, and thus, he legitimizes fiction as the genre capacious enough to tell Washington's story. Douglass, however, does not just combat history's silence by inventing fictional details with abandon. In the novella, the story of Madison Washington is one with many gaps and omissions that characters must struggle to understand.

[27] Stepto, Andrews, Hyde, and Koenigs have noted the way Douglass's opening questions the authority of the historical record to legitimize his use of fiction.

The gaps in the story feature so prominently that they become one of the plot's primary subjects. As a result, Douglass turns his story into a meta fiction about narrating the truth about slavery amidst a landscape of "damaged discourse," a term I'm using to register the impact of proslavery idealogues' strategies for controlling, manipulating, and damaging the mechanisms for disseminating public knowledge. Damaged discourse is a broad term that brings to the forefront the discursive landscape of U.S. slavery in which facts were not stable signifiers of truth. They were debated, omitted, and falsified to favor proslavery arguments and rhetoric. Damaged discourse also illuminates the need for abolitionists and antislavery advocates to strategize ways of being heard to circumvent the gags and ideological narratives produced by the proslavery agenda.

In this chapter, I read *The Heroic Slave* as a theorization of historical fiction as historical recovery that responds to the damaged discourse of the antebellum U.S. The opening paragraphs of the novella offer important clues to Douglass's methodology. The "chattel records" of slavery have kept Madison Washington in obscurity, and Douglass states that we only know Washington through "glimpses," and a "few transient incidents." Despite the damage of the discourse around Washington, Douglass proceeds with his narrative and states the following: "Speaking of marks, traces, possibles, and probabilities, we come before our readers" (*Heroic Slave* 4-5). There is more than one peculiarity in this remark—the "we" pronoun, the assertion that a book can speak, that it speaks "marks" and "traces"—but it's a comment that explicitly refers to *how* the text tells its story. Douglass's commentary on his historical recovery anticipates the problem contemporary scholars have addressed and theorized while working with the limitations of the U.S. historical archive of slavery. In her influential work, Saidiya Hartman formulates a methodology she calls "critical fabulation," in which she "struggles within and against the

constraints and silences imposed by the nature of the archive." For Hartman, fabulation involves working with archival material and also surfacing the "the relation between power and voice and the constraints and closures that determine not only what can be spoken but also (the identity of) who speaks." Hartman's approach involves turning to "forms of knowledge and practice not generally considered legitimate objects of historical inquiry or appropriate or adequate sources for history making and attending to cultivated silence, exclusions…that engender the official accounts." In *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass's description of the historical archive's absences reads like a contemporary piece of criticism, and thus, I argue that Douglass is his own theorist of historical recovery. Douglass takes the scarcity of "marks and traces" that exist in the archive around Madison Washington and creates a possible and probable narrative. The opening statement sets the stage for the subjunctive register to assist in telling the story of Washington. Douglass's paradoxical claims that the novella "speaks" also connotes how the text creates its narrative. The kind of objective knowledge often associated with the written genre of history—knowledge that is empirical and verifiable—is unavailable for Madison Washington, and this lack of evidence sets the precedent for a text that turns not just to fiction, but to a different epistemological and rhetorical mode altogether: orality/aurality.[28]

The Heroic Slave is a dialogic novella. The story takes shape through scenes of speaking and listening, and for most of the narrative, characters struggle to hear, speak, and interpret information amidst the narrative omissions and subterfuge they encounter. Scholarship on *The Heroic Slave*'s dialogic form has argued that it reflects Douglass's use of a diverse range of rhetorical conventions and the discursive politics Douglass found himself in as a public orator

[28] Tony Papanikolas analyzes the ways Douglass' writings engage the sonic and aural dimensions of writing and moral sensibility.

and figure, and frequent recipient of white spectatorship.[29] Critics such as Marianne Noble, Jeannine DeLombard, and Tony Papanikolas have shown how Douglass's writings invoke the prevalent association between listening and sympathy in antebellum culture, a link that abolitionists leveraged for their cause by organizing many public speaking events that often included direct testimony from formerly enslaved individuals. At the time, abolitionists believed that listening, as opposed to looking or reading, provided more direct access to audiences' emotional and moral sensibilities. By encouraging white audiences to listen to antislavery speech, abolitionists could more easily inspire them to convert to the abolitionist cause. Douglass was certainly attuned to the oral/aural dimensions of the public sphere and abolitionists' belief in the power of speaking and listening to touch the moral consciences of white audiences. In *The Heroic Slave* dialogue is the communicative medium that manifests the story, and thus, Douglass claims the more ephemeral epistemologies of speaking and listening for narrating the truth of Madison Washington's story.

Critics, though, have curiously ignored the prominence of eavesdropping in the novella as a primary mode of listening.[30] Mr. Listwell in particular, a fictional white Northerner and abolitionist who is an important point of view for the story, struggles to listen well and relies heavily on eavesdropping to navigate the silences and dangers he encounters. And in terms of the novella's larger structure, eavesdropping is the primary way in which the story moves through difficult moments of informational impasse. Characters, along with the reader, consistently

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[29] Stepto and Goldner have noted the dialogic dynamics in *The Heroic Slave*. Stepto writes of the "communal aesthetic of storytelling" in the novella (365). Goldner reads the subtext of the novella's dialogue within the culture and audience of celebrity in the nineteenth-century, "which increasingly focused attention on the celebrity figure himself, fetishizing the celebrity's body and far more often projecting onto him or her its desires, anxieties and aggression" (31-32).

[30] Goldner writes on eavesdropping in *The Heroic Slave*.

confront missing information in the stories they seek out. This chapter argues that eavesdropping is crucial to Douglass's theorization of how to narrate truths about slavery amidst a landscape of damaged discourse. Eavesdropping represents Douglass's larger endeavor to make audible the traces and marks of Washington's story, but it also works as a literary trope in the novella that conceptualizes subversive listening as an epistemological necessity for navigating a morally and ideologically corrupt historical reality. Eavesdropping represents a kind of aural knowledge-seeking that transgresses generic and discursive boundaries to expose the logics and forms of evidence that undergird the "facts" of slavery.

Corrupt Tongues and Private Soliloquies

The Heroic Slave is a story composed of many voices—contradictory voices, secretive voices, and deceitful ones. As a dialogic text, characters' voices are the ones responsible for narrating the story of Madison Washington, and they are frequently at odds with one another. Thus, *The Heroic Slave* creates the discursive battlefield of voices, rhetoric, and genres representing slavery that Douglass was writing within. Out of the many voices in the novella, Douglass offers one against which all others should be compared, the voice of Madison Washington. In the opening scene of the novella, Mr. Listwell, a major character and important point of view for the story, overhears a voice in the woods. Listwell is a northerner, traveling through the slaveholding state of Virginia, and he hears a voice "apparently engaged in earnest conversation." He admits that he is "intensely curious to know what thoughts and feelings, or, it might be, high aspirations, guided those rich and mellow accents." Listwell then "stealthily" approaches the speaker, but he is careful to remain concealed behind a tree. From his hidden position, he eavesdrops on Madison Washington speaking passionately to himself about his fervent desire for liberty and freedom and condemns the vile nature of slavery. Washington

laments that while the birds of the forest fly free, he, "a man,--yes, *a man*!--with thoughts and wishes" is considered lesser than an "accursed crawling snake." Washington cannot live with the "consciousness of cowardice and indecision" and he vows, "Liberty I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it." Washington then goes on to say that he plans to escape to the north, and if he can make it, "liberty, the inalienable birth-right of every man, precious and priceless, will be mine." At the end of Washington's monologue, he vows to himself, "I shall be free" (*Heroic Slave* 5-6).

Douglass's description of Madison Washington's speech characterizes Washington as a moral and honest man, and one who vehemently denounces the evils of slavery. His voice, "that unfailing index of the soul," is "earnest" and "eloquent." Significantly, Washington's voice is also one that speaks rhetoric of the American revolution.[31] As the narrator points out, Madison Washington is a man who "loved Liberty as well as did Patrick Henry," and his monologue in the woods recalls the very words of Patrick Henry. Henry is famously quoted as saying "Give me liberty or give me death" in his 1775 speech to the Second Virginia Convention, and in the woods, Madison Washington says "Liberty I will have, or die in the attempt to gain it." Washington's words clearly mark him as the republican hero and orator of the novel. In contrast to the very public setting of Patrick Henry's famous speech, however, Washington's monologue takes place in the secret of the Virginian woods. Critics who discuss *The Heroic Slave's* opening scene often focus on how it replicates the complex racial power dynamics at play in Douglass's personal experiences as an formerly enslaved fugitive speaker and writer addressing primarily white audiences. For example, Ellen J. Goldner argues that *The Heroic Slave*'s subtext "allegorizes an emotional struggle between Douglass and his white audience," and though the

[31] See Walker and Hyde for discussions of *The Heroic Slave*'s rhetoric of nation and liberty.

novella idealizes dialogue between the heroic fugitive slave and the sympathetic white listener, the subtext of the novella registers the irrational force of racism (36). Deviating from this paradigm, I read the first scene within the novella's meta fictional framework and thus as a discursive claim about how and where to hear honest discourses of freedom and liberty.

Douglass dislocates the language of inalienable rights and freedom from the public sphere and represents it as a fugitive discourse, the private expression of an enslaved man hiding in the wilderness for safety. The scene creates an epistemological and rhetorical provocation for the reader that the novella will return to at the end with a suggested answer. The task in the opening scene is not to read a factual depiction of Madison Washington being eavesdropped on in the wilderness, but to hear a truth about Madison Washington that the novella speaks—that his escape from slavery and leadership in the *Creole* Rebellion were fueled by the same self-evident truths about freedom that are written in The Declaration of Independence. The opening scene ties the self-evident and natural truths of freedom—truths that have been enshrined in histories of the American revolution—to the private clandestine speech of a fugitive enslaved person.

In contrast to Madison Washington's private voice of abolition and liberty, proslavery voices fill the public spaces in *The Heroic Slave*. The tavern is one of the places in the novella most explicitly tied to Virginia history and public discourse. Listwell, knowing nothing about the history of the public tavern, stops there for a night during his second visit to Virginia. The tavern is described as follows:

> There stands a somewhat ancient and famous public tavern, quite notorious in its better days, as being the grand resort for most of the leading gamblers, horse-racers, cock-fighters, and slave-traders from all the country round about...the house is large, and its style imposing, but time and dissipation, unfailing in their results, have made ineffaceable

> marks upon it, and it must, in the common course of events, soon be numbered with the things that were. (27)

It is significant that in a novella about historical absence, the tavern is one of the few places described in terms of history—its own history and the histories its inhabitants like to tell. The tavern is "ancient" and "famous" in the same way that subjects deemed worthy of history are legitimized through their connections to important pasts, and yet, time has taken its toll on the tavern's structure; its walls are corrupted with "holes and crevices." From a distance, the tavern maintains an "air of grandeur," but a closer examination reveals it as a "gloomy mantle of ruin." While the tavern is meant to be a structure of material integrity, authoritative in its permanence, it is actually penetrable and damaged. As a symbol of Virginian history, the tavern is in the process of "los[ing]…its ancient consequence and splendor." Douglass's depiction of the tavern casts the proslavery history of Virginia as having a less-than-solid material logic and structure.

Beyond its material decay, the tavern is also described in terms of the corrupt voices it houses. Listwell arrives and begins speaking to a "loafer" named Wilkes who assumes that Listwell is traveling through Virginia to attend a nearby slave auction in Richmond. Wilkes's assumption unsettles Listwell, but he does not correct the assumption; Listwell merely asks, "'Why, you must think, then, that there's money to be made at that business?" Wilkes goes on to say that while he himself is not a slave-trader, he knows that they are men of money and education, men who "know all about the government." Discomforted by the exchange, Listwell decides to take his dinner to his private room, and it is within the tavern that Listwell eavesdrops for the second time in the novella. This decision proves advantageous to Listwell. Because of the dilapidated pine wood of the tavern, he easily overhears the "vulgar" and "corrupt" conversations happening below. The occupants of the tavern debate Listwell's identity and the nature of his

visit to Virginia, and some of the men criticize Listwell's decision to stay in his room over conversing face-to-face with "honest men." Wilkes, the traveler to whom Listwell first speaks, confidently states that he is sure Listwell is a wealthy slaveholder, and another man rebukes him, exclaiming, "'O Wilkes! You're known here. You'll praise up any body that will give you a copper." Wilkes is depicted as having a public reputation for being a deceitful man who says not what he truly believes, but whatever will earn him more money (*Heroic Slave* 30-32).

The Heroic Slave presents the tavern scene as a noticeable contrast to the opening scene of Washington's monologue. Compared to Washington's private, honest, and antislavery rhetoric, the tavern stands out as explicitly public (historical), immoral, and proslavery. Its material degradation extends to its inhabitants' voices and values. The tavern dwellers are self-interested and motivated by the money to be gained from the slave-trade. As lowly and degraded as they are, the novella disturbingly reveals that they serve an important public function. The following passage describes the loafers' roles as sources of public information:

> They know everybody, and almost everybody knows them. Of course, as their titles imply, they have no regular employment. They are (to use an expressive phrase) *hangers on*, or still better, they are what sailors would denominate *holders-on to the slack, in every-body's mess and in no-body's watch.* They are, however, as good as the newspaper for the events of the day, and they sell their knowledge almost as cheap. Money they seldom have; yet they always have capital the most reliable...the history of the house is folded in their lips, and they rattle off stories in connection with it, equal to the guides of Dryburgh Abbey. (28-29)

The novella aligns the voices in the tavern with the record-keeping genre of the newspaper, and thus, through the tavern, Douglass links the work of newspapers with chattel slavery and the

production of the historical archive. Like newspapers, the loafers commodify information and facts, and they are also notably productive and corrupt; as one of the tavern inhabitants suggests, they will do and say anything for money.

In his speeches and writings, Douglass often argued that slavery, as an institution and ideology, yielded enormous control and influence over all of America's institutions. He argued that "it has become interwoven with all American institutions and has anchored itself in the very soil of the American Constitution. It has thrown its paralysing arm over freedom of speech, and the liberty of the press; and has created for itself morals and manners favorable to its own continuance" (*Selected Speeches* 165). The tavern in *The Heroic Slave* is the incarnation of this phenomenon. It registers the ways that the grand history of the U.S., as it has been constructed through a discourse of liberation and freedom, has been corrupted and degraded by the "hanger on" of chattel slavery. Moreover, the loafers' information is ideologically intertwined with the public tavern. They use the tavern's publicness, it being a prominent and material site of cultural and political traffic, to acquire their knowledge. Their lips are one in the same with the history of the house. As a result, the knowledge they sell is not unbiased information but a regurgitation of their own proslavery propaganda. When Listwell arrives, the loafers get to work appropriating his identity and story for the narrative of the slaveholding south. Listwell is, of course, a Northerner and an abolitionist, but Wilkes insists that Listwell is there to buy slaves, a false narrative about Listwell that seeks to appropriate him into the tavern's history and reputation. Douglass goes as far in his critique of history as to represent Wilkes's confirmation bias. After Listwell encounters Madison Washington outside the tavern—Washington was recaptured into slavery while attempting to rescue his wife from slavery—he attempts to purchase his freedom. Upon hearing Listwell's request, Wilkes looks at his peers "with a grin of

victory." He takes Listwell's question as evidence of his theory that Listwell is in fact in the slaveholding business.

Damaged discourse in *The Heroic Slave* denotes a landscape of discourse in which honest voices and declarations of freedom have gone into hiding and dishonest avaricious voices construct the social knowledge of the public sphere. The tavern and its occupants are part of the larger public history of slaveholding Virginia, and the voices there uphold the South's proslavery discourse. To do so, they contort their words to fit their narrative. The tavern discourse also functions to silence any information that would undermine its narrative and reputation. When Listwell overhears the men in the tavern debating his identity and speaking crudely, he decides that it is in his best interest to "say nothing which might undo the favorable opinion that had been formed of him in the bar room." While Listwell knows that it is his responsibility as an abolitionist to "cry out against it [slavery]...bodily fear, not conscientious scruples, prevailed" (33). The tavern's proslavery discourse and logic are held together through the threat of violence and domination.

Douglass's novella casts a stark contrast between voices like Madison Washington's and those that inhabit public spaces like the tavern in Virginia. They are ideologically and morally opposed, which in turn impacts the narratives they tell. The tavern stands in for the history of slavery as it is constructed by the dominant ideology of the proslavery South. The loafers are the tavern's "sentinels," and their sole task (as they "have no regular employment") is to maintain the illusion of the tavern's grandeur and continue to tell the history of its importance. But the tavern's significance is undermined by its material dilapidation, and Douglass ties its physical decay to its moral one. The voices of the tavern belong to individuals who lie and commodify the stories of slavery in ways that are just as immoral as the commodification of humans as property.

Madison Washington, on the other hand, is a voice to be trusted. He speaks earnestly and truthfully because as a fugitive in the woods, his voice is temporarily liberated from the oppression of the proslavery public sphere.

Eavesdropping and Probable History

In the damaged discursive landscape of *The Heroic Slave*, "the man who prays in secret is far more likely to be sincere than he who loves to pray standing in the street, or in the great congregation" (21). As a text about recovering true history, the novella displaces truth from the public sphere and makes it a fugitive discourse. Consequently, good interpretation becomes a difficult task for characters, and they often depend on information they gather through eavesdropping to decipher their surroundings and determine the best course of actions. Though scholarship on *The Heroic Slave* has addressed the significance of Listwell's sympathetic listening to the plot of the novella, eavesdropping has featured less prominently in this body of work. As part of the novella's metafictional project, I argue that eavesdropping functions as a literary trope and hermeneutic for uncovering honest narratives amidst a morally and ideologically corrupt historical reality.

Critics have generally read Listwell as a model of good listening—his name even looks and sounds like the words "listens well," and his willingness to listen to Washington's wilderness soliloquy transforms him into an abolitionist.[32] However, to read the opening scene of eavesdropping as a straightforward model for political transformation or example of good listening elides the troubled dynamics eavesdropping implies. Eavesdropping is a form of listening that carries many negative connotations, as it is understood as an aural invasion of

[32] See Stepto, Andrews, Hyde, Noble.

privacy. Analyzing Listwell within the paradigm of sympathetic listening and abolition is suited well for Douglass's autobiographical writings, but in *The Heroic Slave*, listening is part of Douglass's self-reflexive methodology for narrating the truths about slavery.

In the opening scene of *The Heroic Slave*, a fictional character, Mr. Listwell, eavesdrops on a historical figure, Madison Washington. The encounter stages a discursive blending of fiction and history that the novella is interested in and casts eavesdropping as a hermeneutic for damaged discourse. In emphasizing the meta work in this scene, it is helpful to note that critics such as Richard Yarborough, Robert Stepto, and Thomas Koenigs have remarked on the peculiarly formal language of Washington's speech. Stepto advocates for "dismissing the florid soliloquies, which unfortunately besmirch this and too many other anti-slavery writings" in order to appreciate *The Heroic Slave* as "full of craft" (360). Yarborough sees Madison Washington's monologue as exemplifying the tension between the "freer rein the form [fiction] offered Douglass in his depiction of the exemplary black male hero" and the "restrictions imposed by the expectations of the whites to whom he was appealing" (217). Koenigs argues that Washington's theatrical monologue shows that Douglass is not offering readers unmediated access to Washington's interiority through fiction. The dramatic characterization of Washington's monologue does not read like an authentic documentation of a real speech. In contrast to the use of fiction in sentimental novels, which often did give readers access to characters' interiorities, Douglass's use of fiction aims to make audible truths about Madison Washington and the institution of slavery in ways that do not depend upon accessing the interiority of enslaved people.[33] Extending these arguments, I analyze the encounter between Listwell and Washington

[33] See Koenigs.

as one that stages an encounter between fiction and fact that the novella strategizes for circumventing damaged discourse.

The opening scene translates the transgressive connotation of eavesdropping into a hermeneutical endeavor. Consider the etymology of "eavesdropping." "Eavesdrop" comes from the combination of "eaves" and "drop"—"eaves" referring to the roof edge of a house and "drop" referring to the place on the ground in which rainwater drops from the eaves ("Eavesdrop"). "Eavesdrop" as a kind of listening emerged from the idea of standing so close to a house as to hear what is spoken privately inside. Though it is often colloquially used to denote a socially distasteful form of listening, its etymology foregrounds a spatial transgression that is also inherent in the historical debate about fiction and historical discourse. In the antebellum U.S. the genres of fiction and history were often discussed in terms of their association with public and private domains. Fiction was often thought to be the genre concerned with interiority and private experience. Reading fiction was compared to eavesdropping because of the way it offered readers the experience of knowing a character's inner private life. History, on the other hand, was often associated with the public sphere and social knowledge.[34] Douglass's eavesdropping conceptualizes his historical fiction as transgressing the boundary between public and private spheres. But contrary to the idea of eavesdropping as reading the interiority of

[34] The Douglas-Tompkins debate over sentimentalism registers the rise and influence of women's fiction in the nineteenth century. Often referred to as "domestic fiction," much of this literature focused on concerns about private life and family. Catherine Gallagher's "Rise of Fictionality" also provides important arguments about the association between fiction, interiority, and private thought. Koenigs provides in-depth analysis of the genres of history, fiction, and historical fiction in the antebellum U.S. Wexler defined literary eavesdropping as the reading of sentimental fiction by its "unintended readers" (161). For an account of the relationship between eavesdropping, fiction, and the novel, see Ann Gaylin's *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austin to Proust*.

characters, Douglass's eavesdropping is concerned with illuminating the similarity between the public rhetoric of liberty and freedom and Madison Washington's personal fight for freedom. By not offering access to Washington's interiority and placing the nationalistic rhetoric of U.S. history in the private wilderness, Douglass deploys eavesdropping to represent a transgression of spheres and discourses that uncovers rhetoric of the utmost public importance in the clandestine private expression of a fugitive enslaved person.

The Heroic Slave also defines eavesdropping as a hermeneutic that blends fact and speculation to engender probable narratives. In Part II, amidst Madison Washington's escape from slavery, he coincidentally comes across Listwell's home, where Listwell and his wife invite him in to stay for the night. Washington skeptically accepts Listwell's invitation and reveals the details of his escape from slavery. While hiding in the wilderness, Washington climbs up a tree to avoid being discovered by individuals whose voices he hears. While perched on a branch, Washington overhears an enslaved man praying below him, a prayer Washington notes was "the most fervent, earnest, and solemn" one he had ever heard. Washington decides he can confide in the man because "the man who prays in secret is far more likely to be sincere than he wholes to pray standing in the street, or in the great congregation." Feeling certain of the praying man's sincerity, Washington asks if he will go to town and buy him provisions. The man agrees, but when he returns, 14 white men carrying guns are accompanying him, to which Mrs. Listwell interrupts Washington's story and exclaims "Oh! the old wretch…he had betrayed you, had he?" Because Mr. and Mrs. Listwell and Washington are all unaware of the events that unfolded at the store, they find themselves as a group in a situation analogous to Douglass's circumstances in writing a narrative using only a few facts. Mrs. Listwell in this scene impulsively reacts to Washington's story by interjecting her exclamation, "Oh! The old wretch." She labels the man a

"wretch" before she asks, "had he?"; she declares before she clarifies (*Heroic Slave* 20-22). Mrs. Listwell may listen attentively to Washington's story, but she fails as an insightful interpreter of facts. She creates her interpretation from impulsive assumptions about the praying man, assumptions that underwrote proslavery propaganda that depicted African Americans as inherently inferior and dishonest people.[35]

Washington, on the other hand, tells a different story based on the intel he gathers through eavesdropping. In response to Mrs. Listwell's exclamation, Washington posits the following narrative:

> He *probably* [italics mine] went into a store, asked for the articles for which I sent, and presented the bill I gave him; and it is so unusual for slaves in the country to have money, that fact, doubtless, excited suspicion, and gave rise to inquiry. I can easily believe that the truthfulness of the old man's character compelled him to disclose the facts: and thus were these blood-thirsty men put on my track. (22)

In marked contrast to Mrs. Listwell's interpretation of events, Washington bases his speculation on the content of the praying man's private speech and the logic of probability. He draws upon the facts, "the marks, and traces," he overhears and fills in the gaps by speaking the most probable scenario. Interestingly, Washington's speculative narrative is also self-reflexive. As he narrates what "probably happened," he surmises about the speculation of the store owner. Washington imagines that the store owner would be suspicious of an enslaved man carrying money, and his suspicious speculation would have caused him to ask for an explanation. Washington then conjectures that the praying man gave a truthful account of events because he

[35] For an analysis of proslavery ideology and arguments, see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Ante-bellum South*, 1830-1860.

judges the man to be sincere based on the content of his private voice. Unfortunately, upon returning from the store with the 14 white men, the praying man could not find the evidence (Madison Washington) to support the facts of his situation. He *did* receive money from Washington; he *was* sent to the store to buy Washington provisions; and yet, the slave owners believe him to be a thief and a liar based on the evidence they perceive. After all, the man cannot deliver Madison Washington, the man who supposedly gave him money, because Washington has hidden himself. Narrating the bare facts do not serve this man well. He is consequently punished for failing to provide material evidence for his factual narrative.

The scene naturalizes speculation, a narrative supposition that is more fictive than descriptive, as an inevitable and quotidian form of narration that arises when facts and evidence come up short. Washington, however, takes the opportunity to distinguish his own speculative fiction from the ones spoken by Mrs. Listwell, the store owner, and the 14 white men. Their speculations manifest in the form of suspicion. Prone to distrust from the outset, their fictions assume the man's dishonesty. Washington's fiction, however, has been enabled by his eavesdropping. Having heard the praying man talking in private, Washington is assured by the truth of the man's honesty. Washington builds his speculation upon the truths of this observation. By the end of the scene, Douglass has articulated a hermeneutics of eavesdropping that enables probable histories to counter the suspicious ideology of proslavery propaganda.

The Same Rule in Dissimilar Cases

In the closing coffeehouse scene, we encounter the novella's final episode of eavesdropping. The story fast-forwards to two months after the *Creole* Rebellion, when a conversation between two sailors takes place at a Virginia coffeehouse. For the first time, the novella does not designate an eavesdropper, thereby turning the reader into the eavesdropper.

After developing a theorization of eavesdropping across four parts, Part V of the story puts readers' listening to the test.

Consistent with the novella's form, the details of the *Creole* Rebellion are not fully available, and the sailors attempt to create narratives using a few facts. Williams, a sailor who was not involved in the rebellion, confronts Grant, the first mate on board the *Creole*. Williams accuses the crew of the *Creole* of gravely mishandling the rebellion. He compares the setting of the slave ship to a Virginian plantation and delivers a crude speech about how he would have handled the enslaved men on the ship. Williams' speech echoes the voices from the public tavern in form and logic. He is vulgar, and he appropriates the facts of the rebellion into his own self-interested and proslavery speculative narrative. Williams admits he has limited knowledge of what occurred on the *Creole*; he tells Grant, "'[a]ll I know about it is...that on the ninth day after you left Richmond, a dozen or two of the niggers ye had on board, came on deck and took the ship from you;--had her steered into a British port, where, by the by, every wooly head of them went ashore and was free" (*Heroic Slave* 46). In contrast to the two minimal sentences he musters containing facts of the revolt, Williams's subjunctive narrative of what *must have* happened and what he *would have* done spans multiple paragraphs. But, as Grant will expose, Williams draws from the wrong source of evidence to fill in his speculative narrative. Grant rebukes Williams' by stating the following:

> [I]t strikes me, you apply the same rule in dissimilar cases. It is quite easy to talk of flogging niggers here on land, where you have the sympathy of the community, and the whole physical force of the government, State and National, at your command; and where, if a negro shall lift his hand against a white man, the whole community, with one accord, are ready to unite in shooting him down…. but sir, I deny that the negro is,

> naturally, a coward, or that your theory of managing slaves will stand the test of salt water….It is one thing to manage a company of slaves on a Virginia plantation, and quite another to quell an insurrection on the lonely billows of the Atlantic, where every breeze speaks of courage and liberty. (43)

Grant rebukes Williams for basing his speculative fiction on incompatible logic and evidence. When he observes that Williams "appl[ies] the same rule in dissimilar cases," Grant argues that Williams's speculative speech mistakes the discursive freedom of the ocean for the discursive boundaries of the plantation. On shore, Williams's narrative might "[sound] very well," but that's because like the narrative of the public tavern in Part III, the proslavery narrative of the plantation contorts the facts for the purposes of upholding justifications for slavery. Just as the tavern gives an "air of grandeur" and has a past predicated on being "large" and "imposing," the slavery plantation depends upon the "fears already in existence" in its history and the threat of state violence to preserve the ideology of its facade. Outside the ideological frameworks that uphold such narratives, Grant is able to hear the "breeze" of the Atlantic, which "speaks of courage and liberty." Grant recalls that amidst the insurrection, Washington told him that he was guided by "liberty, not malice," and the enslaved men on the *Creole* did what the white forefathers of the American revolution did. In contrast to Williams who forces the same rule onto dissimilar cases, Washington emphasizes the similarity between cases to establish a consistent rhetorical rule. Washington says, "[w]e have done that which you applaud your fathers for doing, and if we are murderers, so were they" (48).· Recalling the opening scene in which eavesdropping represents a kind of transgressive listening—listening across discourses deemed separate—Grant finally hears "the abstract principles of 1776" in the "application to one whom"

he saw as inferior. He heeds the novella's opening provocation to hear the self-evident truth that the *Creole* Rebellion was about freedom.

Grant, though, must also contend with facts he doesn't know about the rebellion. Grant offers to tell the "facts as they came under [his] own observation," but coincidentally, Grant was knocked unconscious at the outset of the revolt. When he regained consciousness, Washington and the other enslaved men on the *Creole* had already taken control of the ship. Grant and Williams are consequently both drawing on speculation to fill in the gaps of what specifically happened during the uprising, but the text takes a clear position that Grant is "in the right" (44). Scholarship on *The Heroic Slave* has often read the curious absence of the revolt as a way for Douglass to avoid representing anything violent about the novella's hero, Madison Washington, but this absence in the story is one of *many* gaps that punctuate the novella.[36] The novella turns on absences of information because they are consistent features of the text's metafictional form and critical to its method of historical intervention.

When Williams doubles-down on his baseless account of events, going as far as to claim far-fetched hypothetical evidence for his theory, Grant directly confronts Williams' method in narrating the rebellion. He tells Williams, "'you can select your own method for distinguishing yourself;--the path of ambition in this direction is quite open to you in Virginia...but for myself...I have resolved never to set my foot on the deck of a slave ship, either as officer, or common sailor again." Grant recognizes that the underlying logic of Williams' story has little to

[36] For debates about the omitted rebellion, see Maggie Sale's "To Make the Past Useful: Frederick Douglass' Politics of Solidarity" and *The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity*. Also see Richard Yarborough's essay "Race, Violence, and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass's 'The Heroic Slave.'"

do with uncovering the truth of what happened in the rebellion; his methodology is aimed at boasting his own superiority and preserving the proslavery ideology upon which Virginia relies. Grant, on the other hand, has been compelled to hear, interpret, and speak truthfully. He clarifies that "it is not the high value that I set upon my life that makes me say what I have said; yet I'm resolved never to endanger my life again in a cause which my conscience does not approve. I dare say *here* what many men *feel*, but dare not *speak*, that this whole slave-trading business is a disgrace and scandal to Old Virginia" (45). Grant is not a self-proclaimed abolitionist; when Williams compares him to William Lloyd Garrison, Grant responds, "'In that, too, ...you were mistaken. I did all that any man with equal strength and presence of mind could have done." What marks Grant as one of the better interpretive listeners in the novella is the way that the discursive space of the ocean has enabled him to hear a different story about slavery and rebellion, one that has remarkable rhetorical similarities to the U.S revolution. Grant cannot in good conscience continue to support the slave trade having been exposed to the hypocrisies of Old Virginia's history. At the end of *The Heroic Slave,* it is up to readers to build on the information we've gathered through eavesdropping (reading) to interpret the most probable and honest speculative narrative about Madison Washington and the *Creole* Rebellion.

In *The Heroic Slave,* the facts do not speak for themselves. Often missing or scarce, the facts are vulnerable to ideological interlocutors of proslavery discourse. In the antebellum U.S., the true history of slavery was under assault by those intentionally misrepresenting and distorting the facts to try and ensure the future of chattel slavery. For Douglass, combatting this damaged discourse required not only producing powerful counter narratives but also exposing the foundational lies and faulty logics upon which proslavery history erected its authoritative façade. In *The Heroic Slave*, Douglass develops eavesdropping as a methodology for this discursive task.

A hermeneutics of eavesdropping requires antislavery speakers and writers to listen beyond what is being propagated in public discourse in order to recover honest voices outside the influence of proslavery ideology. Eavesdropping involves questioning what constitutes worthy social knowledge and an openness to hearing echoes of true principles of freedom and liberation in whatever spaces from which they resound. Finally, it also requires that speakers be brave enough to articulate honest speculative narratives that can combat the silences of the historical archive.

Chapter Three

"Give Ear Unto My Speech": Abundant Aurality in Harriet Jacobs'ss *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

The last chapter theorized how Douglass uses the listening form of eavesdropping to create a metafiction about recovering truths about chattel slavery amidst a landscape of damaged discourse. In this chapter, I turn to Harriet Jacobs'ss 1861 autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to show how listening is a dynamic concept through which Jacobs appeals to a readership of Northern white women and critiques the culture of sentiment that deemed their ears too delicate to listen to nefarious truths about slavery. *Incidents* details the time Jacobs spent in captivity under the system of U.S. chattel slavery as well as her eventual escape from slavery to the North. *Incidents* was the first slave narrative authored by a woman in the U.S, and it was also importantly one of the first slave narratives to directly address the pervasiveness of sexual abuse in slavery. Jacobs was initially reluctant to publish her life story. In the preface to the text, she writes that she was encouraged by a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia to publish a "sketch of [her] life," but she felt "altogether incompetent to such an undertaking" (5). After receiving additional encouragement from Amy Post, a friend of Jacobs's who was a Quaker abolitionist, Jacobs decided to write and publish her autobiography, *Incidents*. However, as the narrative reveals, Jacobs would continue to express her doubts about how her narrative would be received by the public. Jacobs was certainly justified in her hesitancy. During Jacobs's life, women in the U.S. were held to standards of femininity grounded in ideas of purity, domesticity, and submissiveness, a value system that historians and literary critics now refer to

as the cult of true womanhood.[37] In publishing her autobiography, which disclosed not just her own sexual violation at the hands of her enslaver, but also her deliberate decision to have sexual relations with an unmarried white man, Jacobs made herself vulnerable to harsh judgment and the court of public opinion. Moreover, Jacobs was tasked with writing her narrative while negotiating the many competing ideologies and rhetorics that defined the discourses of abolition, ex-slave narratives, and women's writing. Amidst these daunting obstacles, Jacobs moved forward with her decision to write her story and wrote it under the pseudonym of Linda Brent.[38]

Similar to the significance of aurality in Douglass's and Apess's writings, I argue that listening is a crucial feature of *Incidents'* narrative and political intervention. Scholars such as Valerie Smith, Harryette Mullen, and Michelle Burnham have demonstrated how Jacobs appropriated conventions of two dominant literary traditions—the sentimental novel and the slave narrative—to construct her authorial voice. For example, Burnham argues that Jacobs's use of sentimentality simultaneously draws upon rhetorics that were enormously popular with women writers and readers and critiques sentimentality when it is a performance of righteous feeling that conceals immoral thoughts and actions (290). Mullen focuses on how in contrast to the conventions of slave narratives established by black men that equated written literacy with freedom, Jacobs and other black women writers grafted a "resistant orality" onto their texts to show how "slaves countered institutionalized illiteracy" through verbal skills (254). Jacobs and other nineteenth century black women writers aimed to incorporate a "resistant orality" into their

[37] For discussion on Jacobs's *Incidents* and the cult of true womanhood, see Khattab and Burge. Hazel Carby argues that *Incidents* is "the most sophisticated, sustained narrative dissection of the conventions of true womanhood by a black woman author before emancipation" (47).

[38] When discussing Jacobs as she represents herself in the text, I will refer to her as Brent. When discussing Jacobs as an author, I will refer to her as Jacobs.

texts "inclusive of both the literate and the illiterate traditions that represented their lives" (xix). Building on this scholarship, I argue that an important way in which Jacobs appropriates these literary conventions is through careful attention to aurality in her writing. As scholars have noted, *Incidents* is a dialogic narrative.[39] Jacobs records significant dialogues and conversations from her life and quotes them directly in her text. As part of this narrative form, Jacobs also includes rich and detailed accounts of her own aural experiences as well as how those around her practiced different forms of listening. I focus on these aspects of *Incidents* to theorize how aurality in the narrative is a malleable concept and resilient sensory experience through which Jacobs constructs her story and guides her readers' responses.

Dutiful Listening and Truth

The introduction and preface of *Incidents* explicitly establishes listening as one way in which readers are instructed to engage with narrative. The epigraph on the title page, attributed to an anonymous woman of North Carolina establishes that people in the North are ignorant of the truths about slavery. It reads as follows: "Northerners know nothing at all about Slavery. They think it is perpetual bondage only. They have no conception of the depth of degradation involved in that word, SLAVERY; if they had, they would cease their efforts until so horrible a system was overthrown" (4). Directly below is an additional quote, a bible scripture from the book of Isaiah: "Rise up, ye women that are at ease! Hear my voice, ye careless daughters! Give ear unto my speech!" (4). Together, these quotes link truths about slavery not only with orality, as in speech, but also aurality, as in "give ear!" The epigraphs make clear that Northern women

[39] Mullen observes that Jacobs's "textual strategy does not involve the mimetic rhetoric Douglass employs, but a mimesis of quotation and a narrative constructed from collective testimony" (263). Cal M. Logue and Eugene F. Miller argue that *Incidents* "provides a rich source for communication studies because of its careful attention to the context and dynamics of interaction" and "its detailed record of dialogue" (182).

readers who are ignorant to the realities of chattel slavery must deliberately listen to Jacobs's account to learn the truth. The aural demand to "give ear" continues in the editor's note, written by Lydia Maria Child, a prominent social activist and writer in the nineteenth century. Child writes that she is well-aware that "many will accuse [her] of indecorum for presenting these pages to the public" since Jacobs's experiences in slavery "belong to a class which some call delicate subjects, and others indelicate" (6). Child knew that Jacobs's acknowledgment of her sexual exploitation would violate the codes of the cult of true womanhood that viewed any public discussion of sex immodest and immoral. But instead of finding fault in the subject matter of Jacobs's autobiography, Child locates blame in the listening practices of Northern white women. Critiquing the idea that there is social duty to protect white women's feelings and purity at all costs, she states, "I do this for the sake of our sisters in bondage, who are suffering wrongs so foul, that our ears are too delicate to listen to them" (6). Even in this statement's syntactical order, she prioritizes the subjects of enslaved women, "sisters in bondage," and their suffering of "wrongs so foul," before she mentions the delicacy of white women's ears. Child's introduction invalidates a prominent social concern about the corruption white women could undergo by listening to stories of enslavement by tying women's moral "sense of their duty" with choosing to listen to the experiences of enslaved women (6).

As part of the framing of *Incidents,* Jacobs's preface and Child's editor's note critique the culture of sentiment which prioritizes the feelings and sensibilities of white people over the violence black people suffered in slavery. In her book *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century American,* Xine Yao discusses the legacies of nineteenth century sentimentalism that has engendered the "weaponization of white feelings" (2). Yao rethinks American literature of the long nineteenth century and "reads against the grain of the

culture of sentiment" that has aligned white sympathy with the humanity of minoritized subjects (3). I build on Yao's argument that Jacobs's ambivalence about her readership's sympathy represents the political risks and compromises that black writers and activists take in soliciting white sympathy in the interest of social justice (3). Jacobs writes explicitly in her preface that she does not intend to seek sympathy from her readers but compassion for women still in bondage. I take up Yao's equation of nineteenth-century sentimentalism with the prioritization of white feeling over black subjectivity and argue that Jacobs uses aurality in *Incidents* to revise the cultural work of sentimental listening. Instead of a version of sentimental listening, which is focused on the sympathetic feelings of the white listener and how these feelings demonstrate their moral superiority, the opening of *Incidents* constructs a concept of moral listening that is defined by duty and truth.

The opening of *Incidents* makes listening a moral duty at the same time it fuses listening to accessing truth. For example, Jacobs's terrible realizations about life in bondage are frequently prompted by what she hears, and thus, painful truths are accessed auditorily in *Incidents*. Jacobs writes that as a child, she first learned she was enslaved by listening to "the talk around [her]" (10). She also learned the depths of slavery's cruelties through what she hears on the slave plantation. She recalls an enslaved man being whipped by Dr. Flint, her enslaver, and she states that "never before in my life had I heard hundreds of blows fall in succession on a human being" (15). The sounds cause Brent to suffer a kind of tinnitus: the man's cries "rang in [her] ears for months afterwards," and she would "never forget that night" (15). While she later sees the blood-stained cowhide whip, her trauma is registered as an auditory one; she cannot unhear or mute the man's sounds of pain. Mullen aptly describes Jacobs as an "earwitness" to the crimes of slavery in *Incidents* (262). Jacobs's recollection of hearing a man being whipped invokes a common

trope in the slave narrative tradition. In his widely read 1845 autobiography *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass writes about the first time in his childhood when he witnessed the brutality of slavery. He recalls seeing and hearing his Aunt Hester being whipped by her enslaver, a "terrible spectacle" that he would never forget (16). Jacobs appropriates this convention of the slave narrative but ties the truth of what she witnesses to an aural form of knowledge. If Douglass's experience was a "terrible spectacle," Jacobs's experience was a terrible and audible realization. While invoking the slave narrative tradition, this scene also revises sympathetic listening in the sentimentalist tradition, which framed sympathetic listening as a vehicle for identification with a person deserving of sympathy. Jacobs's listening to the suffering of a man being whipped does not engender identification with the man; it facilitates her knowledge of the truth about the cruelties of slavery.

In *Incidents*, Jacobs is clear that many audible truths are painful. Mimicking the repeated lashings of the whip, the man's cries continue to sound in her ear for months. In subtle contrast to Douglass, who reflects on hearing the suffering of his aunt by talking about the spectacle of violence, Jacobs registers the lasting impact of this early experience with violence in terms of the ringing in her ears. By rendering the effects of this moment as one akin to tinnitus, a persistent aural ringing or echo, Jacobs casts the trauma of slavery as one that stays with her and repeats its violence even after a singular act of violence is over. The repeated lashes and the way they engender repeated ringing in Jacobs's ear also introduce the idea of an echo—perpetuation and repetition—as integral to Jacobs's depiction of the violence of slavery for women. The trauma is importantly not visible or dependent on visually witnessing the pained black body of an enslaved person. In *Incidents*, many of the lasting traumas experienced by enslaved people are not visible, and thus it becomes incumbent on readers to listen.

Listening and Sexual Exploitation

Incidents was one of the first U.S. slave narratives to address systemic sexual exploitation in chattel slavery, and thus, there was no existing narrative form or genre in which Jacobs could narrate her experience. As Valerie Smith observes, autobiographies written by freed and fugitive slaves were often "limited by the antislavery agenda," and Jacobs was "doubly bound by the form in which she wrote, for it contained a plot more compatible with received notions of masculinity than with those of womanhood" (225). Jacobs used the rhetoric of the sentimental novel as a way of "talking about her vulnerability to the constant threat of rape," but it also "imposed upon her restrictions of its own" (225). Sentimental fiction was broadly understood as popular domestic fiction, novels written by women and for women, that focused on themes such as purity and chastity, morality, and marriage. Sentimental fiction emphasized the connection between the head and the heart, and the importance of "feeling right," a phrase popularized by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As a genre that was widely accepted as women's writing, the sentimental genre provided Jacobs a rhetoric to draw upon. There were, of course, limits imposed by an existing framework like the sentimental novel, limits that were in conflict with the slave narrative and the condition of being enslaved. As Mullen suggests, these conflicts that Jacobs encountered in writing a slave narrative and a sentimental novel illuminate "the ideological limits of 'true womanhood' or bourgeois femininity" (254). The moments in Jacobs's story that cannot be directly articulated reveal the inadequacy of the sentimental narrative as a rhetorical mode for representing enslaved women's lives.

Jacobs's attentiveness to how her words would be received by her audience is not just evidence of the limitations set by the cult of true womanhood or the rhetoric of sentiment, but also indicative of the limitations set by the anti-slavery movement's ideas about slave testimony

and its impact on a white female audience. In her article "Speech, Listening, and Female Sexuality in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," Deborah Garfield discusses the culture around abolition, public speaking, and gender from the 1830s through 1850s. Garfield writes about the well-known sisters and abolitionists Sarah and Angelina Grimké and notes that "one of the recurring criticisms of the Grimkés was that their lectures on the sexual crimes of slavery wounded the fragile ears of their middle-class female auditors" (21). Oration for many abolitionists was a powerful tool of influence; the immediacy of the speaker on stage, the belief in the power of skillful oration, and the often-assumed connection between spontaneity, truth, and orality made public speaking a significant part of the anti-slavery project. But the embodiment of public speech was often seen as a significant problem for women speakers and listeners alike. As Garfield points out, speech had the capacity "not only to convert the intellect and the soul, but ravish the senses as well" (19). Altogether, the "compact of the ear and speech involves a 'startling' mental ineffability which ripens into revelation" (20). While the intimate scene of speaking and listening was seen as politically powerful, it carried with it a danger, as that influence could intentionally or unintentionally excite revelations that were not pure or pious. As a black previously enslaved woman, Jacobs had to navigate the restrictions placed on her narrative by the sentimental genre, her white female readership, and the polemics and expectations of an anti-slavery movement.

Jacobs rhetorical strategy for talking about her sexual violation was to frame it in terms of lewd speech and coerced listening. One of Jacobs's first experiences of sexual exploitation occurs when Dr. Flint begins whispering sexually explicit words to her. At the young age of 15, Dr. Flint "began to whisper foul words in [Brent's] ear" (26). She describes the first time it happened: "it was on a lovely spring morning, and when I marked the sunlight dancing here and

there, its beauty seemed to mock my sadness. For my master, whose restless craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom to devour, had just left me, with stinging, scorching words; words that scathed the ear and brain like fire" (18). Jacobs expresses her desperation to avoid Dr. Flint and keep herself from being corrupted by his words, but she relents: "[y]oung as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import" (26). In representing this assault as a spoken one, Jacobs avoids articulating a more embodied scene of assault. Importantly, though, the reader is never told that physical abuse does *not* happen. The relentlessness with which Dr. Flint seeks Jacobs out and his attempts to find her alone force the reader to confront the possibility and likelihood that Dr. Flint's abuses do not stop at lewd speech.

Jacobs also attests to how common it was for enslavers to sexually violate enslaved women by framing it as common knowledge among enslaved people. After stating the sad truth about what happens to many young, enslaved women, Jacobs notes that very often, the white slave mistress will unleash her jealous wrath on the victims of the abuse rather than her husband, the perpetrator. The knowledge of these encounters is widely known, and Jacobs expresses the following lament:

> Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn before she is twelve years old, why it is that her mistress hates such and such among the slaves. Perhaps the child's own mother is among the hated ones. She listens to the outbreaks of jealous passion, and cannot help but understanding what is the cause. She will become prematurely knowing in evil things. (26)

Jacobs again avoids writing explicitly about sexual violation. She uses auditory metaphor and rhetoric that attests to its truth; even very young children are aware of the sexual exploitation and

violence that occurs on slave plantations. Jacobs's description of how enslaved children come to know about sexual violence on plantations has implications for her readers. In slavery, even young children do not need to hear explicitly of sexual violence to know it exists. In her narrative, Jacobs does not need to directly describe the physical abuse the enslaver inflicts on enslaved women for the reader to know exactly what is happening. Just as the young child on the slave plantation cannot help but know the reason for the white mistress's rage, the reader cannot avoid confronting the truth behind Jacobs's carefully curated words.

Representing sexual violence through speaking and listening gives Jacobs a means of control over her story. She can address the vile and immoral acts occurring in slavery without having those exact words be part of her narrative. As much of *Incidents* suggests, there are many ways in which speech itself and forced listening are corruptive forces. So, while spoken discourse is often the medium that exposes the crimes committed within slavery, there are many speech acts that are themselves pernicious, as are the sexually explicit words of Dr. Flint and the jealous words of rage expressed by Mrs. Flint. The way in which Jacobs indirectly writes about sexual exploitation—she does not reproduce sexually offensive words verbatim in her text, but she describes her experience of listening to them—protects Jacobs from having to expose the details of her victimization. Jacobs was clearly aware of the risks involved in writing about sexual content, especially for an audience of white women whose values were guided by the cult of true womanhood. Not only was it culturally impermissible to speak openly about sexuality and sexual exploitation, but Jacobs, as a black women discussing her and other women's sexual abuse suffered at the hands of white men, was also writing on a subject matter that evoked cultural anxieties around the corruption of white women by stereotypes of the seductive and

promiscuous black woman and fear of miscegenation. Jacobs's use of aurality protects her from some dangers she could experience by addressing a white reading public.

Aural Agency

In *Incidents*, listening is not a passive sensory experience; it is a dynamic concept through which Jacobs can articulate the gendered and racial power dynamics of enslavement. It is also often the action that is occurring during moments in the text that some critics have read in terms of silence.[40] So while Jacobs describes her vulnerability to sexual violation through aural experience, she does not allow listening to accrue singular or limited meaning in her narrative. I argue that in response to the ways that sentimentalism and the cult of true womanhood imposed narrow parameters for how women could experience and articulate their lives, Jacobs's listening is abundant in its many uses and meanings. Although Brent experiences harmful coerced listening, she frequently uses her aural faculties as a source of empowerment, a way in which she can attend to and have control over her surroundings. During the many years of Brent's escape from slavery, her faculties of hearing are what sustain her, as she uses eavesdropping to surveil her surroundings, acquire information about Dr. Flint's pursuit of her, and secure the safety of her children.

For a time, Brent stayed in a house with her friend Betty whose white mistress agreed to hide her. She stayed in a small room above where Betty slept and sometimes hid below the floorboards in the kitchen. There, Jacobs was able to hear news of Dr. Flint and his search for her by listening to the voices that populated the house and those that could be heard outside on the street. Betty, while performing her duties inside the house, often spoke loudly or retold stories

[40] See Patricia D. Hopkins' "Seduction or Rape: Deconstructing the Black Female Body in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" and Carol E. Henderson's *Scarring the Black Body: Race and Representation in African American Literature.*

she heard throughout the day so that Brent could overhear the information. This is one of the first instances in the narrative that Jacobs explicitly describes her listening as pleasurable. After Brent's escape, Dr. Flint has her children and her brother William taken to jail; he hoped to convince Jacobs's family to give him information about her whereabouts. But Ellen falls sick with measles and eventually must be taken out of jail and to the Flint's home to recover. Through the grapevine, Jacobs learns that Ellen's constant crying eventually overwhelms Mrs. Flint, and she sends her back to jail where Jacobs feels she is safe with her brother William. Jacobs writes that she smiles when she hears a report of Mrs. Flint saying, "she should either kill my child or spoil her…and [Brent] considered it as one of God's special providences that Ellen screamed till she was carried back to jail" (83). Brent's position as an unseen eavesdropper affords her access to information not intended for her ears. Though at times this information is distressing for Brent—she recalls hearing "the patrols and slave-hunters conferring together about the capture of runaways"—she also eavesdrops on words that bring her relief (117). She smiles to herself when she hears that Ellen was brought back to the jail, and out of the Flint's house, because of her incessant screaming. The moments when Brent's eavesdropping brings her relief and joy underscore the capaciousness and resilience of her aural experience.

Later, after Mr. Sands manages to buy Jacobs's children, and she can be sure of their safety, she reflects that it was the first time since she felt happy since she was a child. In contrast to previous moments in which she fears Dr. Flint's voice, she now "heard of the old doctor's threats, but they no longer had the same power to trouble me… whatever slavery might do to me, it could not shackle my children" (88). Even though Jacobs is confined to a small hiding space, she also finds power in hearing while remaining unseen. These are some of the first scenes in which Jacobs overhears words that bring her comfort and empowerment. The knowledge of her

children's freedom, which she gains from listening to the news circulating around her, also undermines the power of Dr. Flint's voice. Her escape alongside the certainty of her children's safety undermines the violating force of Dr. Flint's speech. Her practice of surveillance while hiding outperforms in many ways the surveillance practiced by Flint. She can hear but is not seen, and she takes pleasure in appropriating and inverting the oppressive system of observation that perpetuates slavery.

In the chapter "The Loophole of Retreat," Jacobs's depiction of listening becomes synonymous with her resilience. Brent eventually must move to her grandmother's house in order to avoid discovery, and her uncle prepares a small space in the attic, a garret, for Brent to stay in. Once again, Brent finds herself in a space where she can hear and also remain unseen. Her visual field, however, is extremely limited, and as time passes—Brent spends a total of seven years hiding in the garret—she slowly loses use of many of her other faculties. Her sight does not afford her many uses; she notes that "[m]orning came. I knew it only by the noises I heard; for in my small den, day and night were all the same" (92). Her body begins to deteriorate, as she has very little space to move and cannot exercise her muscles. The thin walls surrounding the garret offer her very little protection from the elements, and she suffers from extreme temperatures. She writes that her "limbs were benumbed by inaction, and the cold filled them with cramp" (97). She eventually suffers a significant decline in her oral faculties. Her "face and tongue stiffened, and [she] lost the power of speech" (97). Her grandmother and uncle do whatever they can to sustain Brent's health, but ultimately, she becomes primarily dependent on her sense of hearing. Listening is what she wields to continue cultivating her plan for escape, her plan for securing her and her children's freedom, and her plan to continuously evade and disrupt Dr. Flint's search for her. Being positioned close to the public street, Jacobs remarks that

she is able to overhear quite a bit of local conversation: "Southerners have the habit of stopping and talking in the street, and I heard many conversations not intended for my ears. I heard slave-hunters planning how to catch some poor fugitive. Several times I heard allusions to Dr. Flint, myself, and the history of my children" (94). And in another instance of pleasure, she remarks that she is not "comfortless. I heard the voices of my children. There was joy and there was sadness in the sound" (92). In the garret, Brent's listening is resilient and expansive. When her other senses fail her, her hearing secures her sense of time and space. And though she overhears sorrowful information at times, her listening is expansive enough to allow her joy when she hears the voices of her children.

The garret also importantly provides Brent strategic knowledge regarding Dr. Flint's pursuit to find her. Eavesdropping affords Brent the comfort of knowing that the general consensus is that she is currently living somewhere in the North, and that by all accounts, Dr. Flint is convinced of this fact as well. For Brent, it's important that Flint be convinced she is in the North—if he were to suspect she is in the vicinity, her close friends and family would be in danger. One day, she decides to enact a plan to give Flint more evidence of her location in the North. She writes two letters, one to her grandmother and one to Dr. Flint, expressing her desire for her children to come North and live with her. She then asks a friend to travel North and mail the letters to Flint from Boston. Brent anticipates that the letter will inspire Dr. Flint to visit her grandmother, so she cracks the door to eavesdrop on their conversation. From her concealed position, she listens to Dr. Flint read her letter aloud to her grandmother, but he has revised the letter for his own scheme. Flint tells her grandmother that Brent is actually miserable in the North, and she wishes to return home. Brent, however, has "heard it all" and finds his actions "as good as a comedy" (103). Brent's plan works, and Flint makes efforts to find her in Boston. She

is satisfied with the ruse and vows to keep sending occasional letters from the North. Brent is able to wield significant power from her position in the garret, and her auditory access to the world while remaining unseen mobilizes her course of actions.

Jacobs spent seven years in a space she referred to as a "prison," and yet her ability to eavesdrop on her immediate surroundings afforded her some agency during this time (105). Jacobs's time in the garret is a reminder that not speaking does not have to equate to silence or absence. Silence, omission, and exclusion—these are all terms that conjure ideas of inaction and absence. But Jacobs is far from being absent or inactive while she is in the garret. She may not be speaking, but she in fact, through her listening, observing, planning, and enacting her escape. Listening is often assumed to be the other side of speaking, and on a spectrum of inaction to action, speaking is often assumed to be situated more closely to action than listening. But in *Incidents*, listening is a powerful form of action for Jacobs, and she takes what is, at times, a source of her own vulnerability—being forced to listen to words she does not want to hear—and turns that same sensibility into a catalyst for own freedom.

Right Listening

Jacobs details numerous scenes of listening that guide her readers to "right listening," a phrase I've adapted from Stowe's articulation of "right feeling." Beyond descriptions of her own listening, Jacobs includes in her narrative descriptions of how others, particularly women, listen to her experiences. In doing so, Jacobs guides her readers to reject a version of sentimental listening about feeling right, that, as Yao argues, prioritizes white feelings over black subjectivity. Jacobs encourages right listening, which is bound to truth, duty, and female familial love. Jacobs's depictions of Mrs. Flint contain some of the most notable sentimental rhetoric, and she is also the character in *Incidents* whose listening engenders reprehensible behavior. After

suffering many of Dr. Flint's assaults, Jacobs writes that it might seem to her readers like an obvious good decision for her to have appealed to Mrs. Flint for guidance and protection since Dr. Flint's behavior also betrays the bonds of Christian marriage. But within the system of slavery, the white mistress cannot maintain her purity or her separation from violence. Jacobs writes that "the mistress, who ought to protect the helpless victim, has no other feelings towards her but those of jealousy and rage" (26). This observation bears out in her own individual struggle with the Flints. As Dr. Flint's transgressions become more brazen and frequent, Mrs. Flint becomes suspicious, and she demands Brent tell her the truth about what has transpired between them. Brent does as she is ordered and tells Mrs. Flint of her husband's transgressions. Mrs. Flint is seemingly moved to pain and grief, an emotional response that within the sentimental novel tradition would confirm Mrs. Flint's sensitive and righteous disposition. She promises to protect Jacobs, but no sooner had she made this promise than she began to place blame on Brent. Mrs. Flint orders Brent to begin sleeping in her room, but it is not out of a desire to protect her. On numerous occasions, Brent wakes in the middle of the night to find Mrs. Flint bending over her; at times "she whispered in my ear, as though it was her husband who was speaking to me, and listened to hear what I would answer" (31). The scene is a jarring one. According to the ideas in Child's preface, Mrs. Flint is supposed to have womanly sensibilities that are delicate, pious, and submissive. In this moment, however, Mrs. Flint is far from being virtuous, vulnerable, and in need of protection. Mrs. Flint speaks the same vulgar language as her husband, and her body is dominant and threatening, hovering over the sleeping and vulnerable Brent.

Garfield argues that when Mrs. Flint whispers vulgar words to Brent in *Incidents,* Jacobs inverts a culturally prominent paranoia that black enslaved women are inherently sexual and

promiscuous, and left to their own devices, will corrupt the innocent white woman. Rather than it being the enslaved girl who "'whispered into the ear of the unsuspecting [white] girl and poison her youthful mind," it is in fact the white mistress of the slave plantation who whispered into the ear of the vulnerable and helpless enslaved girl (23). In taking on Dr. Flint's speech, Mrs. Flint takes on the role of the corrupt white male enslaver and sexual perpetrator. Jacobs's description of her time spent under the intense surveillance of Mrs. Flint shows how sexual exploitation in slavery is not a series of isolated incidents committed by a few immoral individuals. The sexual crimes committed by white slaveholding men are ubiquitous and a catalyst for further violence. Mrs. Flint, who, according to the cult of true womanhood, should have been both a victim to her husband's infidelity and a sympathetic witness to another woman's victimization, reproduces her husband's actions in her desperate attempt to blame Brent and thus free her husband from the responsibility of his own actions. By prioritizing her own feelings, Mrs. Flint's listening leads her to compromises her womanly virtue as it is defined by the cult of true womanhood.

Mrs. Flint's reaction to her husband's transgressions models for readers one way in which a white female audience or readership could respond to Jacobs's narrative. In a moment of forced testimony, Brent reveals to Mrs. Flint the truth of Dr. Flint's behavior. Instead of showing sympathy for Brent, Mrs. Flint had "no compassion for the victim of her husband's perfidy" (30). The pain and pity that manifest on Mrs. Flint's face come from her own wounded dignity and feelings of being betrayed. But Mrs. Flint doesn't only err in her misplaced sympathy. As Jacobs's story will show, Mrs. Flint's most insidious behavior is her decision to actively try and find fault in Brent, the coerced listener, as a way of addressing her own wounded feelings. The moment in which Mrs. Flint stands over Brent and whispers in her ear is a shocking scene. The idea of a white woman speaking sexually explicit words into the ears of an enslaved woman

would have also been scandalous to a public audience. But it's also an ironic moment. In her dogged desire to prove that Brent must be responsible in some way for Dr. Flint's transgressions, Mrs. Flint both re-victimizes Brent and incriminates herself in the sexual crime. Mrs. Flint's sentimental listening that prioritizes how she feels leads her to be the kind of woman who is not living up to the mythology of a virtuous and pious woman.

Mrs. Flint's abusive behaviors represent the risk Jacobs took in vocalizing her sexual assault to a white female readership. Jacobs is one of the few women who did, in fact, publicly address the issue of rampant sexual abuse in slavery. But generally, the "secrets of slavery are concealed like those of the Inquisition" (31). For example, Dr. Flint was thought to have around 11 children with enslaved women, but it was only spoken about in whispers. Jacobs writes, "did the other mothers dare to tell who was the father of their children? Did the other slaves dare to allewd to it, except in whispers among themselves? No, indeed! They knew too well the terrible consequences" (31). The institution of slavery perpetuated itself through an ideology that cast black women as, at the very least, complicit in sexual relations with white slaveholders, and often, willing instigators. In trying to find evidence for how Jacobs's story fits into that proslavery ideology, Mrs. Flint causes her own moral downfall.

Jacobs's description of the time she spent under Mrs. Flint's intense surveillance illuminates, once again, the rhetorical maneuvers that Jacobs used to write about subject matter that could potentially undermine her credibility and make her the target of public judgment. Jacobs writes *about* the salacious words spoken by Mrs. Flint without reproducing them verbatim on the page. The reader does not actually read the exact words that Brent heard. While Dr. Flint fills Brent's mind with "foul words" and "unclean images," Jacobs, the narrator, substitutes Dr. Flint's verbatim language with the indirect descriptive language of "foul words" and "unclean

images" (6). Jacobs's language describes the words she hears, but they are not direct reproductions of Dr. Flint's verbal abuses. Similarly, when Jacobs writes about the times Mrs. Flint spoke obscene words to her while she was sleeping, she does not directly produce Mrs. Flint's words on the page. In the preceding scene when Brent tells Mrs. Flint about her husband's abuses, Jacobs the narrator produces quoted dialogue between them leading up to the very moment where Brent divulges indelicate details. Mrs. Flint is quoted when she asks Brent to swear upon the bible to tell her the truth, and Brent's response that she is innocent is also quoted in the text. The quoted dialogue ends when Jacobs as narrator relays to the reader "I did as she ordered. As I went on with my account her color changed…" (30). Jacobs does not quote what she told Mrs. Flint. Instead, she glosses over the details and alludes to the nature of her words by describing the color change in Mrs. Flint's face. Jacobs repeats this rhetorical maneuver when she summarizes Mrs. Flint's lewd whispering by stating that Mrs. Flint would whisper "as though it was her husband" (31). While the reader is asked to confront the truth of Jacobs's experiences, the narrative itself does not recount the words that "scathed" Brent's ears (18).

If Mrs. Flint is the figure in *Incidents* who represents sentimental listening that makes white feelings more important than the violence inflicted on enslaved women, then Jacobs's daughter, Ellen, is the figure who encapsulates right listening, which is guided by a duty to truth and female familial love. Near the end of the narrative while living in Boston with Ellen, Brent attempts to tell Ellen that Mr. Sands is her biological father; she fears that Ellen will hear a less accurate and insensitive version of the story from another person. When Jacobs begins to tell her daughter about her "early sufferings in slavery," Ellen stops her, crying "'O, don't mother! Please don't tell me any more'" (146). Ellen then reveals that she had known for a long time that Mr. Sands was her father, but he had never treated her with love or kindness. All her love was

reserved for her mother only. Brent is shocked at her daughter's silence on the matter, but she remarks that she "loved the dear girl better for the delicacy she had manifested towards her unfortunate mother" (146). Until this moment, Brent had been protecting her daughter from what she believed would be a painful revelation, but Ellen had already heard the news from the nurse who worked in the Sands household. Ellen asks to be relieved of hearing an account of her mother's relations with Mr. Sands, and Jacobs grants her this request. In contrast to Jacobs, who during her youth is exposed repeatedly to unwelcome whispers and sounds, Ellen asks to be relieved of hearing painful words repeated, and she is granted that relief. Jacobs reflects that her daughter's silence on the matter and her unwavering love for her mother is a reflection of her delicacy, a term that returns us to Child's reference to the "delicate ears" of Northern white women readers.

Ellen's delicacy revises the idea of delicate listening that Child describes. While Northern white women's delicate ears are defined by a kind of not listening that protects their own feelings and virtue, Ellen's request to not hear of her mother's suffering stems from her desire to love and protect her mother. In contrast to Mrs. Flint, who demands to hear about the repeated sexual whisperings of Dr. Flint to ascertain whether her own virtues have been violated, Ellen ends the perpetuation of what might be read as a reckless cycle of salacious speech. She asks not to hear of Jacobs's relation with Mr. Sands, not to preserve her own purity, but because she wants to preserve her mother's "delicacy" (146). Ellen has already been introduced to some of the realities of slavery; she learns that Mr. Sands is her father, and she is painfully aware that he does not love her and treats her differently than the daughter he raises with his white wife. Ellen then takes on a similar role of protectress, stopping her mother from speaking words that pain her and preventing herself, and thus the reader, from hearing details regarding Mr. Sands. The only

person in this exchange who does not know the explicit details of Jacobs relation with Mr. Sands is the reader, and to desire the details would mean aligning oneself more with Mrs. Flint who demands to hear salacious details from Brent.

Child's editor's note chastises the delicate ears of the Northern white woman reader and makes them culpable in maintaining the veil kept over the horrors of slavery. Delicacy, or delicate non-listening, becomes synonymous with the crimes committed in slavery. Ellen revises delicate listening by making it restorative. She listens to and acknowledges the realities of her mother's relationship with Mr. Sands, but she does not make demands to hear. She also draws the appropriate conclusion by focusing on the love she has for her mother rather than her own feelings. Ellen practices delicate listening in that she does not force her mother to repeatedly confess her shame, as Mrs. Flint does. If there is a superior model for listening in *Incidents*, Ellen is offered as the fitting one. The delicate listening she practices perhaps offers a solution or end to the ringing trauma of auditory violation in *Incidents.*

Jacobs's *Incidents* offers abundant scenes of listening that revise the concept of sympathetic listening in sentimental discourse. Eschewing a narrow definition of sympathetic listening associated with white women's right feelings and moral superiority, *Incidents* outlines the many forms of listening that shape Jacobs's life and the lives of those around her. Dutiful listening, compassionate listening, coerced listening, eavesdropping—all of these aural experiences are key to understanding how Jacobs's *Incidents* intervenes in the literary and social world around her. Rather than perpetuate a trope of sentimental listening that is ideologically and narratively limiting, Jacobs illuminates the moral flaws of sentimental listening that prioritizes white women's feelings over the painful truths about what black women endure in the system of

slavery. In *Incidents*, listening is an abundant and dynamic concept capacious enough to capture the vexed and complex experiences of Jacobs's life in slavery and journey to freedom.

Coda

Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* and the Tyranny of a Vocal Minority

Earwitnesses in America recovers the dynamic and active dimensions of listening in nineteenth century literature and politics. As the previous chapters demonstrate, literary scholarship on the oratorical culture of the mid-eighteenth through nineteenth century U.S. has disproportionately analyzed the role of the human voice and largely ignored the role of listening. The privileged topic of public speech in this literary scholarship is understandable because voice is a word we use to describe literary form, but as I've shown, many authors whose writings showed a concern with public voices were also explicitly invested in how their texts could instruct listening behaviors and perform forms of public hearings. Overemphasizing the relationship between literature, politics, and voice in this period runs the risk of attending to individuals whose voices were heard because they had access to public space and audiences based on their own political privilege. As I argue in Chapter One, William Apess and the Mashpee Wampanoag were not just fighting for self-representation in their pursuit of Native sovereignty but for the right to be heard. Whereas an individual like John Adams—white, male, and an established politician—could unhesitatingly state his belief in the power of eloquence, Native Americans like Apess and the Mashpee had to work to "enable" the State and the public to hear their voices (Apess 205). Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs stake out their own articulation of the right to be heard. Douglass uses the concept of eavesdropping to register fiction's capacity to make historical truths audible despite the silences imposed by chattel slavery, and Jacobs's complex relationship to her auditory experiences while enslaved registers the distinct difficulty she faced bringing her story as a black formerly enslaved woman to a listening public that was primarily female and white. Shifting the critical focus to listening

allows us to see oratorical culture as also an aural one, one that has far more listeners than it does speakers. Thus, this paradigm shift brings into focus individuals whose racial, gendered, and class identities made it difficult to make their voices heard in public and influential ways. Through their writings, Apess, Douglass, and Jacobs illuminate the centrality of listening in navigating the tumultuous circumstances of marginalization, dispossession, and enslavement.

This coda turns to Charles Brockden Brown's novel *Wieland* because as a novel about ventriloquism that Brown published around the turn of the eighteenth century, it has been the urtext on the politics of voice and democracy in American literary criticism. In contrast to the authors on which this dissertation focuses, Brown's identity as a white and educated man afforded him a voice and access to the public sphere that was not a given for women and people of color. How might a focus on aurality, as it is explored and conceptualized by the writings of Apess, Douglass, and Jacobs, revise or complicate the way in which speaking and listening are understood in *Wieland*? This question guides this coda.

Following the influential work of Jay Fliegelman, many scholars have analyzed *Wieland* within the tumultuous historical moment in which Brown was living and in relation to Brown's life—his thoughts on the legal system and his career as a lawyer, his ideas about writing and fiction, and his reservations and doubts about the new American nation created through revolution and language.[41] In much of this work, the voices in *Wieland* stand in for the major social and political voices that created the American revolution and dramatize concurrent debates about the intersection of authority, agency, and liberty in the new republic. For example, Eric W. Wolfe argues that *Wieland*'s concern about voice and identity offers a critique of the "drive toward national identity" based on the fantasy of univocality. Christopher Looby reads Brown as

[41] See Fliegelman, Looby, and Wolfe.

a “complex counter-revolutionary figure” and *Wieland* as a critique of the viability of a political order based on vocal acts (202).

This coda argues that insofar as listeners far outnumbered influential speakers in U.S. oratorical culture, *Wieland* is less a novel about the political valences of speech and identity and more a detailed account of the treacherous aural landscape in the nascent U.S. Clara’s descriptions of her aural experiences and her inner psychological wrestling with explaining what she hears takes up the majority of the novel's pages. The inexplicable vocal events that take place—the voices that seem to come from no perceptible speaker, the voices that sound like other characters but say confounding and out-of-character words, the voice of God that allegedly commands Theodore to sacrifice his own family—take up significantly less space in the novel than the descriptions of Clara’s thoughts about what she hears. Clara also offers an enormous catalog of types of listening. There is listening “with silent respect”; listening “with emotions of surprise”; listening “with visible resentment”; listening “in vain”; listening “with seriousness”; listening with a “silent, half-serious smile”; listening “with deep attention”; listening “without marks of surprise or incredulity”; listening “willingly”; listening “with the deepest anxiety”; listening with “avidity and benefit.” Even events are described in terms of listening—occurrences that seem singular and frightening—are described as “unheard of” happenings. And when Clara is confounded about the voice of a family friend outside her bedroom door, she asks herself “[s]hould I confide in the testimony of my ears?” This is one among many significant moments when Clara explicitly ponders the reliability of her listening. In privileging the voice in a novel about speaking and listening, it goes without notice that the novel is constituted primarily through acts of listening. Thus, *Wieland* is part of what I have called “listening literatures,” a literary archive of the long nineteenth-century U.S. that also includes the works of Apess,

Douglass, and Jacobs. These are all authors whose writings not only incorporate rich descriptions of listening behaviors and attitudes but also claim listening as a formal feature. They often imagine their writing as a form of listening, a way of giving ear to stories that are seeking an audience.

Read in relationship to representations of listening in Apess, Douglass, and Jacobs, *Wieland* can be understood as a novel that warns against inflating the power of a minority of voices to the detriment of a majority of listeners. Though Carwin is the singular ventriloquist in the novel whose acts of voice-throwing presumably wreak havoc on this small intimate community, the novel does not actually resolve all its mysteries through his ventriloquism. Carwin takes responsibility for a few vocal events, but his explanation does not answer all the questions that Clara and readers have about why Carwin interfered the way he did and—the most perplexing question in the novel—why and how he influenced Theodore Wieland to commit parricide. At the end of the novel, we are still left questioning whether Carwin is actually responsible for all the horrors suffered by this small community of people. Moreover, we are left wondering about the connection between Theodore's actions and the death and ideological fanaticism of his and Clara's father, who died when they were very young by supposed spontaneous combustion. Vocal utterance and the power of Carwin's voice in *Wieland* are ultimately insufficient objects of blame for the events that devastate the cast of characters. Clara admits this herself at the novel's closing. She writes that the "evils" Carwin authored "owed their existence to the errors of the sufferers." She continues with a series of suppositionals that might have mitigated the situation. If "Wieland had framed juster notions of moral duty," and if she had "been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight," then Carwin, that "double-tongued deceiver," would not have succeeded (181). Importantly, Clara does not give much credit to the

power of Carwin's ventriloquism. Instead, she dwells on her own aural faculties, believing that had she been a more astute or critical listener, she might have avoided the pain and suffering of the past unfortunate events.

Clara's final comments are the closest the novel comes to an explicitly stated moral or lesson, and though her conclusion does not place adequate blame on Carwin's actions, she does admirably stake out a way for her to move forward with more agency as a listener. By embracing a form of listening informed by calm rationality and precaution, Clara believes that she will not again be susceptible to a deceptive voice. Clara, though, isn't the only listener who is duped by the seduction of the voice. Virtually all the characters in *Wieland* fall victim to giving too much authority to powerful voices. In listening to what he presumes is the voice of God, Theodore Wieland murders his entire family. Pleyel sacrifices his love for Clara because he places too much emphasis on the articulations of love he hears being spoken between Clara and Carwin, and consequently, refuses to hear Clara's own explanation. Carwin himself is bound to the power of voice through his ventriloquism—though his intentions are vague, we get the sense that the power of ventriloquism is too seductive for him to resist. This, I argue, is an odd inversion of one of Alexis de Tocqueville's observations about American democracy. Tocqueville wrote that "the main evil" of U.S. democracy arises from a potential "tyranny of the majority," in which a majority opinion can consistently neglect the interests and needs of a minority (303). While "majority" might be presumed to refer to quantity, what Brown's *Wieland* and the other authors in this dissertation articulate is a problem with the *perception* of a vocal majority. In *Wieland*, the characters who suffer from listening to Carwin's voice greatly outnumber the singular Carwin, and thus the listening majority is victimized by the authority of a vocal minority.

Clara's ending statement, which outlines a long list of ways that listeners could have avoided victimhood, articulates this asymmetry and warns against mistaking vocal amplitude and force with democratic authority. This critique finds a surprising analogue in Harriet Jacobs's autobiography in which the opposite of speaking is not complicit silence but active listening. Jacobs clearly details the many ways in which her silence is not synonymous with consent or complicity and is rather a marker of her perceptive and meticulous listening that often enables her resistance and acts of subversion. Clara and Jacobs both illustrate how a loud vocal minority attempts to interpolate them into a narrative they question and actively resist.

Apess's writings take up some of Tocqueville's and Brown's observations more directly. Through a series of conjectures, Tocqueville outlines how the tyranny of the majority could possibly manifest:

> When an individual or a part is wronged in the United States, to whom can he apply for redress? If to public opinion, public opinion constitutes the majority; if to the legislature, it represents the majority, and implicitly obeys its injunctions; if to the executive power, it is appointed by the majority, and remains a passive tool in its hands; the public troops consist of the majority under arms; the jury is the majority invested with the right of hearing judicial cases; and in certain States even the judges are elected by the majority. (303)

Indian Nullification articulates some of these questions almost verbatim but with a subtle though significant distinction. How can the wronged Mashpee Wampanoag apply for redress if they can never receive a hearing? Tocqueville wasn't considering that a "majority" might be established through vocal amplitude rather than number, and a tyranny of the majority could actually be a tyranny of minority masquerading as a majority, such as *Wieland*'s Carwin. Apess and the

Mashpee began their political work by garnering a public hearing outside of the legal sphere to dismantle dominant perceptions about Native Americans as an already vanished people who were incapable of self-rule. This narrative had been circulated widely by a minority of primarily white male authors—a minority as in the number of these writers—whose political privileges allowed their voices to reach large audiences and masquerade as representative authorities. Like Jacobs, Apess's writings take up and also correct Tocqueville's observation of how democracy could be tyrannical. Jacobs dismantles the idea of a "majority" by separating silence from submission and showing how listening can mean dissent; Apess does so by demonstrating that the voices of democracy are not equally represented and heard within the public sphere. Thus, the idea that vocal power and reach represents majority opinion and can create a democratic politics is an illusion. Jacobs's and Apess's writings make clear that the vocal illusion in Brown's fictional novel is not so fictional after all in a democracy that privileges the public voice.

Though *Wieland* is frequently read as a complex meditation on nationhood, voice, and democracy, situating it within the listening literatures that I examine in this dissertation shows it to be a novel concerned with how listeners interpret and act on the voices they hear. Brown's novel illustrates how a tyranny of the minority can arise in a democratic nation that reveres the eloquent public voice as inherently powerful and unifying without considering how those voices were heard by a multitude of listeners. In the decades following the publication of *Wieland*, writers such as Apess, Douglass, and Jacobs would write about the tyranny of a vocal minority by depicting corrupt public voices, dissenting listeners, and the power of being heard.

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