NEW NORTH STAR

Volume 6: 2024

Martin Robinson Delany

Published by the Frederick Douglass Papers

Institute for American Thought

IU School of Liberal Arts

Indiana University Indianapolis

NEW NORTH STAR

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Published Annually by the
Frederick Douglass Papers

Our Aims and Scope

The ***New North Star*** is an open-access online journal featuring new scholarship on the activities and ideas of nineteenth century African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the world with which he interacted. Articles also are desired that assess Douglass's impact on events following his lifetime, including current events. The journal is looking for articles in a broad range of disciplines, from history to literature, communications to anthropology. As in the spirit of its namesake, works of fiction and poetry on topics pertinent to Douglass also will be considered for publication. The *New North Star* will feature interviews with authors of new scholarship on Douglass as well as reviews of that recently published literature. The journal is intended for teachers and students as well as scholars, hoping to help bridge the gap between new scholarship and the classroom. Articles describing new techniques on teaching about Douglass and his world are welcomed. The *New North Star* will be maintained by the staff of the Frederick Douglass Papers at IUI and hosted on that project's website. Instructions for submitting articles to the *New North Star* can be found on the journal's website.

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Authorial Intention and Textual Fluidity in Douglass's Autobiographies

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A recent symposium at Indiana University Indianapolis celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the still-in-progress Yale University Press edition of the Frederick Douglass Papers. My essay celebrates (but also raises some questions about) the Yale Douglass Papers editions of the three autobiographies: the 1845 *Narrative*, published in 1999; the 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom*, published in 2003; and the 1881, 1892 *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, published in two volumes in 2012. The Douglass Papers autobiographies are superb scholarly editions that provide expert historical introductions and annotations, as well as essential information for understanding textual issues in the respective autobiographies. Each edition also has distinctly useful primary texts, such as contemporaneous book reviews and letters.

My focus is on textual editing, and it should be noted right from the start that the editors who created the definitive texts for the respective editions of the Douglass Papers autobiographies followed what they call in their general introduction "modern editing practices." Those practices were inspired by Sir Walter Greg's influential writings on textual editing from the 1930s to the early 1950s, which asserted that the main goal of textual editors should be to find or recover the author's original intentions. I have problems with Greg's approach, which I've explored in essays about the Modern Language Association (MLA)-approved edition of Herman Melville's writings.[1] I wonder about the goal or even the possibility of recovering an author's original intentions, at least in some cases. That said, I'm prepared to concede that Greg's textual principles may be the best approach for a print-based edition that aspires to be definitive. I will say a few more words about the strengths of the Greg-inspired Douglass Papers editions of the autobiographies before raising a few questions about textual matters. I will then point to possible new directions for Douglass textual studies.

I begin with excellence: The 1999 edition of Douglass's *Narrative* has superb historical annotations, textual notes, and materials that help us to trace the *Narrative*'s reception history. I regard it as the best edition of Douglass's most widely read autobiography. The edition's main copy text is the 1845 printing by Garrison's antislavery organization, which makes sense, even though there are two subsequent printings in Dublin, where Douglass may have been more in control of the publication. The 2003 edition of Douglass's *My Bondage and My Freedom* is similarly excellent. Again, we get historical annotations, a textual discussion, contemporaneous reviews, and an interesting add-on of marginalia from the annotated copy of *My Bondage and My Freedom* held by the great-grand-daughter of Aaron Anthony (who was perhaps Douglass's biological father).

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[1] *The Frederick Douglass Papers:* Series Two*: Autobiographical Writings,* Volume I, *Narrative*, ed. John R. McKivigan, Peter Hinks, and Gerald Fulkerson (Fulkerson is the textual editor) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), xiv. On textual problems in the MLA-approved Melville editions, *see* Robert S. Levine, "Why We Should Be Teaching and Writing about *The Literary World*'s 'Hawthorne and His Mosses,'" *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 5.1 (2017): 179–189; and Levine, "Editing Melville's *Pierre*: Text, Nation, Time," *Neither the Time nor the Place: The New Nineteenth-Century American Studies*, ed. Christopher Castiglia and Susan Gillman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022), 163–174. Sir Walter Greg's classic article on textual editing is "The Rationale of Copy-Text," *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950–51), 19–36. Greg initially presented this paper to the English Institute on September 8, 1949.

The 2012 edition of Douglass's *Life and Times* is extraordinary, and it is clear that there were extraordinary challenges in bringing this edition to publication. Multiple editions of Douglass's final autobiography appeared over an approximately twelve-year period, and Douglass did not have full editorial control over some or even any of those. The fifteen editors listed on the title page of the Douglass Papers *Life and Times* suggest the huge labor that went into this two-volume edition. We get an historical introduction; a basically new text of *Life and Times* that draws on manuscripts and five different editions; considerable textual apparatus; illustrations that Douglass rejected from an early edition; and around four-hundred pages of historical annotations, along with reviews and reader-responses from 1881 to 1893. This edition helped to revive interest in *Life and Times*, making it clear that this is a Douglass text we all need to take seriously.

Still, I have questions about textual matters in this and the other Yale Douglass Papers editions of the autobiographies, and I want to use the comments of *Life and Times*'s textual editors, Joseph McElrath, Jr. and Jesse Crisler, as a way into my discussion. McElrath and Crisler proclaim in their textual afterword to *Life and Times* that they aspired to present Douglass's words and not those of people in the publishing industry (such as editors). To do that, they had to create their own reading text of *Life and Times*, which they call "a reconstructed version of this work . . . for which Douglass himself was responsible as individual author."[2] In creating this version, McElrath and Crisler follow Sir Walter Greg's injunction that editors should do everything they can to recover and convey an author's original intentions.

But McElrath and Crisler themselves point to two problematical aspects of Greg's ideas about textual editing. First, how does one definitively determine an author's original intentions, or the work an author is "responsible" for, if that author is no longer with us? And, second, why are "original" intentions—what the author sought to do before his or her text is supposedly corrupted by editors—better than what emerges when authors share their manuscripts with friends, colleagues, and editors? I ask this question for all readers of this essay who recognize that the final printed version of their own writing, after it circulates to colleagues and editors, is just about always better than their earlier drafts (their original intention). Influenced by Greg, McElrath and Crisler adopt a different perspective, which is conveyed in the question they ask about the print versions of the five editions of *Life and Times*: "which were Douglass's corrections, and which were the enhancements made by another or others?" Implicit in this question is the idea that publication in some ways is a corruption of original intentions. The editors, even with their odd choice of the word "enhancements," respond to their own question like this: "[N]o answer to this question is available."[3] In other words, these Greg-inspired editors concede the impossibility of their task. Nevertheless, they choose to privilege surviving manuscript pages over print pages, as if Douglass had nothing to do with any of the editing leading to publication, and as if Douglass may not have been pleased by some of the editorial changes between manuscript and book. Of course, Douglass himself may well have made some of those changes. Overall, what these textual editors achieve in their edition of *Life and Times* is quite impressive. But we have to keep in mind that when we read the text of *Life and Times* in the Douglass Papers edition, we are reading a version of *Life and Times* that did not exist until 2012. For historicist-oriented critics who find it important to take account of the texts that were actually being read at the time, that's a problem.

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[2] *The Frederick Douglass Papers:* Series Two: *Autobiographical Writings:* Volume 3: *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass:* Book I: *The Text and Editorial Apparatus*, ed. John R. McKivigan et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 485.

[3] *Frederick Douglass Papers: Life and Times*, 496.

I now want to turn to the MLA-approved Melville edition, co-published by Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library, to examine what I regard as an egregious, even irresponsible, example of Greg-inspired textual editing. Be assured, there is nothing in the Douglass Papers on par with what I am about to describe. But this example, precisely because it is an extreme case, helps to highlight what is problematic and limited about the imperative of recovering an author's original intentions.

In 1850, Melville published in the New York *Literary World* a celebration of Hawthorne's short fiction. The essay, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," has become one of Melville's canonical texts, appearing in most American literature anthologies. At a key point in the essay, Melville makes an American literary nationalist claim that an American writer can be as great as Shakespeare. Maybe Melville was referring to Hawthorne, or maybe he was thinking about himself. In any case, the famous line in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" goes like this: "if Shakespeare has not been equaled, he is sure to be surpassed, and surpassed by an American born now or yet to be born."[4] With this pronouncement, Melville imagines an American writer greater than Shakespeare! Such a statement has an obvious appeal to American literary nationalists, both then and now. This American literary nationalist proclamation appears in the standard Northwestern-Newberry edition, in the Norton Critical Edition of *Moby-Dick* and other editions of *Moby-Dick*, and, at least until 2017, in every American literature anthology, including the 2007 and 2012 editions of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, which I edited.

But there's a significant problem here: Melville never actually published this sentence. I discovered this serendipitously in 2015 as I worked on the 2017 edition of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* and thought it was time to review the original printing and not rely on the Northwestern-Newberry edition. Let me repeat the line from the essay that appears in the Northwestern-Newberry Melville and subsequently has been widely reprinted: "if Shakespeare has not been equaled, he is sure to be surpassed, and surpassed by an American born now or yet to be born." But this is the phrasing in "Hawthorne and His Mosses" as originally published in the 1850 *Literary World*: "if Shakspeare [sic] has not been equaled, give the world time, and he is sure to be surpassed in one hemisphere or the other."[5]

With this phrasing, we have a global Melville for our times, not a narrowly American literary nationalist. Why did the Northwestern-Newberry editors choose to print a sentence that wasn't ever published? There are at least two answers to this question. First, following Greg's principle of original intention, the editors decided to go with the American literary nationalist version of the sentence because it appears in a surviving manuscript page of the essay, which they take as Melville's original intention. Second, the editors themselves are American literary nationalists who are suspicious of moves toward transnationalism and globalization in American literary studies, so the manuscript version suited their predilections. Choosing to privilege the manuscript version of "Hawthorne and His Mosses," the editors work on the assumption, with no evidence at all, that the editors of the *Literary World*, not Melville, made the change from American literary nationalism to a more global perspective. That assumption makes little sense because *The*

[4] Herman Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," *The Piazza Tales and Other Prose Pieces, 1839–1860*, ed. Harrison Hayford et al. (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern University Press and The Newberry Library, 1987), 246. Melville met Hawthorne for the first time in the Berkshires on 5 August 1850; his anonymous essay about Hawthorne's short fiction appeared in the17 August and 24, 1850, issues of the New York *Literary World*.

[5] Melville, "Hawthorne and His Mosses," *Literary World*, 17 August 1850, 145.

Literary World was an American literary nationalistic journal and Melville himself mocked American literary nationalism in at least two of his novels, *Mardi* and *Pierre*.

The rejection of Melville's complex statement for something rather simplistic seems to me a wildly wrongheaded application of Greg's textual theory of original intentions. It took a Melvillean, John Bryant, who has written critically about the Northwestern-Newberry edition, to develop an alternative to Greg that he has already put into practice to create a different sort of Melville edition. Bryant's textual theory, I submit, could inspire a different, complementary edition of Douglass's autobiographies that would further energize Douglass studies.

Bryant set forth his ideas about textual editing in a punchy 2002 book called *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*. Influenced by Jerome McGann's work on social texts, Bryant argues that the only definitive text of a work is "a multiplicity of texts, or rather the fluid text." As he elaborates, "A poetics of the fluid text is a poetics of revision, whether that change is induced by an individual writer, a social demand, or as often the case, a combination of the two."[6] If there are two or three or even more versions of a text, whether published or in manuscript, Bryant argues, editors should resist trying to create a putatively definitive single text but instead work with all versions to create what he calls a fluid text. Bryant rejects the vague and often unrecoverable notion of authorial intention as the sole rationale for creating a working text, and he rejects the idea that editors, publishers, friends, and colleagues are "bad" in the way of corrupting the so-called original intention. In his book, he offers two possible ways of creating fluid texts. One seems to me ineffective, but the other is potentially quite useful for creating new textual editions of Douglass's autobiographies.

What doesn't work all that well is this: creating a print text that includes what Bryant calls revision moments. By using boxes, inserts, and lots of diacritical symbols, a fluid-text editor, Bryant argues, can represent revisions and alternative textual phrasings on the printed page itself. Bryant gives examples of how to do this in his book, and what you see is a hard-to-read jumble. He subsequently published a "fluid text" edition of *Moby-Dick* which incorporated both the British and American versions, along with other evidence of textual fluidity. That edition got a mixed response. Some greatly admired the way it made readily available on the page different versions of the novel; others, like my students, found the many revision moments on the page (with diacritical symbols and boxes) overly distracting.[7]

But Bryant has a better second approach to textual fluidity, which is that editors could create websites with all published versions of the work under consideration, along with pdfs of all useful manuscripts. He and a group of collaborators are in the process of doing just that for Melville's writings, and it's quite promising and useful. Instead of creating a single definitive text of *Moby-Dick*, for instance, the editors of the website post both the British and American versions. The designers of the website have also ingeniously developed ways of moving back and forth between different versions and highlighting textual changes. For *Billy Budd*, Melville's posthumous novella which has been published by various editors from manuscript (it was not published during Melville's lifetime), this new Melville website posts images of the actual

[6] John Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2, 62. Jerome J. McCann has published widely and influentially in textual studies; *see*, for example, his *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[7] For the fluid-text edition, see Melville, *Moby-Dick: A Longman Critical Edition*, ed John Bryant and Haskell Springer (New York: Pearson, 2007). In *the Fluid Text*, Bryant provides examples, which are almost impossible to decipher, of how he would represent textual fluidity on the page (*see* 164–172). The fluid-text edition of *Moby-Dick* is much clearer, but still would be distracting for most readers.

manuscript pages, the version of the novella they created from the manuscript, and ways for students in a classroom to work with the manuscripts, and with what they learn from the textual editors, to create their own version of "Billy Budd." For "Hawthorne and His Mosses," Bryant and his coeditors have posted both the 1850 *Literary World* publication and the extant manuscript pages. Bryant and his collaborators call their website MEL (Melville Electronic Library).[8] Imagine the possibilities of a DEL (Douglass Electronic Library) for the future study of Douglass's autobiographical writings.

For example, consider the case of Douglass's 1845 *Narrative.* The Yale University Press edition works mainly with the 1845 Boston publication, but the textual editor, Gerald Fulkerson, makes changes from that publication based on his idea of authorial intention. To give one example: The 1845 edition, as published, has Douglass stating early on, "I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell of his birthday." Fulkerson drops the "of," and goes with "tell his birthday," in large part because the 1846 Dublin edition has "tell his birthday."[9] His argument is that Douglass made that change, but he offers no evidence for that. Maybe the Dublin printer preferred "tell his birthday" to "tell of his birthday"; I prefer "tell of his birthday," and I especially prefer that because that's what American readers read in 1845.

Because textual editor Fulkerson follows Greg's notion of authorial intention, he presents Douglass as having full agency in the production of the 1845 *Narrative*. Greg's textual theory has little room for collaboration; his theory celebrates the inviolate author. Perhaps for that reason, Fulkerson tells us that Douglass made the decision to "place a daguerreotype of himself on the book's frontispiece and sign his name below," and he asserts the following: "Next [Douglass] preceded his text with letters from William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips, who served as witnesses to his veracity."[10] But why would Douglass want to create what John Sekora influentially dubbed a "white envelope"—a slave narrative subordinate to its White sponsors?[11] My suspicion is that Garrison and his fellow White abolitionists, who funded the publication of the *Narrative*, had a lot to do with constructing the title page and including those prefatory letters. I see nothing wrong with that because in 1845 Douglass had a mostly friendly and productive relationship with Garrison; the two were collaborators. In his 1855 *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass presents Garrison as analogous to a slave master, but that was ten years later; I wouldn't read back to 1845 from the conflicts that led to that 1855 characterization. In any case, it's worth underscoring that when Douglass worked to produce the two 1846 Dublin editions of the *Narrative*, he put his own freshly-written preface to the *Narrative* before the Garrison and Phillips prefaces. Maybe if one is going to create a single edition of the *Narrative* from the American and Dublin editions, one should include Douglass's preface, for the 1846 Dublin editions provide reasonably good evidence that Douglass did not want his account preceded by two White voices without a Black voice front and center. Maybe that's more important than dropping an "of" on the basis of the Dublin editions.[12]

All of this said, I am a huge admirer of the Douglass Papers edition of the *Narrative* and think it would be absurd to create a single text that combined the Massachusetts and Dublin editions. Readers today need to know what readers of 1845 were reading when Douglass published his first autobiography. But what I think would be great for Douglass studies is for the DEL

[8] *See* "Melville Electronic Archive," Melville.electroniclibrary.org.
[9] *See* the Douglass Papers *Narrative*, 13, 108.
[10] *See* the Douglass Papers *Narrative*, xxx, xxxi.
[11] *See* the Douglass Papers *Narrative*, xxx, xxxi.
[12] On the importance of Douglass's Irish editions of the *Narrative*, along with a discussion of the textual changes initiated by Douglass, see Robert S. Levine, *The Lives of Frederick Douglass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), chapter 2.

(Douglass Electronic Library), the site I hope someone decides to set up in the future, to post the single U.S. and the two Dublin editions with ways of comparing and exploring the three. As of right now, only one of the Dublin editions is readily available, through Cambridge University Press; the more complex second edition is hard to acquire. Arguably, the Dublin editions best convey not Douglass's original but final intention with this particular work, as he adds not only his own preface *before* Garrison's but also new materials in the appendices. Over time, one could add to DEL other editions, translations, and the like.

Because there aren't significant textual issues with Douglass Papers *My Bondage and My Freedom*, other than the editors' odd decision to drop Douglass's table of contents, one could post the 1855 version as it appeared in 1855, plus possibly some later editions or editions published outside of the U.S. The DEL would be especially compelling for *Life and Times*, which exists in multiple editions over the period 1881 to 1893, and also partly in manuscript. Posting all of the editions as published, along with images of the extant manuscript pages, DEL for the first time would make it relatively easy to do a fluid text analysis of the five main published editions and the extant manuscript. We'd view the illustrations as they actually appeared in an early edition. We would get a terrific sense of how the published versions of *Life and Times* developed over time. With the help of the manuscript pages, we could make our own assessment of authorial intention in the editorial changes in the published versions. That said, authorial intention cannot be easily separated from collaboration, as the DEL would make clear, and editors and publishers are not always wrong.

The DEL, as I imagine it, could also provide us with significant new perspectives on Douglass's speeches. The wonderful print volumes of Douglass's speeches in the Yale Douglass Papers necessarily work with one published version of a particular speech, while providing bibliographical references when there are other versions. But what if the curators of DEL chose, say, five key speeches to start with that have major variants and could therefore be thought of as a fluid text? The speech I'd start with is Douglass's 1867 "Sources of Danger to the Republic." Douglass gave a version of the speech to a predominately Black audience in Philadelphia in January 1867 and then a month later delivered another version to a predominately White audience in St. Louis. The speeches are notably different because Douglass was a remarkable rhetorician who knew how to shape speeches for different audiences. The Douglass Papers prints only the February 1867 St. Louis version; DEL could post both.

A possible model for a future DEL could be the Colored Conventions Project, a web-based archive which has generated huge interest in nineteenth-century Black conventions and brought a MacArthur Award to its visionary director, Gabrielle Foreman.[13] The Yale Douglass Papers themselves are now available online, and that's great for all kinds of reasons. But I'd like to see something different develop over the next ten years or so that works in the spirit of what Bryant calls for in *The Fluid Text* and gets people excited about Douglass's writings in the way of the Colored Conventions Project. I can't guarantee a MacArthur to the person who chooses to get this site underway, but I am certain that such a site would bring new scholars and readers to Douglass studies. I am also certain that it would have as its critical foundation the superb editions of Douglass's writings in the Yale University Press Frederick Douglass Papers.

[13] *See* the "Colored Conventions Project," Coloredconventions.org.

New North Star, 2024; 6:7-13

Anecdotal Evidence: Civil War Flash Fictions in the *New (National) Era*

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Shortly after the Civil War ended in 1865, Frederick Douglass acquired a partial interest in the last weekly paper he would eventually own and his sons would eventually edit. Appearing in the District of Columbia for the first time on 13 January 13, 1870, and first edited by John Sella Martin, the *New (National) Era* (1870–1874) initially privileged political reports, educational advocacy, and a zeal for enterprise supplemented by a "HOME CIRCLE" department on its back page. "In our civilization," Martin declared, "home is the focus to which are gathered the elements of manhood and the centre whence radiate the virtues of patriotism" ("Our Journal"). Advancing that cause in "the interest of the negro race" during a year-long run, the page offered sketches and recipes, anecdotes and sermons, poetry and fiction, including two Civil War stories that I have examined in meeting rooms like this one and on the pages of the *African American Review*.

Today, I'd like to consider three not-quite-stories. The only one long enough to approximate a robust narrative is more sketched than plotted, while the other two are brief, episodic, anecdotal. Without much narrative heft, these glimpses of a Boston horsecar, a Virginia apparition, and a District boarding house seem particularly vulnerable to the disdain of historians: too fleeting individually to make waves and too slight collectively to count as a broad sample or a measurable influence. In "Exemplary or Singular? The Anecdote in Historical Narrative," Malina Stefanovska describes such brief flashes as "the threatening substratum from which historiography had to extract itself," and she adds, "anecdotes are associated with rumor, legend, lack of rigor or evidence, a fascination with singularity and with aesthetic form, lawlessness, contamination with fiction, and subjectivity" (16). Even adding two genuine war stories fails to rescue the chief African American periodical postwar from becoming an imaginative lightweight if page count, publishing run, and outsized audience are the only metrics that matter.

But "anecdotal evidence" also conjures up *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, where Thomas S. Kuhn first contended in 1962 with the "anomalies" that Ian Hacking in his recent introduction describes as "contrary to lawlike regularities, more generally, contrary to expectations" (xxvi). For both Kuhn and Hacking, anomalies can accumulate into a changed world view, even into a revolution in contemporary thought and perception with three significant upshots for my purposes. Recast as anomalies, anecdotes become quietly defiant, the exceptions that challenge the social rules they may ultimately help transform. Remembered in addition for their beginnings as French "*faits divers*" or news briefs, anecdotes also foreground everyday drama, the briefly reported spectacles that readers recognize and can themselves begin to extend. Finally, anecdotes as the news of ordinary people, and sometimes the flash fictions invented to meet newspaper deadlines, may help limn an alternate postbellum world that reveals what it was possible historically to imagine.

This reassessment of anecdote as evidence hinges upon the éclat of Kuhn's seminal pink book, which undercut the paradigms of rational inquiry and incremental assimilation for a model of discovery that was sudden, disruptive, and intense. The book has never gone out of print; indeed, new editions appeared in 1970 and 1996, with a fiftieth anniversary edition arriving in 2012 and still promoting crisis and revolution. "The transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one from which a new tradition of normal science can emerge is far from a cumulative process, one achieved by an articulation or extension of the old paradigm," Kuhn still insisted. "Rather it is a

reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations" (85). "New fundamentals"? By analogy, that sounds much like the revolution in race relations that followed the Civil War, during and then after the immediate postwar period when amendments to the U.S. Constitution were debated in Congress and ratified by the states.

Across decades, spirited commentary on Kuhn's structural approach has continued as well, though the thorniest issue has not been abrupt change but shifting vocabularies as an incommensurable paradigm develops into a new way of seeing. Referencing a familiar optical illusion, Kuhn wrote, "What were ducks in the scientist's world before the revolution are rabbits afterwards" (111–12). From Ptolemy to Copernicus and from Newton to Einstein, same data, different paradigm, with the new and the old launching such differing terminologies that they can seem impossible to compare, a singular misfortune that can doom what's called "theory-choice." As Carl Hempel observed in 1980, "How can [adherents of different paradigms] even have lunch together and discuss each other's views?" (Quoted by Kindi, 110, n.27). It is then a small step from bold science as upheaval to bold politics as revolutionary, even for Kuhn's fiercest critics. In "The Demise of the Incommensurability Thesis," Professor of Philosophy Howard Sankey remarks that "the phenomenon appears to be a quite common one, occurring frequently in social interaction, and is by no means restricted to scientific revolution" (89, n.14). On this score, witness Toni Morrison's observation in "The Site of Memory" that her only access to the "unwritten interior life" of those who composed slave narratives was what she called "a kind of literary archeology" (92), one in which "[t]he image comes first and tells me what the 'memory' is about" (95). It is the challenge to rational discussion and steady assimilation that anecdotes, born of imagery and everyday circumstances, can ease by demonstrating how quickly ducks can become rabbits.

For example, in "The Wounded Soldier and the Old Colored Woman," which appeared in the *New Era* for 9 June 1870. Following upon ratification of the three Reconstruction amendments that permanently abolished slavery in December 1865, curbed state jurisdiction in July 1868, and secured suffrage for African American men in February 1870, this reported "incident" (4) takes place on a crowded Boston horsecar among a handful of characters without names. When an aging Black woman climbs aboard, nobody offers her a seat until a young Black man stands up. He wears the cap and carries the crutch of an ex-soldier, who reveals that he lost his foot at Fort Wagner amid African American glory. White passengers immediately offer their seats, before the narrator concludes that "something finer than politeness taught him to respect the woman because she was old, and poor and black" (4). Proffering a seat on the bus to a Black woman is the sudden change that makes this short-short story seem anomalous. But behind that is the greater anomaly of African American service in the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts "colored" regiment bound in 1863 for the Charleston harbor. Kuhn's ducks and rabbits are everywhere in the anecdote's quick contrasts between White and Black, old and young, male and female, civilians and enlistee, able-bodied and injured. Even transformation figures when a wartime volunteer with a crutch inspires horsecar riders to stand up, while teaching a lesson in respect.

As the *New Era* acknowledged, the news brief first appeared in *Merry's Museum*, a Boston children's monthly whose postwar issues Madeleine Stern has described as "enlarged, improved, and rejuvenated, with a new editor, new contributors, new engravings, new features, and a new dress" (166). The new editor as 1868 began was Louisa May Alcott, who included this anecdote in February as part of her "Monthly Chat" and signed it "Cousin Tribulation." The pseudonym is a nod to Alcott's *Hospital Sketches* (1863) and Nurse Tribulation Periwinkle, the narrator that Sarah Elbert has called Alcott's "alter ego" (liii, n.2) in the letters she wrote while serving for six

weeks in Georgetown's Union Hotel Hospital. What Elbert describes as "Alcott's passionate concern for woman's rights and racial integration" (x) abides in the soldier's kindness to an old woman whom other horsecar passengers are content to ignore. Rejecting the status quo, the wounded veteran stands up for a "reconstruction . . . from new fundamentals" that has almost everyone talking in a bare five-hundred thirty-eight words.

Such an anecdote can make the emergence of a new paradigm appear seamless once readers also get out of their seats. Historically, the genre's intersection with news can be traced back, as Sylvie Dion notes, to its oral heyday during the commercial expansion in seventeenth-century France with its big fairs and market days, which led to eighteenth-century newssheets that were hawked and nineteenth-century canards that were sung. With the arrival of the penny press and police gazettes by the mid-nineteenth century, column fillers and whole sections of *fait divers* (Dion's titular "human interest stories") became customary. Enter Félix Fénéon's *Nouvelles en Trois Lignes*, literally both news and novels (equally "nouvelles") in three lines. Published by the Paris daily *Le Matin* during 1906, each composition was Dominique Jullien's "ultra-brief narrative" (66), exacting at no more than one-hundred thirty-five typographic signs with a "haiku esthetic," in Jullien's apt phrase (68).

That esthetic reveals a structural logic more recently deployed in the volley of tweets that became Teju Cole's *Small Fates* in 2011, each tweet no longer than one-hundred forty characters and derived from news items in Lagos, Nigeria. For instance, "An Air Force officer in Bayelsa who mistook himself for a cop mistook the baker Paul Wisdom for a thief and shot him in the head" (@tejucole, 14 August 2011, quoted in Pearce, thenewinquiry.com). Ella Mingazova points out that Cole inherited in *fait divers* a "hybrid form, at once information and story," an anecdotal genre that raced along the divide between history and fiction and sometimes swerved. "Many of Fénéon's *fait divers* were most likely the product of his imagination," Mingazova continues, "as the rapid delivery that was required by the periodicity of the newspaper was incompatible with the time-consuming labor of collecting information and it was customary to invent *fait divers* to meet a deadline" (148). The same hybrid logic, the same tantalizing incompletion gets left for postbellum readers to resolve in "Believe in Ghosts!," which traces the kind of wartime trauma that Alcott's horsecar riders never hear.

This second anonymous anecdote appeared in the *New National Era* for 3 November 1870, after Frederick Douglass became the weekly's full owner/editor and extended the paper's title as well as its aspirations. Almost twice the length of the Boston editorial item, this brief narrative is set along backcountry roads running between an "old mill" and "the ruins of an old-time Virginia mansion," terrain now haunted by Confederate troops near a Union bivouac. Their presence might somehow explain the recurring specter ("the whole picket line saw it repeatedly")—that is, until the narrator spots a six-foot column of fire that takes a human form, "a headless man wrapped in a pale blue flame that flickered in the night air" before gliding toward the mansion (4). Without Fénéon's economy or Cole's wit, this unresolved anecdote reads like an extended haiku without a third line, a "true story" that just . . . stops.

Stuck on an "insignificant incident," a *fait divers* must for Dion (80), "Believe in Ghosts!" crackles with the scrape of the everyday in its picket-duty authenticity. What's more, the bizarre spectacle substitutes fictional devices when its information runs out and teases a mysterious link between Virginia labor (the mill) and Virginia leisure (the mansion) that the weekly's readers were left to ponder. At nine-hundred eighty words, this sequence of events is still flash fiction, which Robert Evans defines as any prose narrative "of roughly a thousand words or less" (69). Although its cast offers no "brown face," its headless apparition counters the swift social resolution that

Alcott provides to reveal how baffling slave country could be for Union troops and how much the threat of violence would linger into Reconstruction, when this "small fate" was published. For readers, as for the anecdote's Tom and James on picket duty, the scene is heightened by the narrator's colloquial voice, his direct address, and his pending task: "Tell it to you? Certainly, I will; and maybe, as you are well versed in ghostly lore, you can explain what it was we saw" (4). Like the report of the wounded soldier on the horsecar, this anecdote summons others to resolve an anomalous crisis, a "crime" now supernaturally charged.

How to read the crime that no histories of the Civil War have noticed? If it is too much to credit the lurking Confederates with engineering a hoax without a hitch, there's another gloss that would have suited the *Providence Evening Press* in which "A Reminiscence of Virginia During the War. A True Story" first appeared on 31 May 1870, five months before the *New National Era* reprinted it. The Rhode Island daily paper was edited at the time by the Reverend Sidney Dean, who had served Connecticut in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1855 to 1859, first with the American Party and then as a Republican (*Biographical Directory*, 892). On July 27, 1862, in a sermon at the Mathewson Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Rev. Dean spoke out with a public servant's dismay against the Confederacy and the" serpent of disunion" (4); in the Virginia dark, that becomes an unsettling phrase that could point less to Confederate hoax than to Union disquiet. After all, James McPherson in *The Battle Cry of Freedom* cites "interior lines of communication" to explain the Confederacy's startling military successes (338), a tactic that led to Union misgivings in Southern terrain the bluecoats scarcely knew. But editor Dean also railed against slavery as "a social, national small pox" (10), an editorial priority that invites two sterner readings. The anecdote's "headless man" in a "column of fire" runs to a mansion that is already ruined, a Union image of a divinely decapitated patriarch and his plantation's just downfall. Alternately, because the specter arises in the old mill and hurries toward the collapsing manor, the headless figure arguably stands in for the brutalized enslaved who were bent on retribution as well as emancipation's new and divinely appointed social order in the making.

Both the "incident" on the Boston horsecar and the narrative frame around Virginia's "dense woods" blur Mingazova's hybrid line between information and story through characters, dialogue, imagery, and narrative structure, precisely what makes the anecdote a rich genre and an historian's nightmare, Stefanovska's "rumor" contaminated by "fiction." As Peter Novick asserted in the first lines of *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, an insistence upon "meticulous documentation" (4) has been fundamental since the nineteenth century, when the study of history banished elitist amateurs to coalesce as a discipline. "At the very center of the professional historical venture," Novick wrote, "is the idea and ideal of 'objectivity.' It was the rock on which the venture was constituted, its continuing raison d'être" (1). There is no question he would raise an eyebrow over "a six-foot column of fire" and the evidentiary value of its "headless man" as symbolic threat.

And yet anecdotes have for centuries provided entrée to incidental worlds that have otherwise gone undocumented, as the etymology of the term reveals. In Greek, "an ekdotos" were things "unedited," unpublished, even not meant for publication, what semiotician Lisa Block de Behar describes as "[c]loser to secret histories" (32) in their access to (say) an undocumented Boston horsecar or an unnoticed Union bivouac in Virginia. Is access through anecdotes important enough to forget their hidden agendas, their unverified information, their suspect data, their "contamination?" As Media Studies scholar Simone Natale puts it: "[w]henever we deal with history, the opposition between fact and artifact is a key problem" (441)—perhaps, I would add, *the* problem with the anecdote as a hybrid form. But Natale goes on to observe: "Whether an

anecdote is based or not on events that have actually taken place, its social and cultural presence depends on the extent to which the anecdote is reported, disseminated, and used by different agents" (443). "Reported, disseminated, and used?" That recalls the function of periodicals such as Douglass's postwar African American weekly, but more specifically its bewildering not-quite-story "Glimpses of Sunshine among the Clouds of War," the first of these three short-shorts to appear and the only one written by "A Soldier" *for* the *New Era*.

Published in the issue for 31 March 1870, this full-blown sketch is too long at 2477 words to be called flash fiction. In terms that Robert Evans would recognize, it is "sudden fiction" (limited to 2000 words) plus an extra flash (70). Next to none of that outpouring concerns an undocumented horsecar or even a Union camp, which disappears as the sketch begins. In their place is a District of Columbia boardinghouse during the summer of 1862, too early for the surge in African American enlistments after the Emancipation Proclamation took effect on 1 January 1863. The sketch's narrator is an Ohio volunteer promoted to captain and serving as an Assistant Adjutant General, a staff position whose responsibilities were rarely assigned to African American soldiers. But his genial account neglects duty to favor a landlady's two daughters and a General's poetic valentine, all nestled in another outsized house without a dark wood or a troubling apparition. The only hint of racial difference comes with the narrator's valet Henry, "a colossal specimen of the *genus homo*" (4), who is mistreated by the captain and departs in three paragraphs.

How did "Glimpses of Sunshine" slip into "THE HOME CIRCLE" of the *New Era*, for which it was written? Like other Civil War short-shorts, this one appeared anonymously, though the last names of its officers—(Capt.) Donn, (Gen.) Armand, (Lt.) Riveroak, and (Lt.) Worthington—bear a striking resemblance to the first and married names of the large Piatt family in the Ohio Valley—Donn, his brother Abram, Abram's son Riveroak, and Riveroak's aunt, Mrs. Martha Piatt Worthington (Miller 11–31, Bridges 1–13). Biographer Peter Bridges describes Donn Piatt as "firmly opposed to slavery" (35) and active in the Republican Party; during the summer of 1862, the captain was also an Assistant Adjutant General in Piatt's Zouaves (Thirty-fourth Ohio Volunteer Infantry) stationed in Washington, D.C. where the literary Donn would later found the weekly *Capital* in 1871.

For him, too, Kuhn's abrupt paradigm shifts may be useful. "In both political and scientific development," Kuhn declares, "the sense of malfunction that can lead to crisis is prerequisite to revolution" (93). Make that "malfunction" in this vignette's pause on a valet's payback for too many hurled "boot-jacks and broom-sticks" (4): Henry lets slip the captain's crush on "Miss Malcolm" before hitting her up for "one dollar in money, an old cider cask, and a table" (4). The peanut-stand he sets up "down street a few doors" (4) recalls the weekly's motto, "Liberty and Enterprise," and nods to the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia during April 1862. In musing upon what Sella Martin and his first readers saw in the captain's valet, perhaps the key point is less the brevity of Henry's appearance than the sudden reckoning with "colossal" new era priorities, his anomalous anecdote emerging in a sketch that was otherwise complacent enough to suit *Godey's Lady's Book*.

Hints, nods, and speculations scarcely lead to "objectivity." Nevertheless, these three short-shorts *can* produce a new way of seeing, specifically of seeing an aging Black woman, a flaming apparition, and an ex-valet. What Frederick Douglass in his September "Salutatory" called "the tumultuous waves of the grand revolution" (2), prompted by the Civil War and the Reconstruction amendments, would thrive on the anomaly of African American volunteers in regimental uniforms, just as the weekly's "HOME CIRCLE," while it lasted, would help to imagine a new social default. The paper's early anecdotes, even when slight, rolled into Douglass's "tumultuous waves" because

they challenged "normal" social practices by highlighting Morrison's images in a Kuhnian model. Brief and unexpected, they nonetheless became commensurable with the country's founding commitments, particularly after peanut-stand enterprise and horsecar respect brought liberty and justice to those the country had so often shunned.

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New North Star, 2024; 6:14-15

Editors' Note: "The *North Star* and the *New North Star*"

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The *New North Star* is pleased to publish the following symposium of new scholarly articles on Martin Robinson Delany's novel *Blake; or, The Huts of Blake; or, The Huts of America*. At its inception in 2019, the *New North Star* declared its goal to be to publish "new scholarship on the activities and ideas of nineteenth century African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the world with which he interacted." The journal always interpreted that "world" with which Douglass interacted broadly. In our issues we have published articles focusing on contemporaries of Douglass, including Ida B. Wells, Robert Smalls, and Albion Tourgée. Publication of this *Blake* symposium therefore fully conforms to our journal's original mission and our vision for its future.

There is a second reason that the editors were eager to give attention to this landmark achievement by Martin Delany. In fall 1847, when Douglass had just returned from his year-and-a-half sojourn in the British Isles, he contemplated founding an African American-edited periodical for emancipation and equal rights. Perhaps unexpectantly, Douglass encountered disapproval from his predominately White associates in the abolitionist movement, led by Boston editor William Lloyd Garrison. These coworkers persuaded Douglass to put aside his journalistic ambitions and instead undertake a speaking tour of western states where he often encountered hostile mobs. One significant exception was a warm greeting he received from the small Black community residing in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Among those individuals welcoming Douglass, he later reported, was a "noble specimen of a man, Martin R. Delany."[1] Delany had struggled since 1844 to publish a four-page periodical, *The Mystery*, to advocate for emancipation and celebrate the intellectual, religious, and cultural achievements of American Americans.

Within months of their initial meeting, Douglass and Delany decided to join forces and launch a joint journalistic venture, the *North Star*.[2] With funds contributed from British admirers, Douglass purchased printing equipment and set up shop in Rochester, New York, where he had encountered a cluster of antislavery sympathizers. Douglass would manage the *North Star* from its Rochester base, while Delany traveled across Pennsylvania, Delaware, Ohio, and Michigan sending the newspapers detailed reports on both the travails and accomplishments of African Americans living in those states.[3] This journalistic partnership persisted only until June 1849, when Delany decided to quit to complete his studies to become a physician, but that was enough time to establish the *North Star* as the leading voice for antebellum African Americans. In later decades, the two men would feud bitterly over different visions for the future their race, but their brief collaboration was a significant milestone in African American history.[4] By publishing the following symposium of modern scholarship on Delany's pathbreaking literary achievement, the *New North Star* seeks to also acknowledge his similarly significant contribution to the history of African American journalism in joining Douglass in founding our namesake, the original *North Star*.

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[1] *Douglass Papers*, ser. 3, 1:228–31; David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), 186–87.

[2] Tunde Adeleke, *Without Regard to Race: The Other Martin Robinson Delany* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), 33–34, 52; Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity (*Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 20–22.

[3] Blight, *Frederick Douglass,* 191–94
[4] Levine*, Politics of Representative Identity*, 48–49.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 16-17

Symposium on Martin R. Delany's *Blake*

Introduction

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My affinity to Martin R. Delany's legacy came about over a course of decades during my career as a museum curator and scholar. Like many people, I was introduced to Delany as a college undergraduate at the University of Cincinnati. To me, he was a footnote in Black history who seemed so remote I did not have an interest in learning more than the baseline premise of his biography. After all, I was a Frederick Douglass man—having attended Frederick Douglass Elementary School from heard-start to the third grade. I grew up just blocks away from the Harriet Beecher Stowe historic site in Cincinnati's Walnut Hills community. I knew about *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, two seminal volumes of abolitionist history.

What I did not know, but learned about and read as a graduate student, was the work of Martin R. Delany. During my ten years as the curator of the African American archives at the Western Reserve Historical Society, I was reintroduced to Delany through an original printing of the *Proceeding of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People,* a convention held in Cleveland, Ohio in August 1854 to discuss emigration from the United States. Delany was selected to chair the convention and set the tone for serious discussion and organizing around Black freedom somewhere, anywhere, but the United States. This public document not only opened my mind to an extended quest for Delany but also broadened my understanding of the struggle for Black freedom during the antebellum period.

When I moved to Pittsburgh in 2002, I took Delany with me. Shortly after I arrived, I searched the archives of the Heinz History Center for its Delany collection and other than a few of the seminal publications—Cyril Griffith's *The African Dream: Martin Delany and the Emergence of Pan African Thought*; Victor Ullman's *Martin R. Delany and the Beginnings of Black Nationalism*; and Frank (Francis) A. Rollin's *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*—the archives lacked any primary sources related to Delany. I immediately ordered a microfilm copy of *the Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention* from the Western Reserve Historical Society and made it a priority to search and acquire Delany archival material.

By 2002, I had served as a member of the Association for the Study of African American Life & History and readily attended the national conference and even chaired panels or presented papers at several meetings. It was at these conferences, between 2002 and 2017, that I would annually meet and re-meet colleagues who I called Delanyites. During its 2017 conference in Cincinnati, I met Kweku Larry Crowe, and he introduced me to his gathering at Delany's gravesite in Wilberforce, Ohio, each May around the birth of Delany. I then told him I was interested in establishing a seminar, symposium, or conference that would document and encourage further discourse about Delany. I felt Pittsburgh was the best place to do it, as the historical incubator of Delany's activism and education.

The Senator John Heinz History Center opened an exhibit named "From Slavery to Freedom" in 2012. That exhibition mounted a life figure of Martin Delany circa 1850 to join a

previous life figure of Major Delany mounting in a Civil War exhibit. Both life figures continue to be displayed and have become a major part of school group education. In 2019, I decided to move forward with the Martin R. Delany Symposium to serve as the primary convening of scholars, students, academics, and Delanyites to present work on Delany and to encourage a continued discourse. As a result, the first Martin R. Delany Symposium was convened in August 2022 with papers presented by keynoters Richard Blackett and Tundi Adeleke accompanied by a cadre of panelists who presented on Delany's novel, *Blake*.

The second Delany Symposium in 2023, likewise, had several presentations on various perspectives of *Blake*. Keynotes by Tera Hunter and Robert S. Levine framed discussion of Delany and his era along with his counterpart Frederick Douglass in the Black freedom struggle. This issue of the *New North Star* captures several of those papers from the 2022 and 2023 Symposia that focused on *Blake*. This collaboration between the Martin R. Delany Symposium and the *New North Star* journal promises to be a continued vehicle that will broaden the scope of Delany, Douglass, and their era.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 18-33

"Diaspora Literacy and the Africanization of Cuba in Martin Delany's *Blake*"

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In fall 1853, the *Daily National Intelligencer* commented on a report that was "calculated to startle": Great Britain was intervening into foreign affairs to accelerate the abolition of slavery in Cuba, not only sounding "the knell of slavery in the Antilles" but also signaling their intentions of "wresting the island from the dominion of Spain." The article details a concerted British effort to facilitate gradual emancipation in Cuba by "introducing apprentices from Africa into Cuba, with the consent of Spain and under the protection of British ships-of-war, to be worked for ten years as slaves; with the further agreement that slavery shall cease to exist in the island at the end of fifty years." Deliberately undermining its stated purpose of quelling national anxieties over Great Britain doubly violating the Monroe Doctrine (intruding into both US-American foreign policy with Spain and domestic debates over slavery), the article fanned the most unspeakable fears of Southern enslavers by contextualizing the potential emancipation of 800,000 enslaved people in Cuba with a reminder that "slavery has long since been extinguished in the large French Island of Hayti."[1] Not only would the abolition of slavery in Cuba sever the illegal routes for human trafficking that continued to feed Southern demands for captive labor, but the immediate proximity of enormous free Black populations in Haiti, Jamaica, and Cuba would also exacerbate their worries about a domino effect. The British, the report insinuates, were acutely aware of this uneasiness because of uprisings throughout their own colonies after failed attempts at gradual emancipation in the 1830s. Furthermore, the article suggests the British would leverage these fears to pressure the United States into abolishing slavery, thereby leveling the economic playing field among imperial powers. However accurate or exaggerated these reports were (most coverage dismissed the scandal as blustery posturing among Atlantic nations or annexationist propaganda), their impact on US-American thinking about Cuba was demonstrable. Racist fearmongering and the centrality of Cuba in (inter)national news transformed their catchy characterization of this scheme as the "Africanization of Cuba" into a commonplace expression in the mid-1850s.[2]

So, what exactly did concerns about the "Africanization of Cuba" mean, and what connotations would this phrase accumulate circulating in transnational political discourses? Most

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[1] "The Cuban Question—Extraordinary Rumors," Washington, D.C. *Daily National Intelligencer*, 22 October 1853.

[2] The abolitionist press shows "Africanization" to be a discursive locus where anxieties about foreign policy were negotiated. Newspapers arguing that the British were interfering, like the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, quickly condemned the scheme on ethical grounds, reprinting an article forecasting the geopolitical nightmare of reopening the African slave trade under the guise of gradual emancipation ("The Africanization of Cuba," 17 November 1853). Other outlets identified the rhetoric as a cover for either U.S.-American annexationists or European anti-annexationists. For more on how imperial contests shaped this discourse, see Urban, "Africanization;" Foner, *History of Cuba*, 75–85; May, *Southern Dream,* 46–76; Rauch, *American Interest,* 275–94; Brown, *Agents of Manifest Destiny*, 19–144; and Horne, *Race to Revolution*, 82–99.

concisely, I contend that it names a process of demographic and cultural changes that would result in Cuban institutions assuming the character of African "barbarity" in contradistinction to Euro-American "civilization." The nominalization was relatively new, however, and therefore pliable, entering English usage just a decade earlier. Furthermore, the fact that it emerges more or less contemporaneously with the advent of "Americanization" proves instructive.[3] For example, the abolitionist *National Era* accused slavery's advocates and expansionists of fabricating fears that the British were "plotting to arrest our territorial expansion" by supporting the Cuban apprenticeship program "so as to prevent, by its Africanization, its Americanization."[4] Here, "Americanization" signifies both a transformation of political status (annexing the Spanish colony to the United States as a state) and culture (assimilating Cubans into the United States as citizens). Efforts to colonize Cuba through subjugation and assimilation not only expressed the white nationalist ethos of Manifest; they also established "Africanization" as a similarly self-conscious and violent scheme that competing imperial powers advanced to obviate the culmination of Manifest Destiny. By framing "Americanization" as a preventative measure against "Africanization," the latter term ultimately serves to conjure the white nightmare of another Haiti—a self-emancipated Black state with self-governing Black population fostering Africana culture(s)—while also justifying preemptive colonization as upholding the Monroe Doctrine and protecting the "righteous" U.S.-American hegemony in the Americas.[5] Through this juxtaposition, the white gaze reveals the anxieties of whiteness embedded in the ambitions of imperial expansion. "More than any other area," Reginald Horsman writes, "Cuba attracted southern interest in the 1850s," exacerbating sectionalist rifts between North and South, but "also revealing . . . the constraints placed on American expansion by new racial ideas." Proponents of annexing Cuba, for example, nevertheless expressed concerns that the island was "too densely populated to be 'Americanized,'" lamenting that the promise of annexation was tempered by the impracticality of "changing the racial characteristics of the [majority Black and biracial] population" in Cuba.[6]

While the racist roots of "Africanization" are perhaps unsurprising, this essay asks what the term communicated to Black organizers in the United States, and how its license to define what Africanized cultural institutions were (and could be) informed Black internationalist writing about a majority Afro-descended colony like Cuba. As Stuart Hall argues, "Africa" is, in the Derridean sense, "necessarily 'deferred'—as a spiritual, cultural, and political metaphor" that Euro-Americans have normalized and fixed "by freezing it into some timeless zone of the primitive, unchanging past."[7] It serves as a homogenizing container that reduces an eclectic continent of cultures and histories into a pretended common denominator (Blackness), thereby subserving supremacist fantasies and authorizing racial capitalism. For Black internationalists though, a monolithic Africa was a useful fiction that animated possibilities for diasporic solidarity. As a principle and practice of stabilizing these bonds, then, the political potency of "Africa" requires deft navigation of the diverse genealogical and geographical trajectories that originate there and

[3] "Africanization, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2021, Oed.com; "Americanization, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2021, Oed.com.
[4] "Africanization of Cuba," *The National Era*, 8 December 1853. *Frederick Douglass' Paper* similarly contrasted the terms, arguing that "Americanization" would be "the most dire calamity which could befall" Cuba ("The Cuban Question," 23 June 1854).
[5] *See* Alexander, *Fear.* On the impacts of the Haitian Revolution on Cuba, *see* Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror*; on the fears of Cuba becoming "another Haiti", *see* Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 23–54.
[6] Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 281, 283. In the mid-1800s, Afro-descended people became the majority in Cuba, exacerbating uneasiness among affluent white *criollos* and enslavers (Murray, *Odious Commerce*, 159–240).
[7] Hall, "Cultural Identity," 231.

thereby theoretically unite the diaspora; at the same time, it also requires a recognition that the continental coherence of "Africa" only obtains in transatlantic slavery's wake. Hall employs diaspora "metaphorically, not literally," dismissing a formulation of "scattered tribes whose identities can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return." Instead, "the diaspora experience" is characterized not by appeals to origin or essence but rather through identities that are "constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference," yielding manifold relations in which cultural differences "are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference."[8] Because "Africa" becomes an imagined community through transatlantic slavery, it is in this sense always a diasporic construct. But rather than reconstructing a fictious past or envisioning an impossible return though, diaspora leverages the utility of a metaphorical "Africa"—rooted in shared histories emanating from the "traumatic ruptures" that "enforced separations from Africa"— to consolidate and preserve those differences into a political community.[9]

Building on Hall's formulation, this essay tracks how Black internationalists like Martin Delany adopted Africanization amid debates over Cuba's annexation to the Unites States. The Black disidentification with this concept speaks back against both its weaponization by annexationists and its discursive homogenization of the continent in service of transnational white supremacy.[10] Whereas Euro-Americans viewed the Africanization of Cuba as a devolution into "barbarity" that threatened to resonate throughout the Americas, the texts I consider here conceptualize it as a reorganization of American societies to more closely resemble what "Africa" signifies to its diaspora: a metaphor for the liberationist organization of a diverse coalition of African Americans (in its broadest sense) that are "*both* the same *and* different," and in which "the difference *matters*."[11]

By regarding Martin Delany's serial novel, *Blake, or the Huts of America* (1859; 1861–1862), as a laboratory for experimentality with reclaimed understandings of Africanization, I expand on Eric Sundquist's pioneering reading of how the Cuban El Día de los Reyes celebration in its final chapters "demonstrated the necessary syncretism that infused any Afro-New World society" and "provided, in its ritual breaking down of the regulating power of the slave regime, a model for the eruption of revolution."[12] While Sundquist provocatively claims that these African cultural retentions constitute "an indigenous account of 'Africanization' that powerfully reorients the role of Afro-Cubans among the various factions pitted against the Spanish slave-holding regime," I argue that these events culminate an evolving strategy throughout *Blake* that expands far beyond Cuba. Indeed, Delany's novel traces a network of religious, cultural, and political assemblages in the U.S. American South, Cuba, and West Africa to unveil its theory of diaspora, wherein Africanization represents both the means and ends of the hemispheric Black confederation that Delany envisions in the novel. By elaborating a reading strategy championed by the novel itself, I divulge how Black organizers in *Blake* accumulate local knowledge from their distinctive

[8] Hall, "Cultural Identity," 235.
[9] Hall, "Cultural Identity," 227. DuBois's writings on Pan-Africanism further relieve the defining duality of diaspora: in calling for "intellectual understanding and cooperation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples" ("Pan-Africa," 242). Even as "Africa" unites diverse populations through their ancestry, their agenda is transnational Black liberation enacted through local actions and global cooperation, not a romantic return to Africa, recovery of history, or reconsolidation of disparate populations.
[10] *See* Muñoz, *Disidentifications*.
[11] Hall, "Cultural Identity," 227.
[12] Sundquist, *Wake the Nations*, 212, 213.

constituencies to facilitate recruitment and augment their revolution's impact—they must learn what makes their African (American) allies *different* and then communicate across those differences to elucidate what makes them the *same*.

Learning "Diaspora Literacy"

In unfolding its expansive political imagination, *Blake* relies on heavy-handed didacticism. Not only does it stage Socratic dialogues designed to wither proslavery arguments and internecine arguments for more conservative approaches to Black liberation (e.g., waiting for legislative action), but it meticulously instructs readers in concrete actions for organizing Black communities. Foremost among *Blake*'s lessons is a masterclass in what Vèvè Clark terms *diaspora literacy*. Responding to (white) U.S.-American readers' frustrations with difficult Afro-Caribbean writings, Clark contends that these texts are only inscrutable insofar as they issue "a command from indigenous, cultural perspectives beyond the field of Western or westernized signification." In other words, if white readers struggle with Afro-Caribbean texts, it is because they were not written for them; and if they wish to understand them, they must learn to read on the texts' own terms: "It is a skill for both narrator and reader, which demands a knowledge of historical, social, cultural, and political development generated by lived and textual experience."[13]

Despite journeying across the South in 1839, traveling as a journalist for the *North Star*, living in Canada from 1856 to 1859, and leading the Niger Valley Exploring Party in 1859–60, Delany could hardly be said to possess exhaustive familiarity with his novel's many locales. Still, *Blake* inculcates its readers into intensely local intelligence (e.g. curfew laws, restrictions on mobility, and cruel/permissive enslavers), often in crucial moments of crisis where that expertise represents the difference between capture and escape, between life and death. Thus, although *Blake* occasionally adopts supercilious tones toward African cultures and their adaptations in the South, developing diaspora literacy becomes paramount to its project. For diasporic subjects, understanding "indigenous cultural perspectives" of *other* diasporic subjects is table stakes for diaspora's political potency. Accumulating knowledge and facilitating communication through diaspora literacy not only enable the navigation of the circum-Atlantic routes necessary for amassing a revolutionary army, but they also unravel the manifold false consciousnesses (class, nation, color, caste, etc.) that might otherwise inhibit the development of a more expansive diaspora consciousness.

We see *Blake*'s investments in diaspora literacy most immediately in religion. Henry's project depends on an extended process of making religion that rejects the racist structures of existing worship "to create a new religious establishment that protects black people."[14] At the novel's outset, Henry repudiates Christianity as an instrument through which white institutions reinforce servility, passivity, and complacency: "Don't tell me about religion! What's religion to me? . . . Put my trust in the Lord! I have done so all my life nearly, and of what use is it to me?"[15] These rhetorical questions illustrate that religion's utility to Henry is as a means of liberation and enlightenment: "You must make your religion serve your interests, as your oppressors do theirs."[16]

[13] Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literacy," 41–42. On the deliberate challenges that Black Atlantic aesthetics present readers, *see* Brodber, "Head-Hurting Fiction"; and Pinto, *Difficult Diasporas*.
[14] Shreve, "The Exodus of Martin Delany," 465.
[15] Delany, *Blake*, 17.
[16] Delany, *Blake*, 43.

Henry employs this strategy throughout his travels, and we see its culmination once he gathers the Grand Council of the Army of Emancipation in Cuba. His call for an inaugural prayer at the meeting briefly derails its business as dissent emerges from the Catholic Afro-Cubans. Henry responds by enumerating the myriad sects their shared cause has convened, only to assure them that none of these faiths are alone sufficient: "No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but he who owns us as his children will we serve . . . [Our ceremonies] are borrowed from no denomination, creed, nor church: no existing organization, secret, secular, nor religious; but originated by ourselves, adopted to our own condition, circumstances, and wants, founded upon the eternal word of God our Creator, as impressed upon the tablet of our hearts."[17] What Grant Shreve calls Henry's investment in "religious novelty"—repudiating existing religions and instead drawing on useful aspects of multiple belief systems to forge a heterogeneous assemblage—describes practices ubiquitous throughout the diaspora.[18] Enslaved Africans and their descendants retained their religious-cultural beliefs, but they also eventually adopted and integrated Christian doctrines into these beliefs, either by evacuating the religious aspects of African cultural practices to square them with Christianity or by borrowing distinct elements from each culture to develop new expressions. Religious novelty, then, blends elements of Euro-American and African religions by blending the secular and sacred, the political and the providential. In this way, these beliefs and practices function "not only as an implement humans use to make transnational connections, but also as a thickly lived set of connections to the material that allows the subject to access something outside of the nation-state—that orients the individual otherwise."[19]

It is fitting, then, that Henry eventually articulates the political expediency of developing a shared, novel religion to unify the African diaspora around a common goal. Recruiting a revolutionary army depends upon his accumulation of knowledge about the myriad Black cultures that have developed in highly localized and disparate contexts. In doing so, Henry imagines diasporic intimacies that develop in the lived experiences of Blackness and then exceed local and national affiliations; or, as John Ernest frames Henry's project, "What is required is the development of a mode of religious interpretation that extends beyond the purely spiritual realm, one capable of reading the world."[20] Ernest's phrase "reading the world" proves doubly insightful. When directed at the white world, *Blake*'s endorsement of religious novelty is a *reading* of white Christianity in the Black vernacular sense, where "to 'get read' or 'be read' is to be dressed down, or told about yourself"; but when directed at the Black world Henry consolidates through his revolutionary enterprise, *reading* the Black Atlantic requires a polyglot versed in the diverse dispersed communities that would comprise its constituents.[21] This is diaspora literacy.

In what follows, I highlight African religious-cultural practices that pervade the novel and invigorate the diasporic praxis that *Blake* champions. Before proceeding, however, I want to clarify that I am not claiming that Delany deliberately wrote these references into *Blake*. Instead, though largely unfamiliar with and uninterested in African religions, Delany was nevertheless invested in what W. E. B. DuBois calls "a certain spiritual housecleaning" in which "intellectual understanding and cooperation" requires that "Negroes, West Indians, West Africans and South

[17] Delany, *Blake*, 259.
[18] Shreve, "The Exodus of Martin Delany."
[19] Jaudon, "Obeah's Sensations," 718. While *religious novelty* might also be called "syncretism," I avoid this term, as critics highlight its tendency to reify constituent religions as "real" while downplaying the realness of "syncretic" religions.
[20] Ernest, *Resistance and Reformation*, 132.
[21] Foreman, *Activist Sentiments*, 3.

Africans must proceed immediately to wipe from their minds the preconcepts of each other which they have gained through white newspapers" and see one another on their own terms.[22] My contention, then, is not that Delany sounded a deep reservoir of knowledge regarding African cultures to sprinkle references throughout his work. Instead, I argue that diasporic readers *could* recognize these allusions in the text regardless of intentionality and that such interpretations would be meaningful and useful to developing real-world corollaries to the novel's transnational revolution. Whether Delany understood himself to be authoring allusions is irrelevant because he nevertheless intuitively recognized that symbolism depends on interpretation. *Blake* could therefore signify "simultextually" by "allow[ing] readers who do not always enjoy shared fields of cultural and social to take multiple interpretive paths through narratives."[23] More interpretive paths, Delany realized, meant more opportunities for the novel to activate diverse Black audiences and could therefore help organize that diaspora of readers into a politically efficacious body.

These tensions between Delany's internalized U.S.-American exceptionalism and his recognition of diaspora literacy's utility materialize throughout *Blake*. Its polyglot protagonist routinely communicates across languages and cultures. Introduced to readers as "a man of good literary attainments . . . having been educated in the West Indies," this edification shapes his scheme.[24] Not only does he learn to read, write, and speak several languages in Cuba, but his vocational education at sea also teaches him about navigational routes, naval operations, international commerce, and what Julius Scott calls the "common wind" of Black maritime communication networks.[25] As Henry moves throughout the South in the first half of the novel, for example, he gathers knowledge from local informants (e.g. names of enslavers, recent gossip, and individual plantations' cultures). In "Come What Will," for instance, Henry secures passage on a steamer as "Gilbert," an identity he performs based on his familiarity with trade and horseracing along the Mississippi River, while in "What Not," he learns of extensive gossip networks that have already disseminated his plot for him, allowing locals to anticipate his arrival and facilitate his movements. Similarly, in "A Flying Cloud," he mistakenly attempts to present himself as a free Black man, only to learn of a statewide restriction on free Black people's movements in South Carolina, prompting his premature retreat from the state and his more surreptitious movements through Charleston in the subsequent chapter. In sum, these lessons instruct Henry that mobility and accruing regional knowledge are mutually constitutive and mutually enriching. As we will see in the next section, this learning serves him well as he begins to navigate the particulars of the diasporic milieus of colonial Cuba, West Africa, and Black Atlantic.

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[22] DuBois, "Pan-Africa," 247. For all the details of disease, topography, climate, and politics in his *Official Report of the Niger Valley Exploring Party* (1861), Delany's remarks on regional religions are spartan, overshadowed by arguments that renewed investments in missionary work are "essential to the success of civilization" in Africa (342). His collaborator, Robert Campbell, however, writes extensively on these matters in recounting the same journey; *See Pilgrimage to My Motherland* (1861). On Delany's assimilationist ideas for Black-led African colonization;, *See* Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans*, 43–69; Moses, *Golden Age*, 32–55; Sterling, *Making*, 176–218; and Tomek, *Colonization and its Discontents*, 187–218.

[23] Foreman, *Activist Sentiments*, 6. Erna Brodber's reflections on the "flying man" trope and her own writing have deeply influenced my thinking here. To explain her seemingly subconscious invocation of the trope despite her lack of familiarity, she concludes, "the tale of the flying man might have been brought from Africa but even if it didn't pre-exist, it would have to be made in Africa of the diaspora" because "it is natural for the imprisoned who see no hope of being released and who know that there is another kind of life, to think in terms of flight" ("Beyond a Boundary," 20, 19).

[24] Delany, *Blake*, 18.

[25] Scott, *Common Wind*.

The Africanization of Revolution

Written in the mid-1850s, *Blake* responds to intensifying U.S.-American efforts to annex Cuba (e.g., the 1854 Ostend Manifesto) and the failed filibustering missions of Narciso López. "To have Cuba as a United States territory the Americans are determined," Delany wrote for the *North Star*, "but what is to be done to prevent a scheme fraught with such fearful consequences as this project of annexation of Cuba?"[26] *Blake* is his answer. Foreshadowed in its opening chapters, the novel's turn to Cuba in part 2 elaborates its anticolonial arguments and the dual objectives of Henry's revolution: primarily concerned with annihilating slavery throughout the Americas, his mission must also prevent the annexation of Cuba to the Unites States, which would further entrench slavery in an expanding U.S.-American Empire.[27]

When Henry arrives in Cuba, he must adapt the lessons learned about vernacular knowledge, religious novelty, and diasporic cultures to the local milieu. Whereas *Blake* relegates Conjure in the U.S.-American South to the Dismal Swamp, for example, the Africanist presence in Cuba literally takes centerstage during El Día de los Reyes in "King's Day." The dancing and drums of this sensational, business-halting festival consume the streets of Matanzas, creating cover for Henry, Placido, and their co-conspirators to convene secretly. More than simply providing a distraction though, the festival's African roots prove equally important to the revolutionaries' covert machinations. Because *Blake* discloses the festivities through the (white) ethnographic gaze of "a popular American literary periodical" from which the narrator quotes, the event appears as a lurid bacchanalia, brimming with elaborate costumes, lascivious dancing, and unruly masses of *bozales* (Africans) and Afro-Cubans.[28] For white onlookers (whether the Cuban *criollos* or the U.S.-American readers of either the original newspaper account or *Blake*), these scenes physically manifest the threat of Cuba's Africanization: "One cannot help thinking of the menace of the Spanish Government that Cuba shall be either Spanish or African, and when we see these savages in their play more like wild animals than human beings, the idea what their rage would probably be, makes the boldest shutter."[29] The account further insinuates that the Cuban colonial government actively encouraged the performances and that by "prolong[ing] for three days the privileges of the day to the Lucumis, the most warlike tribe of the African slaves in Cuba," they effectively terrorized white *criollos* with "the standing threat that Cuba must be Spanish or African."[30] As a spectacular performance of Africanness, then, the festival formed part of a racial-colonial disciplinary apparatus designed to suppress anticolonialism among white *criollos* by activating their fears of racial genocide and insinuating that the holiday's excesses were a faint approximation of what the island's Africanization would bring.

While such fearmongering aimed to temper anticolonial sentiment, *Blake* suggests that it also emboldened antislavery and anticolonial activism among Afro-Cubans. Although the novel reproduces a white ethnographic gaze that renders the festival's performances as hedonistic excess, it also effectively *holds* that gaze, providing a distraction while the revolutionary conspirators' Gran Council convenes to plan its next steps. Historically, El Día de los Reyes celebrations were

[26] Delany, "Annexation of Cuba," *North Star*, 27 April 1849.
[27] On *Blake* as response to the annexation debate, *see* Clymer, "Transnational Politics"; Nwankwo, "Promises and Perils"; and Leary, *Cultural History*, 23–43.
[28] Delany, *Blake*, 299.
[29] Delany, *Blake*, 301.
[30] Delany, *Blake*, 302.

organized by *cabildos de nación*, or ethnocentric Afro-Cuban social organizations designed to preserve African languages and cultures, while also cultivating a political consciousness. Thus, beyond "imply[ing] a secretive African dimension" in Cuban society that unnerved white audiences and emboldened Black ones, the festival advances *Blake*'s argument that local knowledge and diasporic cultures (here, the Yoruba traditions and rituals communicated through drumming and dancing) are vital tools for Black liberation.[31] For example, the passage's allusion to the "warlike" Lucumí (as the prominent Yoruba are known in Cuba) nods to enslaved uprisings around Matanzas, including La Escalera (1843–44), which resulted in hundreds of enslaved Cubans and their allies (including Plácido) being executed for supposedly plotting a slave rebellion on Christmas Day—or, put differently, during the lead-up to El Día de los Reyes.[32] Moreover, as Jane Landers notes, the investigations into the conspiracy "uncovered a supposed connection between the free blacks of Matanzas and plantation slaves, many of whom turned out to be members of the Lucumí nation. . . . The rebellion allegedly involved witchcraft that would renders the whites 'stupid' and their weapons useless."[33] The allusion to "witchcraft" here suggests that white *criollo* fears not only stemmed from the robust Lucumí *cabildo*, but also from the knowledge that "Lucumí" likewise refers to followers of La Regla Lucumí, a Santería sect endemic to Cuba. Unlike Conjure, which is largely divorced from divinity, La Regla Lucumí is an overtly religious practice that interweaves the Yoruba pantheon with the Catholic canon of saints and martyrs.[34] "Lucumí" therefore aggravates a constellation of white anxieties, including the formalization of Black social networks, the potency of folk knowledge (especially herbology and toxicology), and the "Africanization" of Cuban institutions, including Catholicism.

As a case study for the political utility of diaspora literacy in *Blake*, reviewing part two through the lens of these Africanist presences illuminates how its revolution relies not only on the specter of Cuba's Africanization, but on the diasporic forms of vernacular knowledge and power that develop through the island's actual demographic and cultural Africanization, resulting from the continued trafficking of Africans to Cuba. Tellingly, the centerpiece of Henry's plan involves traveling aboard a slave ship (the *Merchantman* of the opening chapters poetically refitted as the *Vulture*), abetting the purchase of kidnapped Africans, fomenting an uprising at sea, and then enlisting those Africans into his Army of Emancipation in Cuba. Two factors complicate this plan. First, the ship's white officers have no intention of transporting their human cargo back to Cuba. Instead, they plan to smuggle them into the United States via Key West, where both the captives and the ship's Black crew would be sold into slavery. Second, just as the rebellion in the *Vulture*'s hold begins, a storm interrupts its momentum, allowing the officers to suppress the uprising but forcing them to reroute to Cuba after all. Upon arriving, Henry circulates gossip about the captives' rebelliousness through his extensive social networks to depress auction prices, enabling the Grand

[31] Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 212.

[32] As Roberto González Echevarría observes more generally, "uprisings and other politically motivated acts were staged during holidays not only to confuse the authorities or to take advantage of the relaxed vigilance and turmoil" (*Cuban Fiestas*, 287).

[33] Landers, *Atlantic Creoles*, 204–30. The Lucumí were strongly associated with uprisings in Cuba, including a series of 1812 revolts led by José Antonio Aponte (a "leader of the Shangó Tedum cabildo, a prominent practitioner of Lucumí religion, and a member of the Ogboni, a powerful secret society of Yorubaland" [Reid, "The Yoruba in Cuba," 116]) and the arrest of Lucumí cabildo leader Juan Nepomuceno Prieto on suspicions of fomenting a slave rebellion in 1835. On these rebellions, *see* Childs, *Aponte Rebellion* and Lovejoy, *Prieto*. On La Escalera, *see* Paquette, *Sugar*; Reid-Vasquez, *Year of the Lash*; and Finch, *Rethinking Slave Rebellion*.

[34] Raboteau, *Slave Religion*. On La Regla Lucumí and Santería, *see* Murray, *Santería*; Brandon, *Santeria from Africa to the New World*; Brown, *Santería Enthroned*; Cros Sandoval, *Worldview*; and Olupona and Abiodun, *Ifá Divination*.

Council's agents to purchase the entire cohort, including the characters of Abyssa and Mende, who played key roles in the aborted maritime uprising and whom Placido purchased personally.

While the storm metaphorically and narratologically functions as one of divine intervention (deus ex machina), *Blake*'s Christian characters would not be the only ones to appraise it as such. Among the kidnapped Africans in the *Vulture*'s hold, disciples of Yoruba and Dahomean Vodun could have interpreted the gathering storm as the intervention of Changó, the god of fire, thunder, and lightning, who, corresponding to Catholicism's Saint Barbara, became a central figure in La Regla Lucumí in Cuba.[35] The oral nature of Yoruba and its myriad American adaptations make a concise portrait of Changó challenging to render, but Michele Reid aptly describes him as "a warrior" who symbolizes "power and control over difficulties, but also embodies virility and passion," making him an ideal figure of the impending insurrection.[36] Indeed, as the weather intensifies at the conclusion of "Middle Passage," the Black crew commence a gleeful rendition of J. E. Robinson's "We're for Freedom through the Land" to torment their oppressors. The song quickly develops into a call and response. As the captives sing "We bring light," Henry replies with an imperative "See!" In response, "a vivid flash of lightning was seen in the distance, presently followed by a heavy rumbling of thunder."[37] As if restaging Jehovah's inaugural speech act ("Let there be light!"), the song summons the storms. And yet to interpret this moment within a strictly Christian framework would be incomplete. In fact, the verse that Henry interrupts continues, "We are coming, we are coming! and 'No league with tyrant man,' / Is emblazoned on our banner, while Jehovah leads the van!" Thus, the deliberate truncation of the verse excises the explicit reference to the Christian God, thereby rendering the allusion more ambiguous.[38] Moreover, that interruption ("See!") visually redirects the crew's attention to the thunder and lightning—signifiers of Changó. Consequently, regardless of which god the Black crew or captive Africans worshiped, this pivotal moment evidenced that *their* god heard their pleas.[39]

The distinctive religious interpretations of the storm are not mutually exclusive, but rather essential byproducts of the simultextual readings that the novels' commitments to diaspora necessitate. The pliability of signification across multiple religions and cultures is essential to the organization of the Army of Emancipation precisely because assembling the African diaspora under the aegis of revolution requires responsiveness to differences among its constituents. *Blake* carefully textures that diversity even aboard the *Vulture*. For example, the aforementioned African characters, Abyssa and Mende, play pivotal roles in the maritime insurrection, while

[35] While I want to be careful not to project worldviews onto the fictional captives, the setting (the Bight of Benin—a key locus of Cuba's illegal slave trade) strengthens the supposition that they were familiar with Changó. Not only is the deity central to many religions and cosmologies in the region (Cros Sandoval, *Worldview*, 223–36), but of the 48,000 Africans sold into transatlantic slavery from Dahomey in the 1850s, Patrick Manning estimates that about 38,000 were Yoruba (Manning, *Slavery*, 335). Determining the ethnicities of enslaved Africans, however, is notoriously challenging in this period because the now-illegal traffic disincentivized recordkeeping and the records that were kept used ethnic monikers that reflected port of sale rather than individuals' origins (Hall, *Slavery*; Falola and Childs, "Yoruba Diaspora"; and Eltis, "Diaspora of Yoruba Speakers"). Moreover, centuries of trade had transformed many Africans in coastal regions into multicultural polyglots that Ira Berlin famously termed Atlantic Creoles (*Many Thousands Gone*). Though the extent of Delany's knowledge of these cultures is uncertain, he was at least familiar with Changó. His maternal grandfather was "an African prince, from the Niger valley regions" named Shango "from that of a great African deity of protection, which is represented in their worship as a ram's head with the attribute of fire" (Rollin, *Life*, 16).

[36] Reid, "The Yoruba in Cuba," 120.

[37] Delany, *Blake*, 228.

[38] Robinson, "We're for Freedom," 187.

[39] Hall, "Cultural Identity," 227.

metonymically signifying the growing revolution's diverse coalitions. Mende's name recalls the 1839 *Amistad* rebellion, in which captive Mende (an ethnic group from modern Sierra Leone) overthrew the ship's crew and successfully navigated from Cuba to the United States, but *Mendi* was also the Black-owned barque that carried Delany to Liberia at the outset of his 1859 voyage to Africa with the Niger Valley exploring party.[40] Similarly, Abyssa is originally from Sudan before she relocates to "the Eba country" (Ibo or modern Nigeria), a thousand-mile migration that culminates with her being "sold to Dahomi by the Ibadana."[41] Her origins in East Africa, read alongside the enslavement of West Africans like Mende, chart the slave trade's enduring transcontinental expanse while also providing a cipher for her name: Abyssa alludes to Abyssinia (the colonialist exonym for the Ethiopian Empire), invoking both the ancient history of Christianity in Africa and the Black rhetorical tradition of citing Ethiopia to evidence the atavistic roots of African civilization.[42] Abyssa, herself a convert from Islam to Christianity, therefore represents the deep roots of African Christianity and portends the renewed evangelical efforts Delany espoused in Africa. Significantly, Abyssa converts in the context of her journey from Sudan to Nigeria to West Africa, meaning that hers is a Christianity forged in a transnational, transcultural African context, not an imposition from European colonizers. In this way, she exemplifies both the cultural assemblages endemic to Black diaspora and the religious novelty for which Henry advocates.

Furthermore, *Blake* spotlights several individuals aboard the vessel who, like Abyssa and Henry, can translate across the diaspora's languages, religions, and cultures. Unlike the vertically oriented scenes of instruction and translation witnessed in "Studying Head Work," the revolution's accumulated diversity disperses more evenly the labor of teaching, learning, and practicing diaspora literacy. Before the insurrection at sea begins, for example, an intoxicated white officer hails several Black sailors standing together ("Disperse there, you black clouds! We're not ready for rain!"), to which Gascar—a character Delany models after a spirited "native Greba boy employed on a vessel on the coast of Africa, 1859"—ominously retorts, "But you may have a storm."[43] Delany's "Greba" likely means "Grebo," an ethnolinguistic subgroup of the larger Kru nation in what became Liberia. Because the *Vulture*'s Black crew were "mostly hired slaves," the young Grebo's enslavement critiques Liberia's failure to protect West Africans from the ongoing slave trade.[44] Moreover, Henry directly divulges the significance of individuals like Gascar to his enterprise: "I am well acquainted with the native Krumen on the coast, many of the heads of whom speak several European tongues, and as sailing master I can obtain as many as I wish, who will make a powerful force in carrying out my scheme on the vessel."[45] A Kru among the crew, this young Grebo man is not only a witty worker whose repartee distracts the white officers as the insurrection organizes itself, but also a polyglot whose linguistic facility enables communication

[40] McGann, "Notes", 328n206; Delany, *Report*, 252.
[41] Delany, *Blake*, 226.
[42] While Black invocations of Ethiopia were common during this period, an especially influential example is Henry Highland Garnet's lecture, "The Past and Present Condition, and the Destiny of the Colored Race" (1848), which not only likely inspired Delany's title for his 1852 tract, but, as Shreve shows, also deeply impacted his thinking on Black nationalism, including *Blake* ("Exodus," 470). Additionally, Abyssa's name parallels Delany naming his youngest daughter Ethiopia, which Tolagbe Ogunleye reads as a manifestation of his investments in the Pan-Africanist philosophy known as Ethiopianism and "his lifelong strivings to awaken Africans in America to the ancient wisdom, traditions, and legendary instructions of that nation as well as to the entire African continent" ("Dr. Martin Robison Delany," 645). On Ethiopianism, *see* Nurhussein, *Black Land*.
[43] Delany, *Blake*, 223.
[44] Delany, *Blake*, 211.
[45] Delany, *Blake*, 200.

among the diverse Black crew and captives. Positioning him as a universal translator on the ship brings into relief the cutting wit of his joke: his multilingualism transforms disparate Africans and African Americans into an organized revolutionary force ("black clouds" into a "storm" in his metaphoric idiom).[46] In this way, the Black crew and captives might have viewed the *Vulture* as what Solimar Otero calls the "transatlantic crossroads," where a diasporic deity (Èsù Elegbara in Yoruba, Elegguá in Cuba, and Legba in Haiti and Dahomey) works to "simultaneously intercept and allow communication between different orders of energies in a manner that reorients attention to thresholds and potentiality."[47] Henry and Gascar, then, emerge as envoys of Èsù, translating across the "disparate religions [that] converge within common space" of the *Vulture* and thereby "mak[ing] and remak[ing] connections" among revolutionary recruits.[48] These characters help translate the storm's symbolism across different cultures and, in doing so, they literalize the metaphor—the rebellion *is* the gathering storm and vice versa.

Translation, as *Blake* demonstrates, is both a function and an effect of diaspora literacy, and we can further expand the sea storm's simultextuality with Christina Sharpe's meditations on meteorology in the wake of slavery: "In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive *as* climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies. . . . The weather trans*forms Black being. But the shipped, the held, and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies. When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of antiblackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?"[49] What we must know, *Blake* posits, is one another. Variously a sign of the disaster of slavery, the impending revolution, and the righteous anger of Jehovah/Changó, the storm that disrupts the *Vulture*'s voyage also disrupts the climate of antiblackness against which *Blake* rages. Aboard the ship and in its hold, we see diaspora literacy facilitating the development of a new ecology: the forging of Blackness in the crucible of crisis, across and through difference. Indeed, Sharpe's sense of ecology here ("the branch of biology that deals with relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings; the political movement that seeks to protect the environment, especially from pollution") provides an apt complement to Delany's favorite metaphor for Henry's project: "sowing the seeds of future devastation."[50] The storm—read through the simultextuality of diaspora literacy—soaks the fecund, expansive terrain of *Blake*'s narrative landscapes, accelerating its revolutionary germination, and cultivating a diasporic ecology of resistance within the total climate of antiblackness.

Ultimately, Africanization becomes a diasporic praxis. For white U.S.-Americans, this prospect provoked fears of multiplying Black revolutions, Black governments, and Black culture in the Americas—what we might, in a longer view of U.S.-Cuba relations, understand akin to the Domino Theory of the Cold War. *Blake* animates and aggravates these anxieties by drawing a direct line between African cultures and transnational Black revolution. But for the predominantly Black readers of the *Anglo-African Magazine* and the *Weekly Anglo-African*, *Blake* demonstrates

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[46] In the 1850s, the Kru were "cultural middlemen as well as boatmen and stevedores" in Liberia, confirming Delany's observations. "Their work interfaced with the polyglot economies of the Atlantic, and so did their identities. Some learned English and other European languages to facilitate social intercourse . . . they were more or less at home anywhere in western Africa, from Monrovia to Angola" (Clegg, *Price of Liberty*, 77–78).

[47] Otero, "Èsù," 208. *See* also Russell, *Legba's Crossing*.

[48] Pettway, *Cuban Literature*, 146–47.

[49] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 106.

[50] Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 106; Delany, *Blake*, 84.

how the Africanization of Cuba models a strategy for building and sustaining transnational Black coalitions rooted in cultural pluralism and routed through the diasporic networks that bind the Black Atlantic.[51] Much like "Africa"—as both a continent and a concept—contains multitudes, *Blake*'s multinational Grand Army recognizes the utility in both unity and diversity. The Africanization of Cuba, then, represented the hope of Black liberation, and perhaps even a Black Americas.

[51] On these readerships, *see* Wilson, "Brief Wondrous Life"; and Fagan, *Black Newspaper*, 119–41.

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New North Star, 2024; 6: 34-55

"Loose," but not Free: Ambiguity and Liberatory Potential in Martin R. Delany's *Blake*[1]

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As a storm rages during the Middle Passage, the slave ship *Vulture* is riven by conflict within. Distracted by the storm and struggling to keep the ship afloat, the officers are unable to attend to the enslaved people below decks, who release each other "from their fetters"[2] and arm themselves. A young midshipman catches a glimpse of the slave revolt's leader in a flash of lighting and is terrified by the sight.

"You don't understand me sir, the negroes, the negroes are—"

"What?"

"Loose!"[3]

As a whole, Martin Delany's *Blake: Or, The Huts of America* (1859–62) can be understood through this central scene. A group of oppressed Black people lie "below" the colonial power structure and political system. They are unshackled by a "master spirit,"[4] prepared for revolt. In the words of midshipman Spencer, they are "loose," but awaiting the revolutionary moment, they are not yet free. Their status is ambiguous, and that ambiguity recurs throughout the novel. The scene is a moment of tension—between unbearable conditions and unthinkable action—that mirrors the post-Fugitive Slave Act, pre-Civil War historical moment of its writing. This tension is never fully resolved in *Blake*. The would-be slave revolt aboard the *Vulture* is interrupted by the ship's arrival in Cuba, and the plotted general revolution of people of color in Havana is interrupted by the historical loss of *Blake*'s final chapter. These interruptions are another source of ambiguity, which characterizes the aesthetic as well as the thematic effect of the novel.

Blake depicts a quest for the liberation for Black people. That quest is often frustrated, often deferred, and ultimately unresolved; but in its progress, in how the novel investigates and explores the conditions of liberation, it offers potential. *Blake* doesn't neatly fit in a binary interpretive box, and neither does its author. Against descriptions of Delany as a Black nationalist, Theodore Draper wrote in 1970 that the life of Delany "was filled with contradictions and dualities," and drew attention to the brevity of Delany's radical period: "the consistently emigrationist portion of his life filled only about ten years."[5] Building on Draper, Tunde Adeleke explored these contradictions and dualities in his study, concluding that "Delany represented very complex, diverse, and ambivalent values and idiosyncrasies that underscore an equally complex and much more pragmatic personality, radically different from and often diametrically opposed to the militant nationalist that modern scholars highlight and exalt."[6] As a text, despite its radical elements, *Blake* reflects this ambivalence in its depictions of the conditions and means of liberation. While the book should be appreciated for its radical, speculative approach, and the insights it offers about anti-colonial religion and culture, it is ultimately incomprehensible without

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[1] In addition to a portion presented at the Delany Symposium in 2021, this essay is adapted from my MA thesis. *See* Brown, "'Loose' but Not Free."
[2] Delany, *Blake*, 236.
[3] Delany, *Blake*, 237.
[4] Delany, *Blake*, 236.
[5] Draper, "The Father of American Black Nationalism."
[6] Adeleke, *Without Regard to Race*, xxi.

an appreciation of that essential ambivalence to Delany and *Blake*, and the centrality of ambiguity to interpreting the novel. In this essay, I read *Blake* through a postcolonial lens, and with an analytic of affiliation sensitive to the ways in which the book is bonded to the history of its author, publication, and world. I find that the book is ultimately an expression of potential: through ambivalence and ambiguity, it creates an alternative space within the oppressive systems it is linked to, a space of political potential for the oppressed.

Timothy Powell and Gesa Mackenthun offer an invaluable starting point in their postcolonial readings of *Blake*, taking different routes to contextualizing *Blake* in postcolonial terms. Powell, whose literary reading largely focuses on the novel's stateside action, points to *Blake* as a literary exploration of the intersection of several strains of internal colonization.[7] Mackenthun takes the alternate path of describing colonialism as a totalizing world system and uses "postcolonial" to refer to a "particular critical attitude of [texts] toward the political reality of colonialism, a reality from which they seek to extricate themselves."[8] This "political reality" is defined by the "Atlantic colonial system," which sees its fullest expression in the slave trade.[9] In *Blake* and in his non-fiction, Delany demonstrates a sensitivity to the global currents of colonialism, especially as it relates to and through the institution of slavery. Reading *Blake* in terms of postcolonial theory helps us appreciate the way it contests these systems and institutions, and points to a kind of alternative space within these structures. As Raymond Williams observed, a social system, no matter how oppressive, "always potentially contains space for alternative acts and alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project."[10] This essay is concerned with exploring such potential, alternative, not-yet-fully-articulated "spaces" through literature. Powell and Mackenthun both acknowledge an ambivalence when it comes to thinking of the U.S. in terms of postcolonial theory. Powell marks the Monroe administration as giving rise to a "unique brand of American colonialism," in some ways both colonial and anti-colonial, which he calls "postcolonial colonialism."[11] Mackenthun also emphasizes the U.S.'s "ambivalent political status as a nation that was postcolonial and colonizing at the same time."[12] Much of Delany's fictional and non-fictional work alike engages with the expansionist mode of American imperialism, as well as the status of Black and indigenous peoples in the United States as internal colonies, as Powell demonstrates. As Mackenthun makes clear, Delany's work also engages with colonialism in a broader sense, as a system of international oppression. Postcolonial analyses of *Blake* have hitherto passed over the depictions of religion and cultural production within the novel, and have tended to focus entirely on reading it strictly for oppositional qualities, not fully accounting for the novel's ambivalence, and the ambiguous spaces within the "postcolonial colonial."

One critic more attuned to the complexities and ambiguities of the novel's political value is Paul Gilroy, whose *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* featured *Blake* as an important starting point. Gilroy's exploration of "the black Atlantic politics of location," and his aim to deconstruct the political binary between "authentic ethnic" and European perspectives, finds in Delany's shifting identities and allegiances an ideal subject.[13] In Gilroy's brief treatment of *Blake*, he finds on the one hand a productive "affirmation of the intercultural and transnational,"

[7] Powell, "Postcolonial Theory in an American Context," 353.
[8] Mackenthun, *Fictions of the Black Atlantic*, 18.
[9] Mackenthun, *Fictions of the Black Atlantic*, 17.
[10] Quoted in Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 29.
[11] Powell, "Postcolonial Theory in an American Context," 350–51.
[12] Mackenthun, *Fictions of the Black Atlantic,* 11.
[13] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 19, 30–31.

especially in the critical, syncretic approach towards religion.[14] On the other hand, in the novel and in Delany's own biography, he sees problematic links to his European-Enlightenment political context: Delany's eventual embrace of American identity, or "the shell of . . . patriotism," is explained by the "resolutely elitist" quality of his Black nationalism.[15] Taking up these strands of Gilroy's analysis, I intend to follow them further in this study, with greater attention to the connections between *Blake* and the historical context of Delany's world. In this, I am inspired by Gilroy's own description of the Black Atlantic as a "webbed network," along with Edward Said's call for an analytic of affiliation: "to study and to recreate the bonds between texts and the world."[16] There is more to be said, and more that historicization can reveal, about the ways *Blake* is bonded to its world.

Having begun with the Middle Passage, I go on to focus mainly on the novel's latter part, set in Cuba, where the novel tackles the international, broadly colonial nature of oppression. In the first two sections, I explore the anti-colonial dimensions of *Blake*; the theological dimension, arguing that Delany formulates a decolonial theology of Black liberation; and the dimension of cultural production in the novel, reading the motifs of banjo and carving knife as powerful symbols of decolonial art and resistance. Lastly, I turn to the intellectual history of Delany and his time. The author's biography, far from limiting interpretation of the work, provides vital context that can enrich interpretation, through an appreciation of Delany's political thought and intellectual milieu, and the ambivalence between and within his influences.

Delany's Theology of Liberation

"What's religion to me?"[17] asks Blake, a moment after his introduction in the novel. The rhetorical question is prompted by the central tragedy of the book—Blake's wife has been sold, torn from her husband and child, a loving family destroyed by the institution of slavery. This despite the Blakes nominally sharing a religion with the man responsible for this imposition; as Henry goes on to observe: "My wife is sold away from me by a man who is one of the leading members of the very church to which both she and I belong!"[18] Answering this question, and thereby renegotiating and reforming some of the fundamental practices and philosophies of Christianity, emerges as a central concern for Delany in the novel. From these first pages through the novel's abrupt conclusion, religion is given a prominent place: it is a central concern to Delany's fictional characters, and it is used to facilitate a potential international slave rebellion. In his imaginative fiction, Delany reformulated Christianity to serve as both liberatory thinking and the means of liberation, in ways that are linked to the historical context and legacy of Black Christianity, specifically the African Methodist Episcopal church in which he was educated, and through affiliation to the liberation theology of the subsequent century.

Religion played a significant role in Delany's early life, education, and political development. Delany's biographers and contemporary scholars are in agreement on the pronounced influence of Reverend Lewis Woodson on Delany's life.[19] In order to understand the

[14] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 29.
[15] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 25.
[16] Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 175.
[17] Delany, *Blake*, 17.
[18] Delany, *Blake*, 17.
[19] *See* Ullman, *Martin R. Delany*, 18; Rollin, *Life and Public Services,* 38; Adeleke, *Without Regard*, 45.

religious element in *Blake*, we need first to understand how the text is linked with the religious world of Delany, Woodson, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Founded by the Reverend Richard Allen and Daniel Coker in Philadelphia in 1816, the A.M.E.'s fundamental value, beyond Wesleyan piety, was self-determination for Black Christians.[20] The seed of the new denomination was Bethel Church, founded by Allen in 1794 as an independent Methodist congregation in the wake of increasing racial discrimination in the mainline Methodist church in Philadelphia.[21] Bethel fought for its independence in court against the White leadership of the mainline Methodists, who sought to impose their leadership on the congregation.[22] This resistance to coercive White authority over matters of the soul, and a corresponding self-sufficiency, can be traced through the congregations that followed, notwithstanding the politically diversity of their membership.

The Reverend Lewis Woodson came to Pittsburgh from Ohio in the early 1830s and became the A.M.E. minister there.[23] He founded a school, and Delany was one of his first students.[24] He epitomized the independent spirit of the A.M.E.—in Dennis Dickerson's estimation, "Woodson, more than any other antebellum A.M.E., articulated a capacious view of black self-determination that transcended both integrationist and nationalist ideologies."[25] Woodson advocated for an organized, self-sufficient, self-advocating Black community that did not tolerate marginalization, even if it came from religious institutions. He chose the name "Augustine" to write a series of anonymous letters in *The Colored American* (New York; 1837–1841), a significant choice, as Augustine of Hippo was championed as a Black church father in Woodson's milieu due to his African origin.[26] As Augustine, he championed a number of causes for Black Americans, many of which find echoes in Delany's later work: an emphasis on education, the importance of founding independent religious institutions, and emigration to form autonomous communities. Overall, his political solution for Black Americans was a program of moral elevation through practical activity. Gayle Tate, while viewing Woodson as a "nationalist" thinker, sums up his approach thus: "Essential to Woodson's philosophical contours of nationalism was the tenet of moral and collective elevation."[27] Over political change at the U.S. national level, he held that Black people could best improve their situation through action within themselves and their immediate communities. As a result, the letters are highly pragmatic—one details the operations of banks and advocates the use of savings accounts and stock investments.[28] But a consistent theme is an emphasis on action as opposed to passivity, especially in a religious context.

Against critics of his call for establishing separate Black churches, (one called it "heretical"[29]) Woodson justified action over passive dependence as Christian: "God has created us all free and equal, . . . and never intended that one should labor exclusively for the benefit of the other, but that everyone should rely on his own exertions for obtaining whatever was necessary for

[20] Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 40–41.
[21] Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 31, 35.
[22] Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 36.
[23] Miller, "The Father of Black Nationalism," 311.
[24] Miller, "The Father of Black Nationalism," 311.
[25] Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 100.
[26] "Preamble and Constitution of the 'Zion Baptist Anti Slavery Society,'" *The Colored American*, 23 December 1837. This periodical widely reported on the independent Black church movement, especially African Methodism. *See* Baldwin, "The Colored American and Its Reports on African Methodism in 1837."
[27] Tate, "Prophesy and Transformation," 231.
[28] "THE WEST – No. 3," *The Colored American*, 2 March 1839.
[29] "DEATH VS. ESPATRIATION," *The Colored American*, 27 October 1838.

his comfort or convenience."[30] Perhaps the best statement of his pragmatic approach to Christianity is this line from a response to one of his detractors: "It is expected that there will come an age of universal and entire righteousness; but from present appearances, we suppose that that age is yet far on; and until it comes we must adapt our thoughts, words and actions, to the age, and world in which we actually live."[31] Woodson's belief in moral uplift placed his emphasis for reform on individual Black people and their communities, as opposed to politics at a higher level, but he was clear-eyed about the limits of White institutions when it came to liberation. Rather than a passive faith that looked for external aid, he saw a divine mandate within Christianity to improve the lot of the individual and the collective. Delany would build on these ideas as he began his own career as a political commentator and activist.

When their 1847 speaking tour brought Frederick Douglass, already famous, and William Lloyd Garrison through Pennsylvania, they were so impressed with Delany as a public speaker that he was invited along to speak at the next stop.[32] When Douglass started the *North Star* a few months later, Delany was on the masthead, and would strike out on his own speaking tour in the following year.[33] It was this tour, and the published work that it produced, that show us Delany's development as a thinker before the period that produced *Blake*. The experience was defined by theological and institutional conflicts with Black churches, specifically surrounding the issue of providential design. While Black churches in the North were a vital part of social life for their worshippers, Delany was bitterly disappointed by the cold reception they gave to his abolitionist speaking tour. In his study of this period of Delany's career, Tunde Adeleke explains that many of these Northern churches "seemed reluctant or hesitant to endorse and propagate any activist reform measures that directly or indirectly questioned prevailing doctrinal teachings and could potentially alienate their more powerful, and still dominant, white sponsoring or 'parent' affiliates."[34] Central to these "prevailing doctrinal teachings" was the idea of providential design.

The theology of providential design cast the suffering of Black people as "constituents of a divine plan meant to better prepare them for God's Kingdom."[35] Many Black churches in the North, troubled by the abolitionist movement's emphasis on material concerns, closed their doors to Delany, who often had to lecture in private homes.[36] Delany connected the theology of providential design to the continued influence of White religious authorities on Black churches, which were "always regarded as subordinates to their white 'sponsoring' institutions."[37] Institutional Christian theology, he saw, was structured by power to ease the oppressor and cow the oppressed. In an 1849 column in *The North Star*, as part of a sequence of articles on "Domestic Economy," Delany notes the difference in how White practitioners engage with the notion of providential design: "Our masters have been so accustomed to teach us how to live in the world to come that they have forgotten to teach us how to live in this world, but are always very careful to teach their own children and themselves, however religious they may be, how to make a living *here*, while in this world."[38] Delany shifts the priority: from preparing for a world to come, to living "in this world." The rejection he experienced from Black churches early in his abolitionist

[30] *The Colored American*, 29 December 1838.
[31] *The Colored American*, 19 January 1839.
[32] Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity,* 19.
[33] Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*, 20.
[34] Adeleke, "'Today Is the Day of Salvation,'" 8.
[35] Adeleke, "'Today Is the Day of Salvation,'" 16.
[36] Adeleke, "'Today Is the Day of Salvation,'" 11.
[37] Adeleke, "'Today Is the Day of Salvation,'" 19.
[38] Delany, "Domestic Economy," emphasis original.

career, and the conclusions about religious priority he drew from that experience, would form the basis of the liberatory theology he puts forth in *Blake*.

Early in the novel, Blake rejects the formulation of the Christian religion that serves the interests of the slaveholders and colonists: "They use the Scriptures to make you submit, by preaching to you the texts of 'obedience to your masters' and 'standing still to see the salvation,' and now we must begin to understand the Bible so as to make it of interest to us."[39] This critical, utilitarian approach to religion is a striking departure from the subservient religiosity of the older generation of slaves depicted in the novel. Gilroy notes this aspect of religion in *Blake*—describing a "skepticism and strictly instrumental orientation toward religion"[40] —but his analysis misses the bond between this approach and the tradition of Black Christianity represented by the A.M.E. and epitomized by Delany's teacher, Woodson. In *Blake*, emerging out of the movement that proclaimed Black Christians "must adapt . . . to the world in which we actually live," critical pragmatism is not separate from true piety, and cannot be "strictly instrumental." Faith and virtue are still central to this understanding of Christianity. It does, however, offer greater "use" to the Christian, in that it gives more opportunities for participation.

One arena for active participation is interpretation of the religious text, which becomes a crucial aspect of Blake's philosophy of liberation and a part of how it is communicated. Departing from the interpretation of the colonists and of the "old people," Blake asserts "with me, 'now is the accepted time, to-day is the day of salvation.'"[41] In *Blake*, Delany continued the effort he began in his abolitionist newspaper work, using theological arguments to advance the cause of liberation, and specifically critiquing passive reliance on providential design as serving the purposes of the oppressors. In the newspaper, Delany carefully offers a hermeneutical argument, stressing the differing sources and audiences of the quote by Moses, on the one hand—"stand still, and see the salvation of God"—and the quote in Corinthians, on the other—"*now* is the *accepted* time."[42] He asks his readers: "Whom shall we obey, Christ or Moses—God or man?"[43] In *Blake*, through its titular character, he is free to be much bolder, stridently criticizing the "old people" and offering an unapologetically utilitarian interpretation to make the Bible "of interest to us." "Standing still to see the salvation" is recast from a passive acceptance of oppression based on the hope of external salvation to an active anticipation of participatory, liberatory action, and becomes a watchword of and symbol for the cell-based insurrectionary strategy of Blake.

Religion is not just a matter of interpretation, it is a lived institution, and in the context of slave societies and colonialism, an institution that is part and parcel of oppressive systems. The institutional aspect of religion is explored later in the novel, as Blake organizes his rebellion in Cuba. While much of the theological thematic in the book emerged from the context of Delany's experiences in Northern Black churches, it goes further, expanding the scope of critique to international oppression within a broadly colonial church as the action shifts to Catholic Cuba. In order to perform the ceremony of marriage, members of the plot are married at the Catholic "church of the Ascension"[44] in Havana. Montego, one of the principal Cuban leaders of the revolt, lectures his African fiancée on the role of priests. "To be 'God-fearing' is to do the will of God . . . and these men have neglected the letter of the law 'Whatsoever ye would that men should

[39] Delany, *Blake*, 43.
[40] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 28.
[41] Delany, *Blake*, 31.
[42] Delany, "Domestic Economy."
[43] Delany, "Domestic Economy."
[44] Delany, *Blake*, 280.

do unto you, do ye even so unto them.' These are the words of His divine injunction, every letter of which these men have neglected either to carry out themselves or to enforce."[45] The hypocrisy of these "God-fearing" priests is laid bare, but it is not just an individual shortcoming. As one of them places a wedding ring on a finger, he describes it as "a type of our holy religion; in substance as pure as the incorruptible gold."[46] The irony between the notions of "purity" and "incorruptibility" of the Church and its open hypocrisy is clear. The corruption of the colonial church is further illustrated when the priests charge exorbitant prices of the group for their services, as the cook Gondolier observes: "These 'men of God' make most ungodly charges for their services; a doubloon apiece for the two little gold rings the ladies got."[47] The doubloons are as golden as the rings they are exchanged for, and highlighting the inequality of this exchange, and the profit derived by the priests thereby, indicates the extent of complicity in the slave economy of the Church as an international colonial institution.

As the corruption of the colonial church is exposed, Blake develops his anti-colonial theology while preparing for revolution in Cuba. Characterizing his previous religious practice as "shadow without substance," he advocates that the oppressed "drop the religion of our oppressors and take the Scriptures for our guide and Christ as our example."[48] Crucially, Christianity itself is not seen as "the religion of [the] oppressors," but as something compromised by a specific interpretation and institutionalization, which can be countered by a new form of interpretation and practice. This new form takes shape later in Blake's experience on the island. Blake's "rainbow coalition" of Africans, Creole Cubans and Americans of color, both enslaved and free, is accompanied by a correspondingly diverse range of Christian denominations: Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, and even Swedenborgian.[49] How can these differences be resolved? Blake offers a radical solution:

> We have all agreed to know no sects, no denomination, and but one religion for the sake of our redemption from bondage and degradation, a faith in a common Savior as an intercessor for our sins; but one God, who is and must be our acknowledged common Father. No religion but that which brings us liberty will we know; no God but He who owns us as his children will we serve.[50]

Blake is advocating a specifically liberatory theology: with "that which brings us liberty," theology has a pointed orientation and is tangible rather than transcendent. In rejecting "the religion of the oppressors" and formulating a new theology of liberation, Delany is attempting to "decolonize" the religious sphere—to contest the oppressive structures of power within the Christianity of his day.

The conflict between the theology of established religion and the reality of the oppressed, and Delany's attempts to resolve that conflict in his written work, can be compared with the questions and tasks of liberation theology as it was formulated in Latin America nearly a century later. Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez describes an "imprint" left on society by "a new presence of the poor, the marginalised, and the oppressed," an "imprint" caused by the downtrodden coming to "see themselves as subjects of their own history, as being able to take their destiny in their own hands."[51] It is this social impression that demands a response from theology;

[45] Delany, *Blake*, 280.
[46] Delany, *Blake*, 282.
[47] Delany, *Blake*, 282.
[48] Delany, *Blake*, 199.
[49] Delany, *Blake*, 259.
[50] Delany, *Blake*, 259.
[51] Gutierrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," 21.

for Gutierrez, the "challenge" responded to by liberation theology comes "from the 'non-persons,' those who are not recognised as people by the existing social order."[52] While separated by a temporal and geographical gulf, the issues Delany responds to share some affinities with those of Gutierrez, most notably a shared concern with those classed outside of human society, and a realization of their burgeoning subjectivity. The theological challenge Delany rises to meet is that of a religion at odds with the lived experience and subjectivity of Black people in the slave societies of the Atlantic. In *Blake*, Delany's protagonist declares that Black Christians "must begin to understand the Bible so as to make it of interest to us"; that is, theology—the "understanding" of the Bible— should reflect the imprint of a Black social subjectivity—"us"—which aligns with Gutierrez's description of an underclass that consciously begins to take "their destiny in their own hands."

In *Blake* and in his newspaper work, Delany also emphasizes a shift in approach to the daily practice of the Black Christian, epitomized in his theme of "liv[ing] in the world." He makes a distinction between "the world to come" and "this world," and calls for a new theology to take the latter as its starting point, echoing the words of Woodson: "the world in which we actually live." Delany emphasizes a grounding in material reality: in space—"living *here*"—and in time—"*to-day* is the *day*." In the novel, this theme is born out in the opposition between the passive "standing still" and the active "to-day is the day of salvation." Gutierrez identifies a similar emphasis underpinning liberation theology, describing "theology," or the reasoning and discourse about the nature of faith and God, as the "second task," only to follow the first task of "practice,"[53] which is connected to serving the poor and advancing the task of liberation. It is practice, faith in action, Gutierrez argues, that "give[s] theology its *raison d'être*,"[54] not the other way around. Consonant with liberation theology, true religion in Delany's published work is borne out through corporeal, contemporary action.

General comparison with Latin American liberation theology should not limit interpretation of Delany's religious writing. Unsatisfied with the Biblical hermeneutics and theological arguments of the White supremacist, colonialist religious institutions of the Americas, Delany seeks to formulate a theology that accounts for the oppression of Black people specifically, and most importantly, informs their liberation from that oppression. Edward Antonio understands "liberation theologies" in the plural, a field of theology "marked by a wide-ranging pluralism,"[55] in which the Latin American strain, while the most recognized, is not paradigmatic. Antonio posits Black Theology as a kind of liberation theology, one that shares affinities with other liberation theologies but diverges from them in important ways. While Black Theology shares with other liberation theologies an interest in the nature of oppression and liberation, and a devotion to ending all forms of oppression, it is also distinct in that it marks "a particular kind of discursive difference by the manner in which it inscribes race at the center of its analysis of oppression."[56] For its most prominent advocate, James Cone, Black Theology "arises out of the need to articulate the significance of black presence in a hostile white world . . . .The purpose of Black Theology is to place the actions of black people toward liberation in the Christian perspective, showing that Christ himself is participating in the black struggle for freedom."[57] The determined utilitarianism of Blake

[52] Gutierrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," 28.
[53] Gutierrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," 29.
[54] Gutierrez, "The Task and Content of Liberation Theology," 29.
[55] Antonio, "Black Theology and Liberation Theologies," 35.
[56] Antonio, "Black Theology and Liberation Theologies," 41–42.
[57] Cone, "Black Consciousness and the Black Church," 53.

as he sets out to make Christianity "of interest to us" epitomizes Cone's notion of Black Theology making Christianity relevant "for their lives." Cone's Christ—a Christ that actively participates in liberatory struggle—offers another way to understand the theological framing of the novel. Rather than viewing the novel purely in terms of "providential design," it instead reflects a shift from a theology of "design" to one of participation—both of believer and God. In his final prayer with the rebel cell in Cuba, Blake emphasizes the active participation of God: "be our great captain, I pray thee; for it is written in thy holy word, 'the Lord is a man of war, for the Lord is his name.'"[58] Gondolier aptly provides the counter-example: when Abyssa cries "Lord have mercy on us," his response is "Ef He don't I will!"[59] For Gondolier, a God who would stand idly by, behind the mandates of a "providential design" that allowed such oppression, is not a god worth following.

Blake also exemplifies the connections between Black Theology and critical discourses about colonialism, whether under the terms of "decolonial" or "postcolonial." Antonio adopts a definition of "the postcolonial" that encompasses a broad range of expression within and without historical, institutional colonialism: "a discursive structure of moral, political, and religious/theological protest situated not beyond the colonial but within it."[60] Understanding postcoloniality as a discursive framework of protest or opposition to colonial power, in a way similar to contemporary use of "decoloniality," allows us to see the connection between Black Theology and anti-colonialism. Antonio identifies several "meeting places" where Black Theology and his notion of "the postcolonial" converge.[61] The first is the "theological moment of slave protest," which he marks as a "fundamental source"[62] for twentieth-century Black Theology. In this moment, Antonio claims, the enslaved "critically appropriated Christianity . . . and in the process transformed it into 'slave religion' for all human beings."[63] The second is in a tradition of "black critical social theory," a tradition in which Delany is included by name, that, in pursuit of liberation and equality, "presupposed a postcolonial order as a social ideal."[64] The third is in the "anticolonial international communities and movements of struggle and solidarity"[65] that arose out of the aforementioned traditions. *Blake* represents each of these "meeting places." It promotes a pluralized, appropriative version of Christianity, as we see in Blake's injunction to "know no sects, no denomination, and but one religion," truly a "'slave religion' for all human beings." It also composes one of the many, varied, contributions Delany made to the tradition of "black critical social theory," and is distinguished by its form as a serialized novel, which provides imaginative space for these discourses to "meet." It also depicts an international community that anticipates in many ways the "movements of struggle and solidarity" of later generations.

"Formidable Instruments" of Liberation

Beyond a theology of liberation, *Blake* offers another set of alternatives within the oppressive power structures of its world through symbols of independent cultural production. As the conspirators gather for the first time at Madam Cordora's, the atmosphere is described thus:

[58] Delany, *Blake*, 293.
[59] Delany, *Blake*, 312.
[60] Antonio, "Black Theology and Postcolonial Discourse," 301.
[61] Antonio, "Black Theology and Postcolonial Discourse," 304.
[62] Antonio, "Black Theology and Postcolonial Discourse," 301.
[63] Antonio, "Black Theology and Postcolonial Discourse," 301.
[64] Antonio, "Black Theology and Postcolonial Discourse," 303.
[65] Antonio, "Black Theology and Postcolonial Discourse," 304.

"There was no parade or imitative aping, nor unmeaning pretensions observed in their doings . . . They were . . . discarding everything which distracted from their object."[66] In their plot to revolt against the powers of colonialism, their attitude towards the cultural expressions or behaviors of colonialism is oppositional. By rejecting "imitative aping," Delany advocates for the abandonment, the "discarding," of the standards, styles, and methods of the colonial power. To Delany, these elements are inherently connected to the strength and focus of the liberation movement. If the colonial forms are to be abandoned, what should take their place? Delany offers two powerful symbols of resistance in two instruments: the banjo and the carving knife.

Introduced as musical accompaniment to the reception of Blake as a liberator among the group of sympathizers, the "African bango [sic]" appears in the hands of Pino Golias, the "leading amateur musician in the city," for whom it is "the favorite instrument of his fatherland."[67] It is immediately set in opposition to an instrument associated with the colonial power: "In solos of strains the sweetest the Spanish guitar proved but a secondary instrument compared with the touching melodies of the pathetic bango in the hands of this negro artiste."[68] First, the banjo is better suited to the "hands" of the colonial subject, in its connection to the "fatherland." Second, Pino Golias finds a role through this use of the instrument: that of "negro artiste." The banjo then becomes a symbol for cultural decolonization, the work of artists and artisans that provide colonial subjects with a "melody." The importance of this cultural decolonization is emphasized in the subsequent passage:

> This instrument, heretofore neglected and despised by the better class among them, at once became the choice and classically refined by the nearest and dearest historic reminisces among them, by an association with the evening of the great gathering from a seclusion of which, the momentous question of immediate redemption or an endless degradation and bondage was to be forever settled. From these associations and remembrances, the migration bango could be thenceforth be seen in the parlors and drawing rooms of all of the best families of this class of the inhabitants.[69]

Two functions of culture are emphasized in this passage: association and memory. The culture produced with the banjo facilitates the memory of "the great gathering," transmitting its values to future generations.

In Laurent Dubois' history of the banjo, he highlights both the memorial and the synthetic qualities that the banjo unites. From its inception, which Dubois situates in the eighteenth-century plantation society of the Caribbean, the banjo was connective, bridging the traumatic disruption of slavery:

> The child of the Middle Passage and the bewildering situation of exile and oppression in the plantation world, it brought together traditions of instrument making from various parts of West and Central Africa. In this way, it offered something vital to those on the plantation: it was recognizably African, an instrument capable of offering familiar melodies and rhythms, but without being clearly derived from the traditions of any single African ethnicity. It was the first African instrument.[70]

The "African bango" is African not in its authentic origin but in its synthesis of experience. It is part of an invented Africa that Dubois details; one invented for the comfort and community of the

[66] Delany, *Blake*, 254.
[67] Delany, *Blake*, 249, 253.
[68] Delany, *Blake*, 253.
[69] Delany, *Blake*, 253.
[70] Dubois, *The Banjo*, 56.

enslaved. Beyond its Caribbean roots, Dubois chronicles the instrument's use in the nineteenth-century U.S.: "The banjo had, by the 1840s, long been rooted in many of the communities of the enslaved in North America. . . . Just as it had in the Caribbean from the earliest days of its invention, the banjo offered a space for solidarity, to sound out the possibility of a world of freedom."[71] Dubois also notes the use of the banjo in *Blake*, and writes that Delany must have imagined "banjo music as a rebel sound that could ultimately upend the landscape of the plantation, a space usually dominated by rhythms and sound of labor."[72] From its origins in the Middle Passage and the harsh plantation life, the banjo always stood for a kind of resistance. Its "rebel sound" had the power to disrupt the plantation system.

Placing banjos in a Cuban context is a leap of imagination, for the banjo did not truly hold a place of influence in Cuba as it did elsewhere in the circum-Caribbean. As Tony Thomas notes, "major areas of African population in the Caribbean with prolonged and intense exchange with Central and West Africa, such as Cuba . . . yield no reports of early banjos."[73] However, the banjo in *Blake* can serve as a symbol for the very real nature of music throughout the Black Atlantic as a unifying and empowering force, just as the banjo itself is a product of syncretic invention. Writing long before Paul Gilroy coined the term, Alejo Carpentier seems to describe the Black Atlantic in his history of *Music in Cuba*: "there is much that American musicology stands to gain in studying the music of the continent by *geographic zones* subject to the same ethnic influences, to the same migrations of rhythms and oral traditions, *rather than by region or country*."[74] The concept of a shared influence of "rhythm" throughout the African diaspora in the Caribbean has been revisited more recently by Njoroge Njoroge. Njoroge uses the concept of "polyrhythm" to analyze an "unmistakable family resemblance between the musics of the African diaspora, a kinship based upon lineage and history and shaped in and by the 'Caribbean crucible.'"[75] In Cuba specifically, "essential rhythmic elements and generative principles from sub-Saharan Africa were rearticulated, notated, and wed to European harmony" through "clave," a pattern that forms the "root of Afro-Cuban music."[76] The banjo may have not been present in the typical nineteenth-century Afro-Cuban salon. Yet there was still a link, a "kinship" of rhythm if not instrument, between the music of the African diaspora in Cuba and in the Southern U.S. The banjo in *Blake* symbolizes this kinship, this affiliation. Njoroge goes on to argue that Afro-diasporic music played a crucial role in the anti-colonial movement of the twentieth century. In this movement, "music becomes a means to realizing unity in the flux of constantly changing social and political relationships."[77] In the novel, banjo performance becomes inextricably connected with the "question of immediate redemption or an endless degradation and bondage." In this way, *Blake* seems to anticipate the importance of music in facilitating liberatory movements. Through the banjo, Delany powerfully symbolizes the importance of independent cultural production with an instrument suited to those who wield it.

Another implement is given special attention in Delany's narration of the meeting at Madam Cordora's. It is connected first to the notion of defense: the "caterer" Gondolier Gofer is offered the position of guard, and the mulatto officer Castina offers him his sword as part of the

[71] Dubois, *The Banjo*, 143.
[72] Dubois, *The Banjo*, 157.
[73] Thomas, "The Banjo and African American Musical Culture."
[74] Carpentier, *Music in Cuba*, 60–61, emphasis original.
[75] Njoroge, *Chocolate Surrealism*, 9.
[76] Njoroge, *Chocolate Surrealism*, 51.
[77] Njoroge, *Chocolate Surrealism*, 12.

office. Gofer refuses to take it, declaring "I got a better thing than this!"[78] He produces a carving knife, a "formidable instrument" whose breadth is "that of the widest common carving knife."[79] To the astonishment of his genteel companions, the lower-class Gofer designed the weapon himself: "I cut the pattern out of a barrel stave, and had the knife made to order."[80] As the "African bango" is preferred to the Spanish guitar, the carving knife takes precedence over the Spanish sword. Gofer comically enacts the preference, "holding out and looking at the sword, with a wag of his head."[81] Rather than being primarily superior due to its origin in the African "fatherland," however, the carving knife is preferred for practical reasons. Gofer designs the weapon so "that on a general rising the blacks in every house might have good weapons without suspicion."[82] He elaborates: "By making a carving knife, I present something that comes in general use as a domestic and family convenience, with which every person may supply himself without suspicion, especially the blacks, who are not only great imitators of the whites as they say we are, but also great eaters as we know ourselves to be."[83] The reason for choosing the carving knife is eminently practical: it allows for the distribution of weapons to the widest possible group of sympathizers. But this has implications that go beyond practicality. By refusing the sword of the officers and preferring a carving knife distributed as widely as possible, and marking a lower class position, Gofer puts forward a fundamentally democratic vision of revolution, in which the instruments of violence are not controlled by a small group of elite officers but by the masses.

This carving knife, with its ability to take the place of a sword, highlights the domestic nature of violence, its proximity to "home." In this way, the carving knife in *Blake* recalls the carving knife in Samuel Otter's reading of Frank J. Webb's 1857 novel *The Garies and Their Friends*. In describing a lavish wedding supper scene, "Webb emphasizes the carving knife as weapon, furnishing it with "hilt," like a dagger or sword."[84] The carving knife is "imagined as a sword, the meat as its victim: 'you might plunge your knife to the very hilt without coming in contact with a splinter.' At this American supper, violence is not the distant, forgotten origin of civilized manners but their current incitement."[85] Otter's reading of *The Garies* intersects with *Blake* in that both novels point out the latent violence of the "common," domestic arrangement in a slave society. In Delany's novel, this underlines the notion that potential revolutionaries are just as likely to be found in the kitchen as on the shipboard, and that the means and power to resist lie in plain sight, ready to be taken up at a moment's notice.

The instruments symbolize aspects of an anti-colonial movement in two distinct ways. The banjo, representing cultural production, is connected to the "fatherland," emphasizing the importance of memory. The carving knife, representing material resistance, is an opportunistic creation most valuable for its practicality and its latent potential, lying just under the noses of the oppressors. The two instruments, with their varying purposes, signs, and ideals, are unified in the purpose of liberation. At first glance, it may seem that they are suited to two types of people, two classes. After all, the role of elite "artiste" is aptly filled by Pino Golias, a surgeon who is the "most accomplished banjoist and guitarist in the city."[86] Gondolier Gofer, a lower-classed servant, seems

[78] Delany, *Blake*, 255.
[79] Delany, *Blake*, 255, 256.
[80] Delany, *Blake*, 255.
[81] Delany, *Blake*, 255.
[82] Delany, *Blake*, 255.
[83] Delany, *Blake*, 255–56.
[84] Otter, *Philadelphia Stories*, 257.
[85] Otter, *Philadelphia Stories*, 260.
[86] Delany, *Blake*, 249.

suited to the dirty work of violence by his characteristic pugilism—this is the character whose threatening words end our edition of the text, after all: "Woe be unto those devils of whites, I say!"[87] Yet Gondolier confounds such classification by unifying both symbols in his person. He is just as apt to take up the banjo as the carving knife, as evidenced by his desire to pick it up before the "sweet strains" of Golias' playing have fairly ceased to echo: "ef you han' me that thing out here, ef I don't make 'er hum I wouldn't tell you so"[88] In fact, Gofer rivals the genteel Golias in musical proficiency. He is valued by his masters for "his skill on the Spanish guitar, or African bango, especially the latter instrument in which he had few, if any equals."[89] The distinction between Golias and Gofer dissolves, as the cleverly contradictory words of the text place them as equals in accomplishment—the "most accomplished" versus the one with "few if any equals." Rather than restrict the vital roles of cultural production and material resistance to classes or groups of people, Gofer is valorized as the ideal revolutionary, one who can take up both carving knife and banjo as the situation requires and wield either with virtuosity.

In Gondolier Gofer, who wields both banjo and carving knife, Delany communicates the importance of cultural production in the context of liberatory struggle. The importance placed on breaking from colonial forms, epitomized by these "formidable instruments," is resonant with Fanon's work on national culture in *Wretched of the Earth*. After anti-colonial tensions rise, Fanon writes, there are "repercussions on the cultural front."[90] These repercussions result in a radical shift within cultural production, one that expands consciousness and inspires the people to revolt:

> By imparting new meaning and dynamism to artisanship, dance, music, literature, and the oral epic, the colonized subject restructures his own perception. The world no longer seems doomed. Conditions are ripe for the inevitable confrontation.[91]

Delany describes such a shift in consciousness in his Cuban rebels, who embrace the banjo by "association" with the resolution of "the momentous question of immediate redemption or an endless degradation and bondage." Cultural production in the form of music paves the way for rebellion, the "inevitable confrontation" that the novel builds toward before its abrupt conclusion. Music is just one of the many ways in which "the colonized subject restructures his own perception" throughout the book, but the careful attention paid by Delany to questions of cultural production is epitomized in these instruments.

In the liberatory theology that it advances, and in the symbology of the "formidable instruments" of cultural production, *Blake* contests and disrupts colonial power. Yet, for as much as the novel explores alternatives to colonial models of religion and culture, Fanon's "inevitable confrontation" never arrives. The rebellion planned by Blake in Havana never progresses past the preliminary stage, just as the domestic slave revolt he seems to build in the U.S. is interrupted by his sudden flight to Cuba. While the novel puts forth, in these ways, an alternative to the oppressive power structures of its time, it is still firmly within those structures, still inextricably linked to the context of thought that it arose out of. That this alternative space that the novel creates is defined also by ambiguity can be understood better through the ambivalence of its world of ideas.

The Ambivalent Delany

[87] Delany, *Blake*, 313.
[88] Delany, *Blake*, 254.
[89] Delany, *Blake*, 265.
[90] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 172.
[91] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 176.

The act of rebellion on board the *Vulture* during the Middle Passage crossing seems to promise a violent denouement, one that would achieve either liberty or death for the enslaved combatants. With the storm raging, the uncouth American mate Royer cautiously peers into the hold, and sees the powerful Mendi prepared for battle: "Yes, there he is armed to the teeth, and all his [n*****s] armed."[92] But the storm suddenly breaks. "Suddenly the wind changed, the clouds began to disperse, and lightning ceased to seen and heard."[93] And with the clouds, the threat of violence unaccountably dissolves as well. "The hatches being secured," the ship's crew take no further notice of their enslaved cargo, despite the fact that they are "loose" and "armed to the teeth."[94] The *Vulture* cruises into port at Matanzas without further incident, and Blake disembarks without a backward glance: "Scarcely had she landed than without waiting for the adjustment of his engagement, Blake went immediately on shore, and was soon lost among the gazing spectators who assembled on the quay . . . ."[95] Nothing is said about how the armed, unfettered Africans were subdued by their captors on deck. Their sale proceeds without a hitch the next day, although the rumor of insurrection, spread by Blake and Placido, lowers the selling price, allowing "agents" of the conspiring pair to purchase them.[96] The lack of resolution of this moment of powerful potential, and the abrupt, forestalled nature of its conclusion, are striking. This episode produces a pervading sense of ambiguity, one that produces more questions about what the novel ultimately says about violence and politics than answers.

It would be difficult to fully account for the ambiguity in *Blake* regarding revolutionary violence without a nuanced understanding of the schools and events that formed its author's political thought. In this section, I argue that Delany as an individual was shaped by two broadly considered categories of influence in his political thinking, and that these influences make themselves felt in *Blake* as well. Namely, Delany was influenced by the European political and political-economic traditions of republicanism and liberalism, and the radical insurrectionism of Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, and others. The ambiguity of *Blake*, especially regarding revolutionary violence, responds to the ambivalence between and among these intellectual sources.

Delany's political philosophy was strongly influenced by republicanism, unsurprising given his context as a man educated towards the end of the early republic period in the United States. Republicanism, to most nineteenth-century Americans, was a fundamental part of how they understood the reality and potential of politics. In his analysis of Vermont farmer Hiram Harwood's diary, Robert Shalhope writes that "Republicanism—a familiar ideology permeating all walks of his life—shaped his thought; it provided him with meaning in his life and a sense of identity," and that this "may be representative of great numbers of nineteenth-century Americans."[97] Republicanism constituted the political horizon of nineteenth-century Americans. Given this, it is not surprising that Delany would go on to couch much of his political writing in terms of republicanism, even directly quoting some of its canonical thinkers. As Robert Gooding-Williams observes, Delany's argument for emigration in 1854 drew upon explicitly republican concepts. In his speech *Political Destiny of the Colored Race, On the American Continent*, delivered to the National Emigration Convention of Colored People, Delany "relies on the sovereign principle to elaborate a republican notion of political liberty that supports his critique of

[92] Delany, *Blake*, 237.
[93] Delany, *Blake*, 238.
[94] Delany, *Blake*, 238.
[95] Delany, *Blake*, 239.
[96] Delany, *Blake*, 239.
[97] Shalhope, "Anticipating Americanism," 66.

racial oppression."[98] He explicitly links his notion of "the sovereign principle" with republican political theory by quoting Montesquieu: "Said a great French writer: 'A free agent, in a free government, should be his own governor'; that is, he must possess within himself the *acknowledged right to govern*: this constitutes him as a *governor*, though he may delegate to another the power to govern himself."[99] In Gooding-Williams' analysis, Delany critiques the U.S. for failing to live up to its republican ideals by sustaining racial oppression: "white rulers collectively oppress black Americans as a group (as a "people") when, rather than treat them severally as sovereign citizens . . . they disavow the sovereignty of each member of the group, treating each member as well as the collective accordingly—that is, according to the dictates of their unchecked collective discretion."[100] Delany's political critique is not directed at the founding principles of the United States themselves. Rather, he holds the nation to those same avowed principles and finds it lacking. In this early period, he was pessimistic about the nation ever acknowledging Black citizens as sovereign, as their own governors, hence his advocacy of emigration.

It may seem incongruous to include republicanism and liberalism in the same intellectual category. By doing so, I am not trying to suggest an equivalence, but rather to think about the ways in which Delany's political thought was in continuity with his contemporaries in the U.S. as a whole. For while in the abstract republicanism and liberalism diverge, they found a unity of sorts in the nineteenth-century American political atmosphere. Summing up his synthesis of the republican-liberal debate, Shalhope cites a consensus that describes how "republicanism, liberalism, and other traditions of social and political thought interpenetrated to create a distinctive and creative intellectual milieu."[101] Delany's more immediate intellectual milieu was defined by what Shalhope describes as "liberal tendencies—the aggressive, materialistic pursuit of individual gain."[102] Delany's initial education and political mentorship was defined by connections with relatively prosperous middle-class Black figures like Woodson. According to Adeleke, the "individual triumph over adversity, particularly economic poverty" of these leaders "inspired a sense of hope and optimism and the conviction that other blacks could equally attain economic elevation."[103] In this way, Delany's political thought was in continuity with the synthesis of republicanism and liberalism in nineteenth-century American. Among other things, this synthesis contained a marked ambivalence when it came to colonialism: the U.S. defined itself against one form, but participated in another.

In an important way, however, Delany was also markedly influenced, as were some of his Black abolitionist peers, by another political force, one that marked discontinuity with political thought in the United States. This force was the insurrection represented by several rebels and mutineers, including Nat Turner. Frances Rollin Whipper, Delany's authorized biographer (*nom de plume* Frank Rollin), indicates the importance of insurrection in Delany's outlook thus:

> . . . almost simultaneously with the outbreak for freedom at Southampton, Va., known as Nat Turner's Insurrection, appeared 'Garrison's Thoughts on American Colonization.' . . . Now, there is a dark significance in that solitary figure, looming up in the dark background of slavery as an offering on the altar of freedom, in the home of Washington, preceded by

[98] Gooding-Williams, "Martin Delany's Two Principles," 79.
[99] Quoted in Gooding-Williams, "Martin Delany's Two Principles," 79.
[100] Gooding-Williams, "Martin Delany's Two Principles," 82.
[101] Shalhope, "Anticipating Americanism," 54.
[102] Shalhope, "Anticipating Americanism," 66.
[103] Adeleke, *Without Regard to Race*, 47.

> that attempted at Charleston with Denmark Vesey at its head, followed by the closing scene at Harper's Ferry. . . .
>
> "When that great heart broke, 'twas a world that shook;
> From their slavish sleep a million awoke;"
>
> when Virginia, the cradle of slavery, became its burial-place, the Smithfield of freedom's martyrs, and the battle-ground of a slave-founded Confederacy. . . . With the scene of Nat Turner's defeat and execution before him, [the young Delany] consecrated himself to freedom; and, like another Hannibal, registered his vow against the enemies of his race.[104]

While the passage is subject to Rollins' own interpretation of her subject, it clearly connects Delany with Turner, Vesey, and John Brown, and places him as a successor of their insurrectionary spirit. It celebrates Turner as a martyr to freedom, and connects Delany to the cause of freedom in a sacrificial sense, as he "consecrated himself." In the image of the solitary figure "looming up" over the nation, and in the paraphrased lines of Orpheus C. Kerr's poem "Avenged," with its lines about awakening a sleeping nation, show violent insurrection as a needed corrective against the "enemies" within the U.S.[105] Taking into account Delany's call to emigrate in *Political Destiny*, despite a fundamental belief in republican ideals and the appeal to the example of the American Revolution, this conflict within the nation was grave enough to require drastic action. *Blake* explores the possibilities of what resolving this conflict could look like.

The theme of insurrection is a prominent part of *Blake*. Its titular character is Turner-like in his militancy and his religious rhetoric. But the interrupted, ambiguous nature of the revolts it depicts raise questions about how insurrection in the text actually functions, what political pressures it might be responding to, and what its limits are. Lenora Warren's analysis of *Blake*'s ambiguous depiction of insurrection offers a vital starting point to thinking about Delany's political ambivalence. Within Delany's political thought, Warren detects "a sense that the feats of the American Revolution . . . need to be reenacted and transformed if black autonomy is to be realized."[106] In the process of "reenacting and transforming" the Revolution, Warren postulates that the interruption of violence in *Blake* may be more about indicating revolutionary potential: "in repeatedly showing blacks in the act of conspiring, he is emphasizing the massive revolutionary potential of an enslaved population. . . . In this way, the power of a collective resides not merely in the threat of violence, but in that collective's ability to capitalize on that threat without firing a shot."[107] However, Warren ultimately marks the ambiguity of Delany and Douglass's depiction of insurrection as a failure.

> This failure by both authors is not merely the failure of imagination but also the failure of revolutionary rhetoric to exceed its limits. The invocation of the American Revolution for the cause of abolition succeeds only in reaffirming the American Revolution's legitimacy. Abolition, burdened by fear of slave insurrection, can only go so far in endorsing black violence on American soil. For a slave revolt to be truly revolutionary, one must face the possibility of slaves overthrowing the nation.[108]

To Warren, the failure of *Blake* to realize revolutionary violence is partly a product of ambivalence between revolutionary rhetoric and the constraints of the American Revolution and the abolitionist movement.

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[104] Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*, 39–40.
[105] Kerr, *The Palace Beautiful: And Other Poems*, 47.
[106] Warren, *Fire on the Water*, 89.
[107] Warren, *Fire on the Water*, 92–93.
[108] Warren, *Fire on the Water*, 97.

Further, Warren posits that *Blake*, in its ambiguous and interrupted depiction of insurrection, and with Frederick Douglass's "The Heroic Slave," "unintentionally white-washed slave violence in such a way that made it impossible to view armed blacks as fully human."[109] This is a response to awareness of White readership: "the gaze of the imagined white reader dogs each text, forcing Delany and Douglass's narratives, in effect, to fade to black before the blood begins to run."[110] Delany specifically, Warren argues, may have "seen the advantages in keeping readers' eyes fixed on the evils of slavery rather than on the full character of the insurrectionists."[111] The idea of Delany being forced to whitewash violence in his book due to the "gaze of the imagined white reader," unintentionally or not, is dubious given the context of its publication. *Blake* was published serially in the *Weekly Anglo-African*, a newspaper owned by Black brothers Thomas and Robert Hamilton. As Benjamin Fagan observes, the *Weekly Anglo-African* was "a newspaper produced by and for Black Americans," and after the outbreak of war, "brought readers a Black perspective on [it]."[112] The publication of *Blake* continued after the war began, and was published alongside material that cast the conflict as a "war for Black liberation,"[113] advocating and championing the participation of Black people in it. There is a profound disconnect between this publication context and that of the other texts Warren places alongside the serial novel. Douglass's short story was published in an anthology that he co-edited with White British abolitionist Julia Griffiths, and collected a diverse range of authors in a coalition-building effort; in John McKivigan and Rebecca Patillo's analysis, the collected works were "envisioned as tools to construct a wider and politically more potent antislavery alliance."[114] The other author and periodical that Warren connects the two literary works with are White abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and his newspaper *The Liberator*. Both could be more accurately described as appealing to White readers. Published in a periodical owned, edited, and distributed to Black readers, the depiction of insurrectionary violence in *Blake*, while ambiguous, can hardly be a product of whitewashing.

With the benefit of hindsight, and the knowledge of reconstruction's failures and betrayals of Black citizenry, it is easy to find shortcomings in the politics of Black abolitionists of the nineteenth century, in their inability to see beyond the limits of the republic. But to Delany and his milieu, the Civil War, and the opportunity to serve in the military, truly did seem like a revolution. After being offered an officer's commission in the Union Army, Delany gave a speech in his hometown of Xenia, Ohio in full uniform. As reported by the local newspaper, in his speech he explained that while the Constitution of the U.S. had been "conservative" up to the war, "he gloried in the fact, that the Constitution has been 'broken,' that it has been amended, that slavery has been abolished, and that the Government, like that of the British, has been rendered 'progressive.'"[115] This moment, for Delany, composed a fundamental break in the political nature of the nation itself. It was finally possible for the promise of freedom represented by the American Revolution to come true. Adeleke sums up this moment in Delany's life thus: "in Delany's estimation, the Civil War had fundamentally altered race relations, transforming blacks from passive objects into constituents and an 'essential element' of the nation. He himself had never anticipated such a revolutionary transformation."[116] To Delany, the war answered in a fundamental way the questions

[109] Warren, *Fire on the Water*, 73.
[110] Warren, *Fire on the Water*, 76.
[111] Warren, *Fire on the Water*, 93.
[112] Fagan, "Black Newspapers, Novels, and the Racial Geographies of Transnationalism," 180.
[113] Fagan, "Black Newspapers, Novels, and the Racial Geographies of Transnationalism," 180.
[114] McKivigan and Pattillo, "*Autographs for Freedom* and Reaching a New Abolitionist Audience," 35.
[115] Delany, *A Documentary Reader*, 390–391.
[116] Adeleke, *Without Regard to Race: The Other Martin Robison Delany*, 159.

he asked in *Blake*. As an officer in the Union Army, he was no longer simply "loose," but free; recognized as a participant in the civic life of the nation, and empowered to help rebuild a nation according to his underlying values.

The context of political ambivalence, that of Delany's own political makeup and that of his milieu, can explain its ambiguous depiction of violent insurrection. This ambiguity, however, is not simply a failure. Through its radical treatment of religion and cultural, *Blake* clearly expresses the latent power of an international Black community. In its ambiguity, the novel endlessly anticipates the moment when that power will be unleashed. Delany found his moment in the Civil War; he threw himself into the work of reconstruction and integration, believing that the storm of violence had come, then dissipated, leaving behind a new world. Contemporary readers may struggle to reconcile Delany the accommodationist with the radical ideas in *Blake*. Yet beyond the anti-colonial treatments of religion and culture that still resonate today, the novel's ambiguity, its refusal of closure, makes it uniquely open to the future. Whenever in time it is read, Mendi and his band will be waiting just beneath the deck, "armed to the teeth," waiting for a sign.

Conclusion

Two months after the end of the war in July of 1865, Major Martin Delany delivered a lecture to a group of freedmen assembled near a church on St. Helena Island, South Carolina. The lecture was attended by a Lieutenant Edward M. Stoeber, who kept a watchful eye on the proceedings and reported what he saw and heard to his superiors. According to Stoeber, Delany delivered a fiery speech, warning the freedmen to be wary of exploitation by White employers. He also emphasized the importance of holding on to the gains won through war: "I tell you slavery is over, and shall never return again. We have now 200,000 of our men well drilled in arms and used to warfare, and I tell you, it is with you and them that slavery shall not come back again, and if you are determined it will not return again."[117] Even as the Civil War, through a terrible price in lives lost, brought Delany the form of liberation he sought, he remained convinced of the revolutionary potential of his people even after its conclusion. Stoeber complains:

> He tells them to remember, "That they would not have become free, had they not armed themselves and fought for their independence." This is a falsehood and misrepresentation. Our President Abraham Lincoln declared the colored race free, before there was even an idea of arming colored men.[118]

Stoeber doesn't get it. To Delany, Black people were not made free by Lincoln's decree. They made themselves free by taking up the carving knife and demanding recognition as a part of the nation's civic life. In his final published work, the speculative *Principia of Ethnology* (1879), Delany concludes his public life of letters thus: "The regeneration of the African race can only be effected by its own efforts, the efforts of its own self, whatever aid may come from other sources; and it must in this venture succeed, as God leads the movement and His hand guides the way."[119] To the end, he had faith in the blessing of the Christian God upon "effort:" practical action to improve the condition of oppressed people. Delany became quite conservative, yet the change in his political orientation can largely be understood as his world changing around him. Many of his beliefs and values, like that of the revolutionary potential of Black Americans, the primacy of

[117] Quoted in Adeleke, *Martin R. Delany's Civil War and Reconstruction*, 42.
[118] Quoted in Adeleke, *Martin R. Delany's Civil War and Reconstruction*, 43.
[119] Delany, *Principia of Ethnology*, 109.

liberty in a republican sense, and a divine mandate for Black self-determination, would be consistent.

Blake is firmly bonded to its present; Delany's imaginative work is rooted in his experience as an abolitionist lecturer and a meticulous concern for the contemporary issues facing Black people in both the North and South of the United States, as well as the global experience of all colonized peoples. Its ambivalence reflects this connection; the book is "split" along the same fault lines that divided its author's experience. At the same time, it also anticipates the future. In one sense, it is anticipatory simply in that in putting forth a radical contestation of institutional Christianity as a part of systematic racial and colonial oppression, it resonates with liberation theologies of our more recent past. But in another, more profound sense, it is anticipatory in its form. *Blake* is a novel, the first and last novel Delany would ever publish, and its status as an outlier implies a certain intentionality; the form was a deliberate choice, central to its intended function. When contemporary writer Samuel Delany describes *Blake* as "about as close to an sf-style alternate history novel as you can get," [120] he reveals the function of the form: it facilitates complex, imaginative speculation. It is open to and oriented towards the future, possibility. Said invites us to imagine the text as "a dynamic field, rather than as a static block, of words," with "a certain range of reference, a system of tentacles . . . partly potential, partly actual: to the author, to the reader, to a historical situation, to other texts, to the past and present."[121] In this sense, "no text is finished, since its potential range is always being extended by every additional reader."[122] Thus, the premature conclusion of the novel can be seen as an opportunity, an outstretched "tentacle" of open reference. Delany offers us a rich, imaginative vision of what a movement for Black liberation could look like. He leaves it to future generations to finish the story.

[120] Delany, "Racism and Science Fiction."
[121] Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 157.
[122] Said, *The World, the Text and the Critic*, 157.

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New North Star, 2024; 6: 56-61

Reading *Blake* after the George Floyd Rebellion

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The novel of what has now been termed the George Floyd Rebellion was written during the nineteenth century. Martin R. Delany's *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1859, 1861–62) better represents the summer of 2020 than other media to date. Likewise, the uprising clarifies the most frustrating and unresolvable dilemma in Delany's tale,[1] namely, why Black revolution in the text is always about to occur—yet seemingly never does. In a recent article, Alex Moskowitz takes *Blake*'s persistent non-depiction as an occasion to pose a larger question about Blackness and literary culture. "Why won't literature directly represent Black revolution?" he asks.[2] We can answer this question by reading *Blake* via the George Floyd Rebellion, and in a very material, historical way. The rebellion confirms and furthers what a line of scholarship on the text has sometimes claimed. Delany's (non-)portrayal of Black revolution is meaningfully one of deferral because deferral captures the historical reality of Black revolution in the U.S. In this way, *Blake* depicts a revolutionary tempo.

My thinking here is very much motivated by my experience of what I've come to call "rebellious 2020." We're still in the early stages of theorizing and analyzing what happened, but there are points of emerging consensus. In general, I'm drawing from my own observations as well as the writing of the best interpreters of the rebellion, including Tobi Haslett, Jarrod Shanahan, and Zhandarka Kurti. What's now known as the George Floyd Rebellion was a series of nationwide and even international protests beginning in late May 2020 after the police murder of George Floyd, then continuing through the summer and, in some places, into the fall. It's hard to overstate the scale of what happened, although I think it's very easy for us to minimize it now. In what has become the defining critical essay on the uprising, Tobi Haslett writes, "This was open black revolt: simultaneous but uncoordinated, a vivid fixture of American history sprung to life with startling speed." According to Haslett, "The whole country seemed to tilt: sacked shopping malls in Los Angeles and pillaged luxury outlets in Atlanta, a siege on New York's SoHo and flaming vehicles from coast to coast. Pictures of Philadelphia and Washington DC [sic] showed whole neighborhoods bristling with insurgency, crowds smashed the lordly windows in Chicago's Loop, and rioters set fire to the Market House, where slaves were bought and sold, in Fayetteville, North Carolina, the town where Floyd was born."[3] Unfortunately, the "open black revolt" that momentarily held such promise has been in some ways forgotten, swallowed up by what Kurti calls "liberal amnesia."[4]

We have to remember, then, how the uprising unfolded. One of its most notable characteristics was its unevenness or differentiation across space: that alongside the burning of the

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[1] "A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States, and Cuba," Martin R. Delany, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 1.
[2] Alex Moskowitz, "The Racial Economy of Perception: Reading Black Sociality in the Nineteenth Century," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 56, no. 1 (2023): 3, Doi.org.
[3] Tobi Haslett, "Magic Actions," *n+1* 40, (2021): 10.
[4] Zhandarka Kurti and Jarrod Shanahan, "States of Incarceration: Zhandarka Kurti and Jarrod Shanahan with Tobi Haslett," by Tobi Haslett, *The Brooklyn Rail,* October 2022, Brooklynrail.org.

Minneapolis Third Precinct, the storming of the security fence at Trump's White House, and street clashes with police in major cities, there were also peaceful demonstrations all around the country, including in rural and majority White communities. The uprising's decentralization in and of itself necessarily implies an unevenness or differentiation across time. From the standpoint of any single location, it was hard to make claims about the state of the rebellion—were things escalating toward a fully revolutionary situation? How long would that take? Were these events momentary flareups, or did they signal something significant about the conditions of racial capitalism in the early twenty-first century U.S.? Many radicals watched and waited for what would happen next.

Add to this another characteristic of the uprising—that it occurred in multiple waves that each had their own politics—and we can say that the George Floyd Rebellion constituted a moment of something like revolutionary time. By this I mean a lived experience of the contingency of social and political struggle. Shanahan and Kurti, especially, have built on early accounts of the summer to produce a timeline of the rebellion as moving from a militant first wave, driven not by longtime activists but by the dispossessed, to a more reformist, recognizably activist second wave. "As the flames of Minneapolis still smoldered," they write, "liberals scrambled to recast the rebellion as *nonviolent civil disobedience*, the opening act for *dialogue* and *healing*, as part of *America's long overdue reckoning with systemic racism*, or else an urgent clarion cry for *police reform*." But the problem wasn't simply portrayal. The composition and actions of the uprising really did change: "After a few months, it was safe to say the George Floyd Rebellion had run its course. Even by mid-June riots and direct confrontations with police had largely given way to leftist rituals: endless marches, kneeling in the street, and seasoned activists policing militancy to make sure nobody engaged in the sort of tactics that had catalyzed the rebellion in the first place."[5] The neat, coherent trajectory in Shanahan and Kurti's analysis is, of course, retrospective. In the moment, revolutionary time feels fractured, disrupted, staccato. While the rebellion was underway, it was unclear exactly where things stood or were headed. For the rebels of 2020 and their allies around the country, the lived experience of the George Floyd Rebellion was one of expectancy, uncertainty, and, eventually, disappointment.

How better to describe my own experience years ago on first reading Delany's sole fiction? Published serially in *The Anglo-African* and then in the *Weekly Anglo-African Magazine*, the tale depicts the formation of a global rebellion of the enslaved. The narrative follows the eponymous Blake out of enslavement and around the U.S. as he travels from plantation to plantation organizing an insurrectionary conspiracy. Blake eventually transports a group of family and friends to Canada before continuing his campaign in Cuba, including an excursion to the western coast of Africa aboard a slave ship. The problem for scholars, of course, is that the ending appears to be missing, unfinished, or just disconcertingly abrupt and anti-climactic. Blake's revolution seemingly never arrives. The sense of deferral is worsened by the overall composition. We never learn any details of Blake's conspiracy; he vanishes from the text at pivotal moments; and whenever the narration appears to reach a climax, it shifts focus entirely, abandoning important plot threads with little or no resolution. At almost every level, Delany gives us a tale of what I call insurrection interrupted.

The text's persistent interruption of revolution has grown into its most persistent interpretive conundrum. In his recent article on "the racial economy of perception," Alex Moskowitz offers a reading of *Blake*'s "nonrepresentational scenes of revolution." For Moskowitz,

[5] Jarrod Shanahan and Zhandarka Kurti, *States of Incarceration: Rebellion, Reform, and America's Punishment System,* (London: Reaktion Books, 2022): 11, 63.

Blake reveals a constitutive problem for Blackness in literary culture. Like the social relations underlying the commodity form were for Marx, Black revolution and its social life are ultimately unrepresentable, at least in the White imagination, for Moskowitz.[6] This is Black revolution as aporia.[7] Moskowitz reads Delany as picking up and extending Melville's critique of White perception in *Benito Cereno* (1855). "Both texts," he argues, "point toward an indisposition of the white sensorium to be able to process Black revolution because of its sociality," which is to say, because of White supremacy's inability to recognize Black people either collectively or individually as political agents. In this reading, Delany again and again interrupts scenes of revolt in order to stage White "imperception." Here Moskowitz suggests that the distinction between the object of criticism and the critique blurs for Delany; I would suggest that it blurs for Moskowitz as well. "But whereas on the plantation the plans for revolution were simply omitted," he writes, "on the *Vulture* the text itself seems to reach the limit of what it can represent by drawing an equivalence between the white sensorium's inability to make sense of an expression of Black sociality and the text's own refusal to depict revolution."[8] In the end, it's unclear if Delany knowingly comments on White perception with *Blake* or inadvertently replicates it within the text. If even the period's most militant Black American fiction formally adopts the standpoint of White ignorance, then does that, in practice, mean that that militant literature cannot actually imagine Black revolution?

I like and admire Moskowitz's argument, but I want to assert something different: for better or worse, *Blake* actually captures the concrete reality and lived experience of revolutionary time, which is to say, of revolution, exactly what Moskowitz argues Delany either cannot or refuses to represent. *Blake* poses a participant's view of Black revolution as contingent, and therefore always expected yet also potentially frustrated. Delany's fiction tells us less about White perception than it does about Black revolution's circumstantial difficulty, particularly in the U.S. After all, this is a text full of interruption: at the level of specific rebellious activity, at the level of the plot, and at the level of the text itself. Adélékè Adéẹ̀kọ́ touches on this feature of the text and plausibly accounts for it. "As innovative as these stories [Black-authored depictions of enslaved rebellion from the nineteenth century] are, the problem of historical plausibility as dictated by conditions in the United States limits the imagination," he writes. Simply put, the prospects for "successful land-

[6] Moskowitz, "The Racial Economy," 3, 13.

[7] I see this as a version of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's influential argument in *Silencing the Past* (1995). The Haitian Revolution, he argues, has been continually erased or "silenced" from the White historical imagination because it runs so counter to the ideological currents of Western modernity. This occurred contemporaneously, too, even as the Revolution unfolded, according to Trouillot. Versions of his argument have become commonplace, although I find that they often overstate Trouillot's essential insight, implying the a priori impossibility of revolutionary thought or even revolution itself. This line of thinking is especially troubling in light of the demobilizing tendency of Afropessimism and other modes of criticism. *See* Kevin Ochieng Okoth, "The Flatness of Blackness: Afro-Pessimism and the Erasure of Anti-Colonial Thought," *Salvage* 7 (2020): 79–116 and Vijay Prashad and Mikaela Nhondo Erskog, "The Actuality of Red Africa," *Monthly Review* 76, no. 2 (2024): 37–49. I return, again, to the George Floyd Rebellion, an "unthinkable" event in its own right. However shocking or unprecedented the torching of the Third Precinct or the brief siege of the White House may have been, these episodes and others of the rebellion were preceded and succeeded by explicitly revolutionary slogans, writing, and imagery. Moreover, the state's plans for counter-insurgency testify to the fact that it also could imagine such eventualities. Thus, we could say, along with Kurti or with Trouillot in part, that this rebellion was eventually forgotten or silenced. But it was nonetheless eminently "thinkable" in the moment.

[8] Moskowitz, "The Racial Economy," 13, 2, 11.

based slave rebellion" have historically been poor within mainland North America. "Reading the rebellion plot as an integral part of the narrative [*Blake*] helps to explain the story's bumpy focus shifts," Adéẹ̀kọ́ continues, because "[a]t every point that the plot shifts into a different journey and narrative register, it is always because a slave insurrection has to be postponed for a more auspicious time."[9] That is, Delany can't entirely get away with the historical implausibility of successful revolt at scale. Or, I would qualify, that historical difficulty is Delany's subject.

Three such interrupted rebellions punctuate and (dis)organize the text: the multiply delayed New Orleans plot, the *Vulture* mutiny, and the final, Cuban leg of Blake's grand conspiracy. The interpretive challenges caused by the text's possibly missing ending are well known.[10] The *Vulture* mutiny, meanwhile, has taken a central place in Jerome McGann's reading as part of his recent corrected edition.[11] I want to consider, instead, the revolt that nearly occurs in Chapter XXII, "New Orleans." On the eve of Mardi Gras in that city, Blake, still known as "Henry," joins a meeting of locally enslaved people. Both predating Henry and spurred on by his presence, the group's plans and organization begin to coalesce into an imminent revolt. However, the text defers the uprising in two concurrent yet unrelated ways, an act of narrative overkill that delays both the local plot and, from the reader's perspective, Henry's conspiracy: Henry first urges the conspirators to wait for a more auspicious time, and then a traitor summons the local patrollers to disrupt their meeting.[12] The effect is of an author taking exceptional pains to delay. The New Orleans episode sets the mold for the subsequent two examples. Whenever rebellion seems most imminent, the narrative actively redirects—or abruptly ends.

If the text seems always unable to bring Blake's conspiracy to fruition, that is because rebellious struggle for Black freedom itself has been so difficult to wage. And if Delany seems

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[9] Adéléke Adéẹ̀kọ́, *The Slave's Rebellion: Literature, History, Orature*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 28, 35, 38. Namely, Adéẹ̀kọ́ analyzes Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1853), William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), and Delany's *Blake*. I consider Adéẹ̀kọ́'s book an invaluable yet underappreciated example of literary criticism on fictive depictions of enslaved rebellion.

[10] I agree with Robert S. Levine when he writes that, "Given the novel's multiple and conflicting sources, purposes, and audiences, and also its truncated ending, we need to be wary of efforts to develop a 'coherent' formalist reading of it." *See* Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997): 179. I would add that the text's own formal characteristics, including its rich unruliness and uneven tempo, call for such an approach.

[11] McGann writes of the imminent slave ship revolt, which is deferred during a massive storm, "Pivotal for the unfolding plot, the chapter argues that while man proposes, God disposes. Throughout Part II of *Blake*, Nature emerges as a looming transhuman presence and force. Here the storm and the ensuing rainbow are presented in symbolic terms that intimate God's providential involvement with Henry's 'scheme,' at once advancing it and leading Henry to modify it." *See* Delany, *Blake*, 328 n204. I question McGann's emphasis on "Nature" within the text, as well as his straightforwardly "argumentative" reading. However, I share his fundamental sense of the importance of these interrupted rebellions to the text.

[12] Delany, *Blake*, 106–7. McGann echoes Adéẹ̀kọ́'s argument when discussing the episode: "Slave revolts were not common in Louisiana, particularly after the failed 1811 uprising of slaves from plantations along the so-called German Coast, an area just west of New Orleans. But white apprehension of revolt was widespread, and Delany may have had the German Coast uprising in mind here, although if so, he modified the history. In that uprising, several hundred slaves organized themselves into an army that marched toward New Orleans. They were eventually defeated by white militias, and the leaders were executed. In any case, when Part II of *Blake* maps its tale to the Conspiracy of the Ladder (La Escalera) in Cuba, a formal parallel in the narrative action is established with this New Orleans uprising." *See* Delany, *Blake*, 322 n97. I think McGann overstates the "formal parallel," as I am skeptical of such neat readings of such a disorderly text. But McGann is right to read these disruptions, like Adéẹ̀kọ́, as being reflective of the historical record of enslaved revolt.

unable to explicitly imagine Black revolution, that failure spotlights the long history of defeated Black revolt in the U.S., as Adéẹ̀kọ́ argues, a problem that perhaps changes when we shift focus away from the national frame. A thorough comparative study is beyond the scope of my project; a handful of examples will have to suffice. It should come as no surprise that contemporary Francophone literatures contain forthright and "complete" depictions of enslaved rebellion, unlike the examples that Moskowitz and Adéẹ̀kọ́ examine. If U.S.-based literary depictions of enslaved rebellion are conditioned by that nation's history of revolts, as the latter argues, then the same should be true of depictions from France and its post/colonies with their specific history of revolts, the victorious Haitian Revolution being the *ne plus ultra*. Victor Hugo's early novel *Bug-Jargal* (1826) takes place amid the uprising that initiated the Revolution, for example, cutting its gothic dread from the cloth of White defeat. Louis Timagène Houat's Réunionese novel *The Maroons* (1844) makes enslaved rebellion into a shocking *deus ex machina*, even going so far as to portray the final revolt as laying the foundation for a new maroon army.[13] And the first Haitian novel, Émeric Bergeaud's *Stella* (1859), retells the Revolution as an allegorical, almost fantastic founding epic. These are only cursory examples of the kind of direct depiction of enslaved rebellion that we can find elsewhere, but they begin to outline my point. The problem of interrupted or absent depictions of enslaved rebellion is partly a function of a too narrow focus on the Anglophone world, its histories of Black struggle, and its literatures.[14]

Blake's uneven tempo is not an inherent problem to Blackness within literary cultures of racial capitalism but a reflection of a particular history and a feature of revolutionary time itself. Returning to Moskowitz's compelling question, "Why won't literature directly represent Black revolution?" I would answer in three complementary ways: some literatures straightforwardly do; early U.S. American literatures should be historicized especially in terms of U.S. enslaved revolts; and *Blake*'s attunement to revolutionary time means that it does depict Black revolution, although one could argue only indirectly. My disagreement might seem insignificant, a too subtle distinction as to why Delany never delivers readers a triumphant scene of Black revolution. Or worse, my argument could seem to minimize the degree to which anti-Blackness structures Western modernity, which is perhaps Moskowitz's most urgent point. But I think there are other stakes to my argument. To say that Black revolution is unrepresentable in *Blake* is to foreclose the possibility of imagining it, whether for writers, readers, or, ultimately, revolutionaries. I'll confess to despairing at that possibility. I also find it unconvincing. Much writing on what Cedric Robinson termed the Black Radical Tradition celebrates the creative or visionary aspects of Black resistance.[15] Black-revolution-as-aporia sits uneasily alongside that tradition, in my view. More importantly, 2020's Black rebellion demonstrates that the tempo of revolutionary struggle is such that interruption and possibility are inextricably bound together in reality, just as they are in Delany's fiction. By rereading *Blake* via the George Floyd Rebellion, I'm arguing for an interpretation of the text as well as revolutionary struggle itself in which contingency—and

[13] Louis Timagène Houat, *The Maroons*, trans. Aqiil Gopee with Jeffrey Diteman (New York: Restless Books, 2024): 111–13.

[14] This is not to say that other literatures do not exhibit their own colonialism and anti-Blackness. Rather, my point is to more specifically historicize the apparent non-depiction of Black revolution in Anglophone U.S. literatures.

[15] In particular, Robin D. G. Kelley's *Freedom Dreams* (2002) develops the nascent line of thinking in Robinson's *Black Marxism* (1983) that Black artistic production belongs to the Black Radical Tradition and that its truest form is, for Kelley, a Black surrealism. In light of Kelley's work, especially, I find many versions of the Black-revolution-as-aporia argument untenable.

therefore possibility—is defining. Everything has been and remains up for grabs, including the representability of Black revolution.

Caught between victory and defeat, the characters of *Blake* are no less suspended in revolutionary time than historical rebels, whether in the woods of Bois Caïman or en route to Union lines or in the streets of Minneapolis. Revolutionary subjects who are also subjected to their histories and the array of circumstances before them, at times they must act while at others they must steadfastly wait for conditions to change for the better, or, in the words of Blake himself, "Stand still and see the salvation!"[16]

[16] As Levine points out, Delany's recurring reference to Exodus 14:13 is typologically significant not as a justification for passivity but as an injunction to hold firm in faith, for the Israelites, and, for Delany's characters and readers, in the work of Black revolution. *See* Levine, *Martin Delany*, 194. This lesson strikes me as urgent during experiences of the uncertainty inherent to revolutionary time.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 62-74

Martin Delany's *Blake* and the "Secrets of His Organization"

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In January 1859, Thomas Hamilton introduced Martin Delany's *Blake* as a work that "differs essentially from all others heretofore published." He asserts that the novel "not only shows the combined political and commercial interests that unite the North and the South, but gives in the most familiar manner the formidable understanding among the slaves throughout the United States and Cuba."[1] Hamilton rightly identified a central thrust of *Blake*'s critique—its representation of coordinated political and commercial interests that undermine abolition and racial equality in the U.S. By emphasizing the "formidable understanding among the slaves," he also recognizes the novel's power as a tool of resistance. This introduction observes Delany's coupling of critique and political alternatives in *Blake*, implicitly agreeing with its premise that deconstruction is necessary for the construction of something better. This essay expands Hamilton's focus to consider the novel's "secrets of . . . organization" amongst free and enslaved people of color in the Atlantic world.[2]

We know that Martin Delany had hoped that *Blake* would help raise money for his emigrationist project in West Africa. His letter to William Lloyd Garrison in February 1859 candidly states his economic interests: "I am anxious to get a good publishing house to take it, as I know I could make a penny by it, and the chances for a negro in this department are so small, that unless some disinterested competent persons would indirectly aid in such a step, I almost despair of any chance."[3] His doubts about the publication possibilities for Black fiction writers proved too true. Garrison never responded, and Delany was otherwise unable to secure its publication in book form. Despite his opposition to emigration, Thomas Hamilton printed two separate, incomplete runs of *Blake* in the *Anglo-African Magazine* and *Weekly Anglo-African.* Clearly, Hamilton saw the novel as more than an appeal to emigrate. I think Hamilton understood *Blake*'s potential to enlighten and empower his transnational Black readership.

This essay illustrates that vision of the novel. *Blake* takes up weighty questions about the condition, elevation, emigration, and destiny of Black people that Delany had been wrestling with for over a decade. It also engages with antebellum literature, from Black radical writings by David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet to slave narratives, popular fiction, poetry, songs, and prayers. Delany variously employs or subverts conventions and incorporates references to, as Jerome McGann notes, achieve a "startlingly innovative aesthetic result."[4] The analysis that follows closely examines Henry's/Blake's strategies for organization to track the novel's overarching arguments and various modes of engaging readers.[5]

In *Blake,* the protagonist's attempt to reunite with his wife, cruelly sold and separated from her family, transforms into a broader mission to unify Black communities from the Americas to

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[1] Editors, "Blake; or, The Huts of America," *Anglo-African Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1859): 20, Babel.hathitrust.org
[2] Martin Delany, *Blake; or The Huts of America,* ed. Jerome McGann (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2017), 5. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically in the text.
[3] Martin Delany, "Letter from Martin Robison Delany, 157 Church St., New York, to William Lloyd Garrison, Feb. 19, [18]59," Massachusetts Collections Online, Digital Commonwealth, Digitalcommonwealth.org.
[4] Jerome McGann, introduction to *Blake; or The Huts of America,* by Martin Delany, ed. Jerome McGann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), xvi. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically.
[5] The hero is called Henry Holland in Part I and revealed to be Carolus Henrico Blacus, or Blake, in Part II.

Africa. In Part I, Henry organizes slaves throughout the Southern U.S. for a general insurrection that he cannot personally join and leads a small party of fugitive slaves to Canada. In Part II, Blake frees his wife in Cuba, sails to Africa, and returns to Cuba to organize a revolutionary movement that never finally incites revolution. Like other major antebellum writers, Delany dramatizes the tension between the individual and the collective—and between intellectual and spiritual enlightenment and physical resistance.

I. Launching the plot

"Chapter 1: The Project" offers a curious start. The chapter consists of three paragraphs. It introduces major characters in the United States and Cuba, who are "entirely absorbed in an adventure of self interest," which involves "refitting the old ship the *Merchantman*" (5). Nearly teasing readers, the second paragraph begins: "Here a conversation ensued upon what seemed a point of vital importance to the company; it related to the place best suited for the completion of their arrangements." The paragraph relates an argument about whether Baltimore or Havana is the best site for their operation, but it doesn't state the point of their conversation in the first place. Literary critic Martha Schoolman calls this first chapter "almost inexplicable."[6]

While the lack of context and details is disorienting, this introduction arguably offers insight into Delany's expectations for his audience. Tellingly, the first sentence of the first chapter of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Blake* both focus on a meeting between "gentlemen" (5). Of course, Stowe's narrator then didactically undercuts the gentlemanly status of the slave-trader Haley and more subtly interrogates the position of Shelby, as he demands a minstrel performance from Eliza's son and negotiates the sale of his human chattel. Delany's narrator, on the other hand, merely points out the "self interest" driving their adventure. He neither encourages nor directs his reader's moral judgment. But Delany likely expects his audience to know that these officials' interests don't relate—or are in direct opposition—to his readers' interests and, further, that a meeting between American and Cuban elites must somehow involve slavery.[7]

Chapter Two then follows Colonel Stephen Franks, one of the Americans, back to his plantation in Natchez, Mississippi, and it quickly introduces the central critique identified by Hamilton. Like the first, this chapter with Franks and his guest Arabella Ballard, the wife of a judge in the North, is obliquely about slavery: "The conversation, as is customary on the meeting of Americans residing in such distant latitudes, readily turned on the general policy of the country" (6). Arabella, speaking as a representative Northerner, tells Franks, "We can have no interests separate from yours; you know the time-honored motto, 'united we stand,' and so forth, must apply to the American people under every policy in every section of the Union" (6). She continues, "You, I'm sure, Colonel, know very well that in our country commercial interests have taken precedence of all others, which is a sufficient guarantee of our fidelity to the South" (6). For her (and presumably Delany), the U.S. is not bound by a shared political ideology or a commitment to certain inalienable rights. Instead, the nation is held together by its states' vested economic

[6] Martha Schoolman, "Martin Delany, *Blake; or, the Huts of America* (1859–1862)," in *Handbook of the American Novel of the Nineteenth Century,* ed. Christine Gerhardt (De Gruyter, 2018).

[7] In Part II, it is revealed that the *Merchantman* is refitted as the *Vulture* for a transatlantic slave voyage involving a cargo of two thousand slaves (205).

interests.[8] Disparate regional interests are subsumed into a single national interest when the focus is on the dollar, and slavery will continue, strengthen, and even grow as long as it remains profitable.

Blake also launches its restorative community-building project in the opening chapters. After she rejects his sexual entreaties, Franks sells Maggie, a decision that catalyzes Henry's radicalization. Maggie's mother, Mammy Jude, breaks the news to Henry, suggesting that it would be better if she had died or submitted herself to his demands (17). Outraged by the latter suggestion, Henry prepares an oath that Mammy censors, urging him not to swear or "lose [his] 'ligion" (17). Henry responds, "Don't tell me about religion! What's religion to me? My wife is sold away from me by a man who is one of the leading members of the very church to which both she and I belong! Put my trust in the Lord! I have done so all my life nearly, and of what use is it to me? My wife is sold from me just the same as if I didn't" (17). Henry seems ready to adopt Delany's own lines from *Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny:* "Talk not about religious biases—we have but one reply to make. We had rather be a Heathen *freeman*, than a Christian *slave.*"[9] But here Delany is not crafting a polemic. He's searching for a way to make faith unify a community in spiritual and mental darkness. Soon Henry rejects the "oppressor's religion" and the slave-holding preacher's advice to stand still and see the salvation (22). Instead of waiting on "heavenly promises" (18), he insists, "'Now is the accepted time, to-day is the day of salvation.' . . . [T]his is very different to standing still" (23). From here onward, Henry uses this ethos to fuel an earthly mission for the salvation of his oppressed race.[10]

II. Imparting the "secrets of his organization"

Franks's attempt to deceive his wife about Henry's sale provides Henry with the opportunity, as he calls it, to "become a runaway" (33). Before leaving, Henry shares his mission with his enslaved friends and allies Charles and Andy: "I now impart to you the secret—it is this: I have laid a scheme, and matured a plan for a general insurrection of the slaves in every state, and the successful overthrow of slavery!" (40). He claims his plan is "so simple that the most stupid

[8] James Fenimore Cooper views slavery similarly in *Notions of the Americans*: "It is difficult to imagine a state of society where there is so little competition, (the source of all discord,) between its members, as is to be found in the United States. The unfortunate and lamentable grievance of slavery ceases to be an evil in this respect. That momentary collisions of opinion do arise between northern and southern, between eastern and western policy, is undeniable; but they are far more the results of the right to complain, than of any natural disability to maintain the connexion." He then goes on to discuss how regions rely on a shared national commerce (Cooper, *Notions of the Americans* [New York: Stringer and Townshend, 1850], 339).

[9] Martin Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), Gutenberg.org.

[10] *Blake*'s framing of Christianity stands out compared to other appeals to Christianity. Consider, for instance, William Apess's "An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man" (1833) and Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" (1852), two works whose titles explicitly identify their audience. They both seek to transform the moral conscience of the White reader, in part, by appealing to true Christianity. Believers in a single vision of Christianity with clear moral directives, Apess and Douglass seek to expose the hypocrisy of Christians, whose immoral practices—from land theft to slavery—are decidedly unchristian. For them, a wicked slaveholding Christian is not really a Christian at all. Meanwhile, Martin Delany takes an approach that may be described as either profoundly cynical or maybe postmodern. He seems skeptical of one *true* Christianity and presents multiple interpretive possibilities, which individuals choose based on how those beliefs align with their self-interests. Read unfavorably, the novel weaponizes Christianity for political ends; read favorably, the novel encourages its readership to adopt a Christianity that defends human rights and empowers Black communities.

among the slaves will understand it as well as if he had been instructed for a year" (40). He continues: "So simple is it that the trees of the forest or an orchard illustrate it; flocks of birds or domestic cattle, fields of corn[,] hemp[,] or sugar cane; tobacco[,] rice[,] or cotton, the whistling of the wind, rustling of the leaves, flashing of lightning, roaring of thunder, and running of streams all keep it constantly before their eyes and in their memory, so that they cannot forget it if they would" (41).[11] Rather than clarifying, this catalogue only further befuddles Charles and Andy. Henry never explains the meaning of the list. Read quickly, this long sentence seems to suggest that Nature offers the best illustration of slavery's wrongs.[12]

Henry's list, however, includes things that are not a part of the natural environment. This catalogue juxtaposes trees from a forest with those from an orchard; birds with domestic cattle; fields of corn, hemp, and sugar cane and the agricultural products of tobacco, rice, and cotton with natural phenomena involving lightning, thunder, and rushing streams. It's impossible to definitively claim how these things "illustrate" a plan for insurrection. At this moment, the author's intended meaning is less important than the reader's process of interpretation, which requires imagination and self-reliance. In uncultivated environments, slaves can find free living beings; they can observe elements of the land, sea, or sky that break past constraints or explode to produce balance and equilibrium. In cultivated environments, slaves can equate their existence to domesticated animals; they can see the animals and plants that they grow, care for, and process profit others besides themselves. No matter where slaves with unbridled imagination look, they can build a case against their enslaved condition. For Henry (and Delany), interpretive ambiguity opens the door to empowerment.

Henry continues, "such is the character of this organization, that punishment and misery are made instruments for its propagation, so—" (41). Andy's and Charles's constant interruptions illustrate their thirst for knowledge; they also serve to build up readers' anticipation for Henry's responses. Betraying more of his plans, Henry asserts, "Every blow you receive from the oppressor impresses the organization upon your mind, making it so clear that even Whitehead's Jack could understand it as well as his master" (41). The violence, lust, moral hypocrisy, theft, and deception of slaveholders build the obvious and urgent intellectual case against slavery. The system itself creates the resistance movement *if and only if* it is actively understood by individuals who then organize and respond collectively.

Then Delany pulls a trick on his readers. Charles and Andy shout, "We are satisfied! The secret, the secret!" (41). Henry delays a bit by first praying, and then the narrator relays, "whilst yet upon their knees, Henry imparted to them the secrets of his organization" (41). Readers never learn the "secret." The move allows Delany to retain a certain mystique. Is the secret so explosive that it can't be printed? Withholding information also could be a subversive display of authorial

[11] Admittedly with a heavy editorial hand, I have added commas to illustrate my reading of the idiosyncratic syntax.
[12] Henry's words could thus resemble Madison Washington's soliloquy in *The Heroic Slave*. For Douglass's hero, birds and snakes offer a model of freedom denied to the abject slave: "What, then, is life to me? it is aimless and worthless, and worse than worthless. Those birds, perched on yon swinging boughs, in friendly conclave, sounding forth their merry notes in seeming worship of the rising sun, though liable to the sportsman's fowling-piece, are still my superiors. They live free, though they may die slaves. They fly where they list by day, and retire in freedom at night. But what is freedom to me, or I to it? I am a slave,—born a slave, an abject slave,—even before I made part of this breathing world, the scourge was platted for my back; the fetters were forged for my limbs. How mean a thing am I. That accursed and crawling snake, that miserable reptile, that has just glided into its slimy home, is freer and better off than I." Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave,* in *Autographs for Freedom* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1853), Docsouth.unc.edu.

mastery over certain readers.[13] Nonetheless, most importantly, by hiding the blueprint for war, the scene prioritizes the pathway to organization, emphasizing building solidarity over staging violence.

Framed as a meeting about "a general insurrection," this chapter focuses on individual enlightenment that can lead to collective resistance. Henry's actual plan for organization *is* quite simple. "All you have to do," he says, "is to find one good man or woman—I don't care which, so that they prove to be the right person—on a single plantation, and hold a seclusion and impart the secret to them, and make them the organizers for their own plantation, and they in like manner impart it to some other next to them, and so on" (42). Before Henry ever travels to Cuba, there is an archipelagic logic to his scheme, as the revolutionary power of his scheme lies not in a single plantation—a solitary island—but a network of plantations—an archipelago of resistance. Henry's rally with Charles and Andy, however, ends on an unexpected note, as he urges them to collect all the money they can "for when we leave for the North" (44). While his listeners don't register any surprise, this parting note first informs readers that Henry doesn't intend to fight in the revolution of his own design.[14]

III. Touring the South

Henry leaves Natchez for his tour of Southwestern and Southern states. His rhetorical dialogues throughout his journey exemplify how blows received from the oppressor impress the organization upon the minds of the oppressed. In Louisiana, in his first exchange, Henry asks Aunt Dolly about living conditions—their treatment, food, clothing, housing, and so on. Their responses build a case for the unbearable nature of their state. As Henry travels onward, it becomes increasingly obvious that his interviews resemble the narrator's broadly non-interventionist approach with his audience. The most mundane question—"What time do you get to wash your clothes?" or "How much [cotton] must the women pick as a task?"—allows slaves and Delany's readers to open their eyes to an untenable situation (76, 78). Without ideological instruction or promises, his dialogues reflect their lives back to them to process it anew.

Occasionally, he praises resistance. He tells young women to "die before surrendering to such base purposes as that for which this man who holds you wishes to dispose of you" (80). To the same women, he learns of a cruel Black overseer. Henry promises them that the man soon will "never whip another" (79), and the narrator reports that on the following day the man never was seen again. This Black man—an abuser of his own race—stands as the only one whose life Henry takes over the course of the work.[15] Later, along the Mississippi River, Henry meets a kidnapped man, stolen from freedom, and he encourages him to kill his master in his sleep instead of

[13] Potentially, he was inspired by Frederick Douglass's refusal to reveal the means of his own escape in *Narrative*. Douglass flexes his authorial power over his slaveholding reader by withholding this information: "Let him be left to feel his way in the dark; let darkness commensurate with his crime hover over him; and let him feel that at every step he takes, in pursuit of the flying bondman, he is running the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible agency." Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* ed. William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York: Norton, 2017), 69.

[14] When Henry confronted Franks about Maggie, he told him, "I'm not your slave, nor never was, and you know it! and but for my wife and her people, I never would have staid with you till now. I was decoyed away when young, and then became entangled in such domestic relations as to induce me to remain with you; but now the tie is broken!" (21). Henry thus has an unusual insider-outsider relationship to his fellow slaves.

[15] The death count of animals is higher.

submitting to continued captivity (83). In the "Indian Nation near Fort Towson, Arkansas," Henry discusses with Chief Culver the possibility of an alliance between Natives and slaves echoing the partnership between Seminole Indians and maroons and free Black people (88).

While Henry champions resistance in the cases above, he also consistently frames the revolution as anticipatory, not immediate. The narrator uses a metaphor about sowing seeds for an abundant harvest to describe the future "devastation and ruin to the master and redemption to the slave" enabled by Henry's organization (84).[16] Somewhat ironically, in the gatherings throughout the South, Henry appropriates the master's imperative to "stand still and see the salvation" (108).[17] A warning about the consequences of premature action occurs in New Orleans when Brotha Tib, a man "bent on mischief" and working in cooperation with White slaveholders, insists "now or neveh!" (105) and incites a rebellion. The result is a predictable failure, which yields an increased state of surveillance that only threatens to doom future freedom efforts. To no avail, Henry had pleaded with Brotha Tib, "Have all the instrumentalities necessary for an effective effort before making the attempt. Without this, you will fail, utterly fail!" (106). Still, Henry escapes to carry his message forward and returns to Natchez with the "brightest hopes and expectations for the redemption of his race in the South" (126).

Back with Charles and Andy, Henry discusses how a "good master" is the very worst of masters, which opens a conversation on the violence of resistance. Talk of head chopping ensues. Charles and Andy bluster about their psychological preparedness to kill their masters, along with their beloved mistresses. Henry tempers their passions, "There's neither of you, Andy, could muster up courage enough to injure a 'good master' or mistress. And even I now could not have the heart to injure Mrs. Franks" (129). Undoubtedly relieved, Andy suggests, in fact, he would cut off "anybody's head" attempting to hurt his mistress, and they all break down laughing (129).[18] Then Henry provides a justification for the "general insurrection" he just attempted to organize:

> "A slave has no just conception of his own wrongs. Had I dealt with Franks as he deserved, for doing that for which he would have taken the life of any man had it been his case—tearing my wife from my bosom!—the most I could take courage directly to do, was to leave him, and take as many from him as I could induce to go. But maturer reflection drove me to the expedient of avenging the general wrongs of our people, by inducing the slave, in his might, to scatter red ruin throughout the region of the South. But still, I cannot find it in my heart to injure an individual except in personal conflict."
>
> . . . "I have taught the slave that mighty lesson: to strike for Liberty. 'Rather die as freemen, than live as slaves!'" (129)

Delany appropriates Garnet's call to "*die freemen, than live as slaves*" for Henry's speech, notably keeping it in quotes to highlight its intertextuality. But Henry includes neither himself nor Andy

[16] For other references, *see* 74, 113, and 124.

[17] *See* 81 and 123.

[18] This shocking conversation brings to mind a passage in *My Bondage and My Freedom* in which Douglass references dialogues between him and his fellow slaves on Freeland's plantation: "Thoughts and sentiments were exchanged between us, which might well be called very incendiary, by oppressors and tyrants; and perhaps the time has not even now come, when it is safe to unfold all the flying suggestions which arise in the minds of intelligent slaves." Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom,* ed. John David Smith (New York: Penguin, 2003), 197.

and Charles in this general grouping of slaves.[19] While they could never kill a "good" master or mistress, "a slave has no just conception of his own wrongs." Henry dumps the moral burden of war and its necessary mass violence on the other slaves. For those slaves, the effort to secure freedom is moral, regardless of the actions required. In his address, Henry Highland Garnet reframes the conversation on morals to posit "VOLUNTARY SUBMISSION" to slavery as "SINFUL IN THE EXTREME" and the use of "EVERY MEANS, BOTH MORAL, INTELLECTUAL, AND PHYSICAL," to abolish slavery as a "moral obligation" and "IMPERATIVE DUTY."[20] Delany reflects ambivalence by emphasizing the conditional application of this moral code. This passage divulges Henry's reticence for violence.

IV. Seeking refuge in Canada

To escape slavery personally, Henry opts for flight, not fight. A mentality of self-reliance undergirds the fugitive's pathway, just as it informs the noble rebel. Henry shows his small party of friends and family how to use the stars to find the North Star, "the slave's great Guide to Freedom!" (134). In case stars cannot be seen, they should "depend alone upon nature for your guide" and feel for moss on the trees: "[W]herever you feel moss on the bark, that side on which the moss grows is always to the north" (134). Lastly, he teaches them how to use a compass. After that, he insists, "Now, I've told you all that's necessary to guide you from a land of slavery and long suffering, to a land of liberty and future happiness" (135). Read literally, this statement feels exaggerated; surely the ability to identify North isn't *all* that's necessary. Read figuratively, the geographic route from the land of slavery becomes an allegory for the intellectual and spiritual path to living free. Robert Levine has rightly noted that Henry's conspiracy relies on "oral forms of communication" rather than "literacy" insisted upon by Douglass and other Black abolitionists.[21] Henry also empowers his fellow slaves with instructions to read the environment, not books. This pragmatic lesson falls in line with what Henry later tells Placido: "we know enough now, and all that remains to be done, is to make ourselves free, and then put what we know into practice. We know much more than we dare attempt to do" (199). As Jerome McGann notes, such episodes "dramatize Delany's touchstone for freedom: self-emancipation through a commitment to practical reason" (xiv).

Henry's discourse on flight is twice linked to another concept: the "white gap." First mentioned when sharing the secrets of his organization with Charles and Andy (44), he dilates further on the concept with Sampson and Drusie in Texas during his Southern tour:

> "Your most difficult point is an elevated obstruction, a mighty hill, a mountain; but through that hill there is a gap; and money is your passport through that White Gap to freedom. Mark that. It is the great range of White Mountains and White River which are before you, and the White Gap that you must pass through to reach the haven of safety. Money alone will carry you through the White Mountains or across the White River to liberty." (86)

[19] Henry Highland Garnet, "An Address to the Slaves of the United States of America" (1848), *Electronic Texts in American* Studies: 8, Digitalcommons.unl.edu.
[20] Garnet, "An Address," 5–6.
[21] Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 195.

Here the geography of the nation is racialized as White. The characterization of the U.S. as the "White Gap" suggests that the spaces on either side of the border are *not* White and therefore present safety and freedom. Henry registers degraded, disempowered, and enslaved Black people as not just a "nation within a nation"—as Delany does in *Condition*—but as a Black nation trapped inside the White nation by its very physical terrain. The concept creates its own implicit case for emigration, as the national environment is inimical to Black people.

Ironically, the fugitive party's escape to Canada offers lessons about defusing racial tensions. Immediately after leaving Franks's plantation, they need to cross a river on a "lightly built yawl, commanded by a white man" (130). Asked for a pass, Henry hands him a "half eagle" for himself and, after further insistence, seven half eagles for the rest of his crew. Sure enough, the money works. With coins in hand, he makes "the quickest possible time to the opposite side of the river" (131). The second skiffman they meet initially rejects written passes as "nigger passes" (136). Here is Henry's response and the skiffman's revised comments:

> "Then I have one that will pass us!" presenting the unmistaking evidence of a shining gold eagle, at the sight of which emblem of his country's liberty, the skiffman's patriotism was at once awakened, and their right to pass as American freemen indisputable.
> … "Now, gentlem'n, I done the clean thing, didn't I, by jingo! . . . I dont go in for this slaveholding o' people in these Newnited States uv the South, nowhow, so I don't. Dog gone it, let every feller have a fair shake!" (137)

This scene is more overtly satirical. The narrator's commentary is expanded and the newly won over skiffman's comments take on a near comic effect. Both interactions emphasize that the nation's core values revolve around money, extending the critique first established by Franks's and Arabella's conversation in Chapter 2. Intriguingly, by appealing to their self-interests with money, Henry overcomes their racism and even prompts the second man to rhetorically embrace equal opportunities for all.

In a later interaction, Henry appeals to a comically confused ferryman insisting on his national duty to follow the "Nebrasky Complimize Fugintive Slave Act, made down at Californy": "My friend . . . are you willing to make yourself a watch-dog for slaveholders, and do for them that which they would not do for themselves, catch runaway slaves? Don't you know that this is the work which they boast on having the poor white men at the North do for them? Have you not yet learned to attend to your own interests instead of theirs?" (141). The initial hostility eases, and Henry coaxes the ferryman to help them evade capture by slaveholders in pursuit. Henry takes a pragmatic approach with these boatmen. He does not waste his fine rhetorical powers by appealing to higher moral or political principles when money talks. He finds a way to disarm their prejudice—to neutralize their White nationalism—and transform their relationship. Henry's methods diverge from the more confrontational rhetorical approaches typically taken by activists and abolitionists, and perhaps they offer a fleeting vision of how a focus on economic materialism could open the door to racial equality and equity.

I say "fleeting vision" because the capture of the fugitives underscores the nearly insurmountable systemic forces faced by enslaved and free Black people. Dave and Adaline Starkweather are first alerted of the group's fugitive status when they hear them singing about Canada. With lines alluding to British pressure on the U.S. to abolish slavery, their song offends

the White couple's sense of nationalism, built on ahistoricism (145). The Starkweathers direct the fugitives to stay with William and Sally, a free Black couple, who ultimately hand them over to the White townspeople. Sally urges William to not betray them, but he reminds her, "yeh knows we make our livin' by de wite folks, an' mus' do what da tell us, so whar's de use talkin' long so" (148). While ostensibly free, Bill and Sally are effectively enslaved, stripped of self-reliance and trapped by so-called economic necessity. The scene dramatizes David Walker's critique of free people of color in *Appeal*: "Do any of you say that you and your family are free and happy, and what have you to do with the wretched slaves and other people? . . . Look into our freedom and happiness, and see of what kind they are composed!! They are of the very lowest kind—they are the very dregs!—they are the most servile and abject kind, that ever a people was in possession of!"[22]

By exploiting their White captors' drunkenness, Henry and his crew escape and arrive in Canada. Andy celebrates their arrival with a series of rhetorical questions: "Is dis Canada? . . . Is dis free groun'? de lan' whar black folks is free! Thang God for dis privilege!" (154). The narrator dramatically intervenes by illuminating what Andy doesn't know about the imperfect freedom offered to the fugitive slave in Canada. For one, the narrator highlights how White Canadians have forgotten that Black men fought alongside them to defend their land in the War of 1812 from "Patriots"—a satirical label for Americans whose expansionist zeal is at odds with their sense of postcolonial innocence.[23] This section builds on Delany's advice to free people of color and fugitive slaves about Canada in *Condition*: "We are satisfied that the Canadas are no place of safety for the colored people of the United States . . . . But to the fugitive—our enslaved brethren flying from Southern despotism—we say, until we have a more preferable place—go to Canada. Freedom, always; liberty any place and ever—before slavery." By the close of Part I, the fugitives have escaped slavery; in Part II, Henry leaves North America to explore other possibilities for a "place of safety" in the Atlantic world.

V. Sailing to "Afraka"

Once in Cuba, Blake finds Maggie, who is horrifically abused but soon freed through the process of *coartación,* and reencounters his cousin Placido, the "distinguished poet of Cuba" (194).[24] To Placido, he reveals his next big step: "I go directly to Matanzas, to take out a slaver as sailing master, with the intention of taking her in mid ocean as a prize for ourselves, as we must have a vessel at our command before we make a strike" (200). An experienced seaman, Blake explains that his racial identity makes him desirable for the job: "[N]o white men manage vessels in the African waters, that being entirely given up to the blacks" (196). Unaware that White men were "unable to stand the climate," Placido says this information "opens . . . an entirely new field

[22] David Walker, *Appeal, in Four Articles* (Boston, 1829), Docsouth.unc.edu.

[23] As Delany suggests in Destiny, "[T]here is a manifest tendency on the part of the Canadians generally, to Americanism. That the Americans are determined to, and will have the Canadas, to a close observer, there is not a shadow of doubt; and our brethren should know this in time" (*Condition*).

[24] In *Condition,* Delany remembers the historical figure as "the noble mulatto, . . . the gentleman, scholar, poet, and intended Chief Engineer of the Army of Liberty and Freedom in Cuba . . . shamefully put to death in 1844" (*Condition*). As this part of the novel is set in 1853, McGann argues, "When Delany resurrects Placido in Part II, he uses the dead poet to replay historical events that occurred more than ten years before" (xvii). As I will relate in the conclusion, I am less sure than McGann about how exactly this replay works out.

of thought" (197). He doesn't reveal what he's thinking, but the conversation marks the African coast Black just as the "White Gap" paints the U.S. as White.

From the start of the voyage, racial tension seethes on board the *Vulture.* They are briefly pursued by the *Sea Gull,* a cause of "great anxiety" amongst the White men and "grim satisfaction" for Blake (206).[25] Although the *Sea Gull* is unsuccessful, the failed chase confirms that the Black crew are on the side of justice and international law, while the Cuban and American mariners are renegades on the global stage. Gascar, one of the Black crew members, sings threatening verses, beginning with "I'm a goin' to Afraka, / Where de white man dare not stay" and followed by three rhymed couplets describing acts of violence and the White man's pained responses (212). The narrator relays George Royer's disturbing reflections: "In his own country a white man was all that he desired to be; and out of it, he was no better than a negro" (212). The United States is exceptional for its White supremacy.

As soon as they land, "Blake was on shore and off into the forest," nearly absent from the text throughout their stay in Africa (214). Decentering Blake, the focus moves away from enlightening dialogues at organizations to a symbolically loaded sentimental sequence about a powerful family—the Portuguese slave trader Ludo Draco, his native African wife Zorina, and their daughters Angelina and Seraphina. In Lisbon, Angelina's religious instruction taught her to "love my neighbor as Myself," and she intended to "come home and teach my race" (217). However, back in Dahomey, she is haunted by her father's business and the sights and sounds at the barracoons. Angelina's health collapses at the moral outrage, and Zorina tells her husband, "Oh, Don Ludo, my poor child is almost gone!" (221). In a state of delirium, Angelina exclaims, "Oh, 'tis my mother's race and not his! Yes, 'tis my blood and not his!" (221). At once, Angelina recalls Eva from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the tragic mulatto. Like Eva, the child seems too pure for this corrupted world, and her mixed heritage makes her an object of sympathy for White readers, even as she asserts solidarity with enslaved Africans. Angelina seems prematurely destined for a heavenly home with the angels she's named for. By her bedside, Draco Ludo "promised the distracted Angelina never again to traffic in human beings" (222). Instantly, she springs from bed, and asks, "What is the matter—is anyone sick? Have I been dreaming, or what? I am well now" (222).

Injecting anti-slavery politics into sentimentalism as Stowe did in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or William Wells Brown did in *Clotel,* Delany prepares readers for Angelina's death scene.[26] However, at the last moment, Delany subverts expectations, rejecting the idea that the fictional child must be sacrificed to motivate change in the real world. Instead, Angelina's rather unbelievable and nearly comic turnaround catalyzes a moral transformation that, according to Delany's footnote, echoes a scene that actually took place between a slave trader and his family

[25] According to McGann, it was an actual British patroller that enforced international laws concerning trade and the slave trade (n181, 327).

[26] In Part I, after a brutal minstrel performance involving whipping, the enslaved child Reuben "left time for eternity" (69). The scene comes after an entire chapter involving a discussion amongst slaveholders and the judge about American and Cuban policies about slavery. The introduction and quick departure of Reuben shows Delany employing antebellum tropes, but implicitly questioning their effectiveness at empowering readers. Reflecting on antebellum sentimental literature, R.J. Ellis posits, "Introducing variations upon . . . familiar generic tropes might promote a reconsideration by this genre's readers of their lives . . . and their values. So the untypically overt political strain underlying Eva's generically familiar death-bed scene hints at the need for racial equality in Uncle Tom's Cabin—thereby advancing a radical program (immediate abolition) within established generic conventions." *See* R.J. Ellis, *Harriet Wilson's* Our Nig: *A Cultural Biography of a "Two-Story" African American Novel,* Costerus New Series 149, Series Editors C.C. Barfoot, Theo D'haan, and Erik Kooper, (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2003), 78.

(222). Liberated from the tragic fate dictated by sentimental literature, Angelina shows Africa's promise is a living reality.

Interestingly, mentions of Blake's arrival to and departure from the family's mansion frame this scene, making his absence from it more conspicuous.[27] Still, Blake's background role is emphasized further on the return journey, as the narrator notes, "Blake during the entire troubles was strangely passive to occurring events below, strictly attending to the duties of his office in silence, except when speaking to a black, or spoken to by a white" (238). While the narrator reveals the Americans' suspicion that he was the "instigator of the plot," Blake virtually disappears during the account of the journey home (238). The *Sea Gull* again chases them, and the officers meet no resistance throwing "six hundred" dead or dying men, women, and children "into the mighty deep" to escape their pursuer (231). The next day, a storm arises, awakening the vengeance of the remaining slaves.

The narrator draws parallels between the Africans and the brewing storm: "The black and frowning skies and raging hurricane above; the black and frowning slaves with raging passions below" (236). Mendi, a captive whose name references the crew of the *Amistad,* "stood in readiness for the conflict" (236). Together, the storm and rebellion appear to be a manifestation of God's retribution for the crimes of slavery. However, the storm suddenly stops, and "a rainbow appeared above the horizon, telling in distant and silent eloquence as a harbinger of gladness, of a brighter prospect to all, as if conscious of the terror which pervaded the enslavers, and the future that awaited the enslaved" (238).

In the aftermath of Maggie's sale, Henry twice relates that his "course is laid out" (18, 24), and on the Southern tour, the narrator twice relates that "nothing short" of "Divine Providence" can impede his "progress" (84, 102). Clearly, this is a moment when Providence runs counter to Blake's original plans. While six hundred lives are lost during the Middle Passage and the "mutiny was unsuccessful," the outcome is viewed as favorable: the masters of the ship decide to dispose of the cargo at Matanzas instead of the United States, and Placido engineers a private sale to ensure that "the entire cargo of captives" went "directly into black families or friends" (240).

VI. Organizing in Cuba

Soon after Blake arrives in Cuba, Placido announces that their councils have chosen "Henry Blake General-in-Chief of the army of emancipation of the oppressed men and women of Cuba!" (243). While Henry's organizations in the U.S. were primarily among slaves, the organizations in Cuba include a range of Black people from various social classes, including elite free people of color as well as the newly freed Africans. In the Grand Council meeting at Madame Cordora's house, Blake and Placido cover topics to bring them into deeper solidarity. Addressing religious distinctions that could potentially lead to division in the organization, Blake adopts "one religion for the sake of our redemption from bondage and degradation, a faith in a common Savior" (259). Essentializing race to create racial equality, Placido explains that Black people of "unmixed blood" must be held as equal to White people, and then "the descendants of the two" will "be acknowledged the equals of both" (262). Placido even lays out the "undoubted probabilities" of Africa becoming a great nation, a discussion that provides foundations for emigration to Africa

[27] The scene's closing reference to Blake is ungrammatically tacked onto Angelina's declaration of health. The sentence reads, "'I am well now!' when Blake left the mansion for the vessel, which he reached at so late an hour" (222).

which are not finally realized in *Blake* (263). At a later meeting, Blake also justifies their possession of the island through, as the narrator explains it, "the fundamental basis of original priority" (287). This argument claims "that the western world had been originally peopled and possessed by the Indians—a colored race—and a part of the continent in Central America by a pure black race. This they urged gave them an indisputable right with every admixture of blood, to an equal, if not superior claim to an inheritance of the Western Hemisphere" (287). *Blake* thus also supplies the rationale for emigration in the Americas. Blake and Placido (and Delany himself) use a broad understanding of racial solidarity amongst all people of color to effectively absorb the interests of indigenous people in Africa and the Americas into an agenda that suits the Black emigree.

Other Americans also express plans for Cuba. After Maggie is freed, her former slave mistress, Adelaide Garcia, talks to her brother, Peter Albertis, about the "prospect of a patriotic movement" (188). She wishes to extend the rights that she enjoyed in Louisiana to Cuba, but Peter discusses the impossibilities of the scheme. For one, "negroes are the main stay of Cuba, and can never be induced to join the patriots, who, as soon as they got the island, would deny the negroes the rights they now have" (188). Peter also confirms that the Spanish government would prefer "a negro to white dominion" because Black Cubans would be "more docile, contented, religious and happy" than Anglo-Americans (188). Delany thus articulates White Americans' desires for seizing Cuba, even as he relates their improbability. Still, the narrator's later admission that "speculators as frequent exchanges in Dock, Wall and State streets, backed by the brokerages of Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston and New Orleans" have "openly declared that Cuba and Porto Rico must cease to be Spanish Colonies, and become territories of the United States" further reifies the imperial ambition of the U.S. and the intimacy of political and economic interests (299).

Finally, in Chapter 70, titled "Momentous Step," Blake announces, "I am for war—war upon the whites" (291). Then he qualifies, "In the name of God, I now declare war against our oppressors, provided Spain does not redress our grievances!" (293). Rallying again, he says, "Then let us determine to be ready, permitting nothing outside of an interposition of Divine Providence to interfere with our progress" (294). The revolution seems to be at hand, but Blake clearly positions war as a contingency plan. He gives space for both Spain and Divine Providence to open opportunities to avoid the uprising that he has been planning the entire book.

While Blake contemplates and delays war, the Castilian aristocracy, represented primarily through Count and Countess Alcora, seems prepared to protect and continue its reign of power. At one point, Countess Alcora shares a dream with her husband "of being in the interior of Africa surrounded entirely by negroes, under the rule of a negro prince, beset by the ambassadors of every enlightened nation, who brought him many presents of great value, whilst the envoy of Her Catholic Majesty, sat quietly at the foot of the African Prince's throne" (267). She interprets the dream as a presentiment that "the negroes of Cuba are maturing a scheme of general insurrection!" (267). While her husband at first dismisses the dream, Captain General Alcora "set immediately industriously at work using every covert means in his power, not only to ferret out, but with a determination to implicate if possible some of the suspected parties" in order to preserve his "government" (270).

With only seventy-four of its likely eighty chapters published, *Blake* leaves readers without a definitive resolution about revolution or emigration. Will the brewing revolution in Cuba be a replay of *La Escalera,* the 1844 slave revolt doomed before it began that led to the execution of Placido, or a successful reimagining of *La Escalera*? How will the revolution, unsuccessful or not, impact the geographic trajectory of its characters? If it fails, will it spur Blake to lead a group of

emigrees to Africa to found a Black nation on the hill? If it succeeds, will it spark the general insurrection that Blake laid the seeds for in Cuba, leading to Black rule of the island? How will that revolution, successful or not, impact the United States?[28] Rather than speculate further, I want to focus on the last serialized issue of *Blake* as the actual ending of the novel. While it may appear anticlimactic, the conclusion significantly leaves its characters on the brink of revolution. The novel's final words shouted by an outraged Gofer Gondolier after a series of violent assaults on Placido and others—"Woe be unto those devils of whites, I say!"—could foreshadow a just revolution and divine retribution *or,* more likely, a premature, unsuccessful insurrection that parallels the events in New Orleans in Part I. The line offers a dual warning to White oppressors and Black people fighting for their liberation.

VII. Conclusion

The critical reception of *Blake* focuses on its radical advocacy for slave rebellion in the U.S. and Cuba. Throughout this reading, I have aimed to show how both Henry Blake and Divine Providence often resist the pull of war. In his April 1849 essay "Annexation of Cuba," Delany imagines "at the instant of the annexation of Cuba to these United States" a "simultaneous rebellion of all slaves in the Southern States, and throughout that island."[29] No simultaneous rebellion seems possible in the fictional world of *Blake.* While there is ambivalence towards mass violence, *Blake* offers a guidebook to mass organization and alternative forms of resistance.

Some critics have taken the novel's final words and appropriated them to Delany himself to convert the novel into a political manifesto. But it would be more accurate to apply Frederick Douglass's reflection on Delany's *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852) to *Blake*: "He has written a book—and we may say that it is, in many respects, an excellent book—on the condition, character and destiny of the colored people; but it leaves us just where it finds us, without chart or compass, and in more doubt and perplexity than before we read it."[30] Douglass offers this statement as criticism, but it speaks to the complexity of Delany's work and the flexibility of his vision. While Douglass claims to "expect no plan from him," he rightly identifies Delany's goal, even if he doesn't see it as a "plan" in and of itself: "Brother DELANY has worked long and hard, he has written vigorously, and spoken eloquently to colored people—beseeching them, in the name of liberty, and all the dearest interests of humanity, to unite their energies, and to increase their activities in the work of their own elevation." Similarly, *Blake* aims to build solidarity in a transnational Black community.

[28] McGann predicts that, like in *La Escalera,* the authorities would again seize and execute Placido and others for their role in the larger conspiracy. Henry with Maggie and others will eventually escape, retake the *Vulture*, rename it, and sail to Africa to "establish a black city on an African hill" (xxiv). The emigrationist voyage, in this line of interpretation, is not only an escape from slavery and the Americas, but an escape from a doomed history authored by White people. Perhaps only in "Afraka," an idealized version of Africa introduced through song by the Black sailor Gascar on the journey across the Atlantic (212), can Blake lead his people to redemption and a new history.

[29] Delany, "Annexation of Cuba," *The North Star,* 17 April 1849.

[30] "Martin R. Delany, with Douglass's Remarks," Utc.iath.virginia.edu.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 75-92

Transformation in *Blake; or the Huts of America*: The Structure for Land and Enslaved Labor in the South

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In *Blake; or the Huts of America,* Martin Delany offers a scathing critique of the system of enslaver rape, the consequences of which are visible throughout the American South. Delany uses the timeframes of what we can now call the Anthropocene to show the proliferation of mixed-race peoples, much like we might use time-loops to show gradual deforestation. Delany shows the impact of racial-mixing becoming more and more present in the South especially because it remains an unspoken, spectral, aspect of the story. In *Blake*, Henry Blake, the protagonist, accomplishes revolution over the system of enslaver rape as a spectral figure, moving both in and out of time. By engaging with time at a macro scale to show the historical proliferation of racial-mixing within White culture, Delany indicates the reliance whiteness comes to have on the transformation and reproduction of Black labor—the same system which is pervasive in Southerners' treatment of the land.

Transformation, as a system typically associated with the cultivation of the land, is described by cultural critic Achille Mbembe, as a system he extrapolates from Hegel, as a reduction of wilderness so that land might meet the needs of man, in a process he refers to as Transformation. He says:

> First, the human negates nature (a negation exteriorized in the human's effort to reduce nature to his or her own needs); and second, he or she transforms the negated element through work and struggle. In transforming nature, the human being creates a world; but in the process, he or she also is exposed to his or her own negativity. (14)

Critics in race and environmental studies have discussed the ways in which this system came to define how White men, especially in the South, came to think of other races. Paul Outka describes the system of transformation and its relationship to race as "the reduction of the human to a locus of agricultural productivity, fertility, or a commodified and domesticated animality" (51). Outka explains that this transformative system "was not simply the treatment of Black people as if they were part of nature that underpinned slavery, in other words, but in making Black people coextensive with a nature that existed solely to be exploited and 'improved' by whites" (53).[1]

Delany attempts in *Blake* to overthrow the system of transformation pervasive in the South. Although the unfinished Part II of *Blake* does not give the full details to the state of the new republic after Black rebellion and leaves its exact plans clouded, through Part I's condemnation of the plantation system, both by its crops and its slavery, Delany's *Blake* can be read as a novel based in revolution as an alternative to the system of transformation which defines the South's sexual and agricultural economies. The system that Blake hopes to replace is one he identifies as principally related to the plantation system, which is intent upon reproducing extracted value,

[1] David Silkenat, Raj Patel, and Jason Moore reference a system which viewed enslaved peoples as transformable. Roderick Nash and Jedediah Purdy have also referenced it with concern to Indigenous peoples as they describe how White settlers intended to "cultivate" Indigenous peoples. Historically, even W.E.B Du Bois references White attempts to "improve" Black populations.

whether by crop or by labor, in the most easily controlled manner that is compatible with increased profits and efficiency.[2] This chapter emphasizes an element of the larger process of transformation, an element by which enslaved persons came to be understood as a distinctive form of commodity, reproduced by enslaver rape. By producing more enslaved persons and making them steadily less Black, rapists made more commodities and made each of those commodities more valuable through chattel slavery, however, just as with land, the continued reproduction of this exhaustible commodity thrust the definitions by which White's understood the commodity into chaos.

Implicit in the White Southerners' system of commodification is a racial hierarchy privileging European Whiteness as the pinnacle of man, while relegating Blackness to a less-than-human classification. The "improvements," or racial-mixing through rape, White enslavers forced on enslaved populations destabilized the condition that was imposed upon them, that of commodity and object, in the same way that 'improvements' destabilized the ecologies of farmlands. As he historicizes 18th and 19th century Southerners' beliefs on slavery, Mason Lowance describes the definitive aspects of Whiteness which purported to differentiate enslavers from enslaved. Lowance explains, "Hierarchical classifications of race led to conclusions of superiority and inferiority based on relative cultural standards such as literary genius, religious practices, and long traditions of civilized behavior" (251). Individuals who fought for racial equality argued against this type of racial hierarchy by illustrating the literacy and religious conversion of Black figures such as Phyllis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano. Among these figures was Fredrick Douglass who argued against a racial hierarchy in his speech "The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered." Delany also wrote against the "racial science" which purported such racial hierarchy.[3] One of the ways which Delany opposes "racial science" is by showing that the same system of transformation through enslaver rape is modeled in enslavers' treatment of the land as they attempt to transform wilderness into private property and how that system is destabilized by the fetishization of Whiteness within mixed-race peoples.

The conversation surrounding *Blake* and its treatment of racial-mixing is still being developed, especially as it concerns enslaver rape. Eric Sundquist suggests that "Delany does not develop the themes of patrimony and miscegenation with much rigor" (191). This is a claim that I dispute, for I find that the entirety of Part I has a (relatively) unspoken tension between Blake's Black revolution and the system of enslaver rape which pervades the plantation. In her history of former enslaved peoples' conceptions of mixed-race sexual unions, Fay Yarbrough references consensual and nonconsensual sexual relationships between Indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples in *Blake* but does not associate the same with spectral relations of enslaver rape.

Scholarship on *Blake* tends to emphasize the creative acts of resistance which Delany instills in Henry Blake's narrative. Jonathan Gaboury clarifies that although Blake is a revolutionary and resistant, *Blake* only brings Black Nationalism to the edge of violence without engaging. Instead, one of the ways Blake resists is through the idea of "specter" which has become a critical term of inquiry for *Blake* scholars. Rebecca Biggio deploys the "specter of conspiracy" to describe Blake's ability to operate in and out of time as an agent of the taboo (to enslavers) revolution. Her treatment of specter fits within the unexplored paradigm where Colonel Frank and

[2] Donna Haraway's terming of "making killable" in *When Species Meet* and Paul Outka's description of the transformation from "man to brute" in *Race and Nature from Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* has resonant meanings within this definition as well.

[3] Russert Britt argues that in *Blake*, Delany "empties antebellum science of its rational core, revealing how the many fields of natural science, including but not reducible to the fields of racial science, are animated by a supernatural and mystical encounter with Blackness itself" (803).

other enslavers like him are unable to speak about the specter of Black revolution because implicit in Henry's Black revolution is his revolt against the system of enslaver rape. Other critics such as Marlene Daut delineate Delany's desire for his version of revolution, as distinct and separate from rebellion. She says, "the novel does not seek to use prior slave rebellions and revolutions as a blueprint" (84). The concept of revolution—outside the system, as distinct from rebellion—within the system, has become an important distinction for *Blake* scholars. Sean Gerrity, for example, locates Blake's resistance as acts of marronage, saying, "Marronage emerges as a set of practices untethered from the extremes, from the codified poles of enslavement as totalizing unfreedom and freedom as emancipation through the fantasy of revolutionary actualization" (3). Although this project primarily concerns itself with the system from which Blake revolts, Part II of the novel deals with the international colonialist representation of independent Black nationalism.[4]

The conversation surrounding Blackness and nature is one which has grown in the last few years. Scott Hess argues that Frederick Douglass' ownership of Cedar Hill as a "literary landscape" modeled the land-owning privilege of White authors, while also complicating an African-American nature. Hess says:

> As a number of studies have documented, African American environmental traditions tend to conceptualize nature differently than white traditions: not as pristine and "untouched" wilderness, ostensibly separate from human impact, but instead as fully implicated in human society and history, including a long history of intertwined environmental exploitation and racial oppression (592).

For my purposes, Douglass's willingness to engage with White institutions serves as a foil to Delany's independent Black nationalism. This difference between the two men also illustrates Delany's feelings towards racial mixing and consequently the transforming system illustrated in a nature wherein (White) 'Man' transforms.

Recently David Silkenat has brought attention to the history of slavery and land development as tied to Southern economies. Although he does not make distinctions about mixed-race people as tied to the same transforming system, both he and W.E.B Du Bois separately indicate the growing proliferation of change, through deforestation, and racial mixing occurring at the same time. Silkenat, without specifically referencing mixed-race peoples, indicates that slavery and deforestation were related when he says, "The rate of deforestation only increased as slavery spread into the Lower South" (59). As deforestation, the exhaustion of Southern soil, and slavery spread, enslavers found that the economically feasible way to sustain their way of life was by creating a surplus of enslaved peoples. Du Bois suggests that the reproduction of enslaved peoples was the primary means of increasing enslaved populations in the American South (4). For plantations who depended on enslaved labor in order to function, reproduction through rape was a way to guarantee a continued labor stream. References to this type of thinking have historical evidence as Olaudah Equiano writes, "Mr. James Tobin, a zealous labourer in the vineyard of slavery, gives an account of a French planter of his acquaintance, in the island of Martinico, who shewed him many mulattoes working in the fields like beasts of burden; and he told Mr. Tobin these were all the produce of his own loins! And I myself have known similar instances" (126). In

[4] Relevant scholarship includes Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* and Sharada Balachandran Orihuela's "The Black Market: Property, Freedom, and Piracy in Martin Delany's *Blake; or, The Huts of America.*"

addition to guaranteeing a continued presence of enslaved labor, mixed race enslaved peoples were also more highly valued than wholly Black enslaved peoples.[5]

In addition to guaranteeing a cheap labor force, enslaved peoples were valued as an industry in and of themselves. Value was found within mixed-race enslaved peoples, and specifically women because of white Southerners' fetishization. White Southerners' fetishization is evinced by Paul Outka in his study into the conflation of race and nature. Outka argues, "the most valuable female slaves—often light skinned . . .were sold expressly for concubinage" (71). Outka details how enslaved women were fetishized for several reasons including their sexual availability, and their varied appearance as either White or Black women. Gavin Wright shows in his study into the economic value of slavery in the South, that the commodity-value of mixed-race enslaved peoples for enslavers was often higher than the value for their land; therefore, the extra value that a mixed-race enslaved person might provide for an enslaver was often more economically important than their labor (Wright, 70). This shows not only that enslaver rape was an economic institution, but a systemized one which "cultivation" rivaled that of Southern farming.

Although economically profitable, enslaver rape, and race-mixing in general, was still considered taboo with the South and because of this it remained an unspoken open secret on the plantation.[6] However, Joshua Rothman, in his history of mixed-race peoples in the American South, notes, "No visitor to the antebellum South could fail to notice that slaveowners and other white men had sex with enslaved Black women and that they often did so by force" (133). Not only did enslaver rape serve as a violation of publicly accepted Southern morals, it also destabilized the economic system designed to uphold the "racial hierarchy" by which commodification became possible.

Where Whiteness was defined by the hazy definitions related to literacy, religion, and White considerations of "civility," by engaging in enslaver rape, Southerners viewed mixed-race enslaved peoples as inhabiting Whiteness or White attributes. Many enslavers viewed this favorably, expecting mixed-race peoples to be more easily controlled and not as "wild." We see the presence of this type of thinking in fictional accounts of the South from the 20th century which draw attention to the proliferation of mixed-race peoples and White male Southerners' fascination with them and wilderness. In "The Old People," William Faulkner uses Sam Fathers as an example of Blackness lying with wilderness and Whiteness lying with tameness.[7] In *Absalom, Absalom!* Faulkner compares Thomas Sutpen's enslaver rape to breeding horses.[8] As Faulkner describes, the task of transforming the "wild slave" fell to the enslaver, while the labor of the enslaved was tasked to transform the land. Nevertheless, enslaver rape did destabilize enslaved peoples' commodified status, as seen through the gradual shifting number and privileges of mixed-race people over wholly Black.

Du Bois, writing over fifty years after the Antebellum era, references the proliferation of mixed-race people. Note his scathing use of the word "improve" as he says:

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[5] This claim is addressed below.

[6] According to Joshua Rothman, "In most circumstances white community members clucked their tongues behind closed doors more than they complained to legal authorities" (2).

[7] Robbie Etheridge argues that "tameness," for Southerners, resides with Whiteness, as he says, "Interestingly, Sam's Whiteness also renders him just tame enough to be Ike's mentor" (139).

[8] Faulkner writes, "The wild blood which he had brought into the country and tried to mix, blend, with the tame which was already there, with the same care and for the same purpose with which he blended that of the stallion and that of his own" (70).

> Sexual chaos was always the possibility of slavery, not always realized but always possible: polygamy through the concubinage of Black women to white men; polyandry between Black women and selected men on plantations in order to improve the human stock of strong and able workers. The census of 1860 counted 588,352 persons obviously of mixed blood—a figure admittedly below the truth. (35)

Du Bois is deliberate in designating the enslaver perspective as attempting to "improve" their commodity with Whiteness. Read from an economic perspective, the proliferation of this system led to a (relative) shortage of "Blackness" and thereby enslaved labor. Du Bois suggests that this enterprise to "improve" Black populations was abandoned. He argues that during Reconstruction, "[t]he great republic of the West was trying an impossible experiment. They were trying to make white men out of black men. It could not be done. It was a mistake to conceive it" (632). Instead, Du Bois details how the exploitation of Black labor was solidified by outlawing mixed-race couples through anti-miscegenation laws, as well as the installation of the "one drop" rule (492, 632). Delany, writing in the 1840's and 50's, was unaware of the future shift and argued against mixed-race people being considered Black. Delany's politics are shown through Blake, who personally suffers from the effects of enslaver rape when his wife, the enslaved daughter of the plantation owner, is sold into hard labor in order to hide her father's impropriety from his wife. As a result, Blake, a man on the run, travels the South drumming up support for a Black revolution. During his travels, Blake witnesses the growing proliferation of mixed-race peoples, who, while still enslaved but privileged with Whiteness, serve as a class of people seen as more easily controlled commodities.

For Delany, the presence of mixed-race people as economic superiors to "wholly Black" individuals was detrimental to the cause of Black Nationalism. At several junctures in *Blake,* Delany shows Blake's cause deterred by the system of mixed-race peoples. Delany's views on racial-mixing and "Black purity" can be found in his early work, specifically his pamphlet, "The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States of America" ("Condition"), where Delany argues:

> The elevation of the colored man can only be completed by the elevation of the pure descendants of Africa; because to deny his equality, is to deny in a like proportion, the equality of all those mixed with the African organization; and to establish his inferiority, will be to degrade every person related to him by consanguinity; therefore, to establish the equality of the African with the European race, establishes the equality of every person intermediate between the two races. (IX)

Although Delany writes in *Blake* that mixed-race people would be invited into his hypothetical Black nation, he illustrates at several points that he views mixed-race peoples as separate from Black nationalism.

While the transforming conception of nature expressed by Mbembe was a dominant of the time, Delany sought for Black Nationalism to join the world on a global scale, where they might be competitors to White economic standards. Delany sought for this more utilitarian conception of nature, to replace the one implicit in Mbembe/Hegel's nature of transformation. In "Condition" Delany illustrates this utilitarian view towards nature as he discusses resources lying in nature waiting for extraction, when he says, "The land is ours—there it lies with inexhaustible resources; let us go and possess it" (Appendix). The events of Part II show Blake after revolution, once he

has successfully escaped from Colonel Franks and the specter of enslaver rape, and as such, Blake attempts to grow the capitalist machine for Black Nationalism which Delany envisioned.[9]

Writing in the late 1850s, Delany did not anticipate the installation of the "one-drop rule" which decreed that "one-drop of Black blood" would designate that person as Black. Rothman describes unspecific attempts to codify into law definitions of Blackness in the 18th century, but that racial mixing, and the descendants of such unions, if publicly acknowledged, were generally treated on a case-by-case basis. He also describes the movement which would eventually lead to the "one-drop rule," and which gathered momentum in the 1850s, before the Civil War (10). However, its widespread installation would not happen until after the war, during Reconstruction. Where the limits of a transforming view towards enslaved peoples rendered "Blackness" exhaustible through inter-racial couplings, the "one-drop" rule signified an end to the ownership of Black bodies as commodities in the form of enslavement toward a future exploitation of the labor produced by those bodies. As a result, we can trace the installation of the "one-drop rule" as tied to the transition between a transforming and utilitarian South.

Current readers will know the history of exploitation by White-controlled institutions over Black labor within a paradigm of Utilitarian Nature during Reconstruction. Without that historical benefit, Delany was hopeful for Black Nationalism to join capitalism as its own entity. Part of his hope was tied to his view that White involvement in Southern economies were minimal. He says, "An endless forest, the impenetrable earth; the one to be removed, and the other to be excavated. Towns and cities to be built, and farms to be cultivated—all these presented difficulties too arduous for the European then here, and unknown to the Indian" (VII). Rather than cultivators of the land, Delany identifies European enslavers as benefactors over a system intent on having them work as little as possible, an endeavor they accomplish most efficiently, through enslaver rape.

Delany makes the slow proliferation of racial-mixing visible to readers through Blake's interactions with differing modes of mixed-race peoples–showing a progression as mixed-race peoples become a more and more present aspect of society. By taking a wide view of the proliferation of mixed-race peoples within *Blake* we see how Henry's interactions with a radically changing subclass of mixed-race peoples changes over time, by putting the great intervals of time between changes of mixed-race peoples. Through Henry's interactions, the distinction of inhuman vs human becomes increasingly hazy.[10] By viewing these changes, we further can see that the dominant culture of Whiteness creates a narrative of separation between Black and White which both empowers its ability to objectify enslaved peoples, as well as creating the necessity for self-deception within the Southern culture as plantation owning rapists argued for their own moral righteousness while hypocritically using enslaved women as sexual objects. It is through that hypocrisy that the commodified status of Black peoples becomes questioned, and thereby creates upheaval in the binary racial paradigm.

Delany argued for a transformation of Black nationalism as separate from White nationalism because of a feeling of inferiority assigned at birth by what Delany calls in "Condition" a "corruption of blood" (XVI). He says:

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[9] W.E.B Du Bois argues that the system of child rearing to grow enslaved labor was a peculiarity specific to the American South within the Americas (*Black Reconstruction*, 4). Delany may have viewed escape to Cuba and other areas outside of the American South, as also an escape from the specter of enslaver rape, explaining why he feels compelled to tell his audience, at the outset of Part II, of Maggie's parentage.

[10] In his history, Paul Outka discusses the history of mixed-race women used as sexual objects and says, "the less natural, the more "human"—read white——she seemed, the more the whole justificatory structure of slavery was called into question" (72).

> By corruption of blood is meant, that process, by which a person is *degraded* and deprived of rights common to the enfranchised citizen—of the rights of an elector, and of eligibility to the office of a representative, of the people; in a word, that no person nor their posterity, may ever be debased beneath the level of the recognised basis of American citizenship. This debasement and degradation is "corruption of blood"; politically understood—a legal acknowledgement of inferiority of birth. (XVI)

The "corruption" Delany speaks of is related to the commodification of Black bodies, however, his feelings towards racial-mixing clearly indicates that he views mixed-race people as something different from Black. What this shows is a clear link between enslavers' feelings towards nature, where their ability to transform land led to ownership of valuable landed property, aligning with their feelings towards human chattel.

The first instances of enslaver rape within *Blake* are subtle. The exact circumstances for Maggie's (Henry's wife) dismissal from Colonel Franks are not known until much later in the novel where Delany writes, "Goaded and oppressed by a master known to be her own father, under circumstances revolting to humanity, civilization and Christianity, she had been ruthlessly torn from her child, husband and mother . . . ." (193). Here, Maggie's character serves multiple functions as her character symbolizes the impetus (both metaphorically and literally) to the system of rape on the plantation (both Colonel Franks, and the broader, historical plantation). Through her character, Delany shows a progression of mixed-race enslaved peoples and their roles within Southern society—essentially showing how the taboo of racial mixing (primarily born out of fear of Black sexuality) hid the growing number of mixed-race enslaved peoples born of enslaver rape.[11] From a wider perspective, Delany indicates that initial rape of enslaved peoples operates in ambiguity, with Colonel Frank's rape of Mammy Judy left unspoken and outside of the narrative. Regardless, his rape creates a fear of enslaver rape in the rest of the enslaved population on his plantation.

The same fear of enslaver rape is shown early in the novel as well where Ailcey, an enslaved woman, is being questioned about Henry's missing child, and admits her fear of an unidentified figure in the night, whom she ascribes to Colonel Franks. She says, "Ah tho't 'twah maus Stephen afteh me" (49). Although Ailcey references Colonel Franks accosting her in the night as a ploy to avoid questioning, fear of the enslaver created a system wherein non-enslaving Whites did not speak of enslaver rape for fear of taboo violation, and the enslaved dare not directly speak of enslaver rape for fear of enslaver retribution. Delany shows the culture of fear which

[11] Joshua D. Rothman provides a history of this institution. He says, "A white man might reasonably believe he could act toward Black women sexually as he chose. So long as he kept his affairs quiet and comported himself respectably before his neighbors and colleagues, no legal or public repercussions were likely to follow. Interracial sexual abuse reminded enslaved women that their bodies were never their own. It placed Black men on notice that their families were insignificant and their pretenses to protecting their wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters from harm ultimately futile. White women, meanwhile, responded to the extramarital affairs of their spouses with a combination of resignation, denial, and displaced hostility and vindictiveness toward their slaves. If a slaveowner recognized his Black family in his will with emancipation or financial assistance, it often posthumously compounded the emotional and psychological injuries to his white family, who were compelled to confront what they may have been able to deny while their husband, son, father, or brother lived. From the colonial era to the Civil War, thousands of rapes of Black women went unreported and untried. Thousands of white wives maintained public silence while their husbands turned their private lives into a series of painful and tumultuous betrayals, thousands of neighbors whispered to one another behind closed doors, and thousands of Black men stood by anguished while their loved ones were sexually assaulted" (133–134).

permeates the plantation, because of the potential of enslaver rape. The primary motive of Ailcey's confession is to weaponize her fear against the enslaver's inquiry: by alluding to Colonel Franks rapacity, she stops him from asking any other questions for fear that his rapes be made public. Here is the first instance in which the specter of revolution is masked by enslaver's inability to acknowledge the specter of enslaver rape. However, her actions also instigates Colonel Franks' rage and shows his need for dominance.

At several junctures in Part I, Colonel Franks shows a compulsive need for control over the enslaved. Delany writes, "The will of the master being absolute, his commands should be enforced, let them be what they may, and the consequences what they would" (15). Clearly Colonel Franks' controlling aspect fits within the paradigm which Mbembe describes when he says, "The human negates nature (a negation exteriorized in the human's effort to reduce nature to his or her own needs)" and, as we might expect, Franks' labor is primarily spent attempting to control the enslaved. However, because he primarily views them in relation to their labor, his ability, or desire, to understand the inner workings of culture and communication among the enslaved is limited by his understanding them principally as commodities (14). Where his control would seem to be most integral is with Maggie, with whom he identifies with more humanely, as her father.

Delany suggests a differing liminality between Maggie and other enslaved peoples, by going out of his way to describe her in the most proximal language to Maria Franks, the Colonel's wife. Delany writes, "The conduct of Mrs. Franks toward her servant was more like that of an elder sister than a mistress, and the mistress and maid sometimes wore dresses cut from the same web of cloth" (8). Maggie's privileged station is ostensibly related to her beauty, but this too is related to the pale complexion of her skin. Delany writes, "She was a dark mulatto of a rich, yellow, autumn-like complexion, with a matchless, cushion-like head of hair, neither straight nor curly, but handomser than either" (8). In both cases Maggie is described as inhabiting the same social sphere as Maria, while also being valued for specifically White and Black physical attributes. Outka describes the attraction White Southern men had for mixed-race enslaved women when he says:

> This contradiction—in which slave women were simultaneously rendered as chattel that could be exploited without qualm or limit, and as sexual objects whose monetary value to their white masters increased in direct proportion to their distance from chattel—turned the slave woman's body and sexuality from the site of self-possession into a racially saturated locus of conflicting definitions, a battle ground both semiotic and intimately physical (72).

Maggie's privilege becomes problematic for Colonel Franks when he perceives her as being difficult to control. Her ability to resist his control is principally related to her inhabiting a station of authority more in line with her place as his daughter, than as his property. He says, "I have been watching the conduct of that girl for some time past; she is becoming both disobedient and unruly" (10). By virtue of privileging the Whiteness within his daughter, Colonel Franks' power over Maggie is brought into question to such a point that her status as object on the plantation becomes in question. Douglass also refers to the removal of enslaver progeny as a defense against hierarchy destabilization. He says, "Masters are frequently compelled to sell this class of their slaves, out of deference to the feelings of their white wives" (10). Such a relationship is hinted at in *Blake* where Delany describes Mrs. Franks treating Maggie as a younger sister (8). Broadly, this becomes the foundational problem for the plantation culture, as the existence of mixed-race enslaved peoples creates ambiguity with consideration to their commodification.

Part of the issue for enslavers controlling enslaved peoples was related to their inclusion in spreading economic spheres. Whereas enslaved peoples were principally field or domestic workers, doing the labor of agrarian life, as their usefulness to enslavers grew they began to inhabit different economic spheres. Indeed, enslaved peoples were more useful to enslavers based on their ability to do so, and as Southern economies relied on enslaved labor in other spheres, the more enmeshed they became in Southern culture. Andy Doolen argues that this enmeshment defines American society when he says, "In *Blake*, slavery is neither isolated to the South nor contradictory to national institutions and principles. Slavery is the crux of U.S. society" (157). Blake clearly agrees as he points out that in "Condition," enslavers have no real economic purpose outside of their role as enslavers. *Blake* shows Doolen's argument most clearly when, while Henry is on the run, he witnesses a group of Southerners arguing over the presence of enslaved peoples in varied aspects of Southern life. One unnamed man asks Colonel Sprout, "Then, Colonel, we're to understand you to mean, that white men can't live without n—," and Colonel Sprout replies, "I'll be hanged, gentlemen, if it don't seem so, for wherever you find one you'll all'as find tother, they's so fully mixed up with us in all our relations!" (97). The reaction to Sprout's admission is shock and anger before Sprout plays it off as a joke. Sprout's proclamation is sensational, not only for its revelation that the reproduction of enslaved labor is the foundation of Southern society, but also for its suggestion of sexual liaisons between enslaved peoples and enslavers. Sprout's admission suggests that the once isolated and taboo rape of enslaved women has become a deeply enmeshed aspect of Southern culture: one which, as Rothman's history suggests, is publicly rejected while privately ignored or even supported. In the privacy of his party, Sprout's proclamation, and his contemporaries' shocked reactions, indicates that racial-mixing continues to be taboo, despite its growing influence. Sprout is able to make a passing joke in the country, surrounded by other White men, and Rothman's history makes clear that public accusations of enslaver rape were rare, and thereby rarely punished.

Colonel Sprout's joke among his company is the most explicit linguistic reference to enslaver rape until the revelation of Maggie's parentage. Instead of linguistic evidence, Henry witnesses the steadily increasing proliferation of mixed-race peoples on each subsequent plantation. The first instance features a family which privileges its mixed-race children, if not as the same, very similarly to White. Dolly, Henry's guide says, "Yes, hunny, yes; da good culed folks any body. Some five-six boys an five-six gals on 'em; da all rich" (73). Henry's first explicit experience with racial-mixing shows the ability for enslavers to privilege the "Whiteness" of mixed-race peoples over their "Blackness." The interaction with Dolly suggests the problematic consequences to the system of transformation which had defined the plantation culture, and while this differentiation is able to be contained in an isolated case, the novel shows that its continued proliferation necessitates greater mental gymnastics.

Delany shows enslaved people's knowledge of enslaver rape permeating the plantation when Henry comes into contact with a mixed-race woman, Nancy, who lacks for clothing while working and who is treated brutally by the Black driver, Mr. Dorman. At the same time, enslavers still continue to engage in a form of "wilderness" transformation. When asked why she and her other female compatriots do not desire to work in the plantation homes, Nancy alludes to the system of rape as control when she says, "Case we gals won' go! Da been mo'n a dozen plantehs hear lookin' at us, an' want to buy us for house keepehs, an' we wont go; we die fus!" (79). Nancy's shows that the initial fear of enslaver rape has permeated the plantation culture and has necessitated the transformation of enslaved peoples to controlled commodities be relegated to other enslaved peoples. While Mr. Dorman's fully Black status, and Nancy's resistance to having her sexuality

commodified are not indicative of widespread resistance, it does provide the outline and initial impetus to the sub-classes creation, while also illustrating the resistance to transformation. In addition, the power dynamics between Mr. Dorman and Nancy suggest that rather than having to "transform" the entirety of their enslaved labor, enslavers rather employed a few enslaved peoples to do the transforming for them.

Delany also illustrates resistance within Black and Indigenous peoples' communities. One of Henry's ventures takes him into contact with members of the Chickasaw and Chocktaw tribes, where their members are identified as enslavers. Regardless of their separate oppressions, Delany's portrayal of Indigenous peoples in *Blake* suggests Indigenous peoples as allies to Black nationalism. When Henry comes into contact with a Chickasaw and Chocktaw tribe which enslaves Blacks, Chief Culver tells him, "The difference between a white man and Indian holding slaves. Indian work side by side with Black man, eat with him, rest with him and both lay down in shade together . . . . In our Nation Indian and Black all marry together" (87). Not only are mixed-race relations spoken at this moment, but they are celebrated as a way of forming alliances. The contrast between White and Indigenous enslavement is found in the nature of enslavement. Delany frames Indigenous enslavement of Blacks as in-name-only enslavers, especially as Henry gains the support of the Chief in his aim for rebellion. However, by virtue of Indigenous peoples being allowed to be enslavers, it is clear that White conceptions of Indigenous peoples align them more with transformers, rather than the transformed, and as such privileges them above Blacks in the White racial hierarchy.[12]

The discourse surrounding the transformation of wilderness out of non-White peoples has historically emphasized White relationships with Indigenous peoples. Jedediah Purdy said, "The 'savage,' literally a creature of the *sauvage*, the forest, was the arrogant, 'lordly' enemy of common progress—the worst thing in a young republic of property-hungry settlers. The savage represented static, unchanging nature, without the galvanizing power of labor . . . . The savage stood against providential design" (81). In his history of wilderness, Roderick Nash, in agreement with Purdy, says, "The whites also had a word for the natives: 'Savages.' They were to be conquered and transformed (or eliminated), just like the wild country" (xxi). Despite equating Indigenous peoples with the land, their forced assimilation and transformation had no direct economic advantage for White Southerners, after the theft of their land, because Indigenous peoples could not be sold as chattel.

Whereas Indigenous peoples stood against plantation owners as a warring force, White Southerners' economic incentive relied on Indigenous absence in order to prosper. Forced assimilation among Indigenous peoples was largely an attempt to further create Indigenous absence, through cultural genocide, which included attempts to introduce them to Judeo-Christian religion. According to Rothman, the same type of transformation was controversial to enslavers for potentially bringing into question the "racial hierarchy" (204). At the same time, religion becomes controversial in *Blake* for the controlling aspect it instills in Mammy Judy, as Henry rebukes her for her faith early in the novel. Still, enslavers sought a way to increase the value enslaved peoples brought them. One way was teaching trusted Blacks trades that they might bring surplus value back to their enslavers. This is shown early in *Blake* where Delany shows Henry returning after having made Colonel Franks money while away. However, the primary method of increasing enslaved peoples' value was through reproduction (Du Bois, 4). This constituted the primary difference between Indigenous and enslaved peoples, where, while making arguments for Black inferiority under all other races, enslavers additionally had an economic incentive to

[12] Frank Kelderman suggests that Indigenous slavery was structured and controlled by White colonists (2).

transform enslaved peoples: first into commodities capable of being sold through slavery, and then again into more valuable (and seemingly more easily controlled) commodities, as mixed-race offspring born into slavery. In this way, the transformation of enslaved peoples is more closely aligned to the transformation of land than Indigenous peoples' forced assimilation.

Whereas Henry's initial experiences with the sub-class of mixed-race peoples are primarily contained on the plantation, its proliferation soon finds the system within Indigenous tribes and then in urban life where Henry visits Charleston with its "'Brown Society,' the bane and dread of the Blacks in the state, an organization formed through the instrumentality of the whites to keep the Blacks and mulattos at variance" (112). For the purposes of transformation, the "Brown Society" symbolizes the ability for White colonizers to not only relegate the labor of transforming the land, but also the transformation of labor as to perpetuate the transformation of the land. Henry finds the full expression of transformation within the "Brown Society" in his discourse with a "mulatto gentleman" with a White gentleman standing by. The "mulatto gentleman" tells Henry, "you know that no free negro is permitted to enter this state. You are a runaway, and I'll have you taken up!" (112). Despite a wholly White gentleman standing by, the duty of punishing Henry falls upon the "mulatto gentleman." From a wide temporal perspective the "Brown Society" shows the full destabilization of the notion of transforming "wild" bodies intro tractable ones, and the relative impermanence, or short-comings, of the future "one-drop" rule—that the fetishization of Whiteness within mixed-race peoples suggests a compulsive need to humanize them, and throw their status as object into question. In addition, with the creation of a subclass of mixed-race peoples taken to its logical conclusion, White Southerners have left themselves no real purpose within the economic system, an argument which Delany supports in "Condition."

The full transformation back to human for mixed-race peoples is shown while Henry is in Richmond. There, Henry finds mixed-race peoples who not only replace White labor, but are seen as White themselves. Delany writes, "a mulatto or quadroon who proved [through documentation] a white mother was themselves regarded as white" (117). By virtue of Blackness lying with the mother, once again Black or mixed-race women are seen within the system of transformation, as objects of labor, not only for domestic and field work, but also for their ability to reproduce extracted labor through their children. Delany discusses in "Condition" the importance of dignity lying with women when he argues, "No people are ever elevated above the condition of their *females*; hence, the condition of the *mother* determines the condition of the child. To know the position of a people, it is only necessary to know the *condition* of their *females*; and despite themselves, they cannot rise above their level. Then what is our condition?" (XXIII). Delany's point here draws attention to the plight of Black women all throughout the Antebellum South. What such a legal situation would suggest is that not only does the system of Blackness lying with mothers show the specific desires of white Southerners, but also that at this time in history Delany believed extracted labor to be less integral to the South than *total control* over extracted labor. Thus we can surmise that mixed-race people began to be seen as White as a result of the ruling classes' inability to control mixed-race peoples. Despite mixed-race peoples finding some form of agency within the new alignment, the experience of Black individuals, specifically seen through Blake, remains objectified. Blake's goal, an independent Black nation, relies on the eradication of the system of objectification, and as a result he searches for the inspiration to create such a society.

In order to establish a culture away from the system of extracted labor, Blake finds an outpost of wilderness, in the Dismal Swamp, where "a number of the old confederates of the noted Nat Turner were met with" (113). The wilderness Blake finds is not only a refuge from White transformation, but also an escape from the conditions of linear time which measure the system of

extraction. Andy Doolen's argument shows the conditions of the removal from linear time when he discusses Delany's use of the Revolutionary War as inspiration for Blake's rebellion. He says:

> Delany treats the Dismal Swamp as a subaltern archive of Black resistance and independence, repositioning it at the center of his revisionist history of the Revolutionary War. Some of the maroons tell Blake that they had been patriots in the American Revolution. Within the temporal framework of the white Revolution, the statement is clearly false, but the Dismal Swamp revises the chronology of the war. In this way, the Dismal Swamp represents the imbrications of time and space in Delany's philosophy of history. (158)

As Doolen argues, one of the necessities for removal from a social system is rebellion, which is based within the Dismal Swamp; however, Blake's goals are more far-reaching based in revolution.

Although Blake is able to find refuge and relative safety within the Dismal Swamp, it does not offer the full potential for a Black culture, because it is reliant on White Southerner's depictions of "wilderness" in order to function, essentially adopting the distinction/label that Whites forced upon Blacks. The inclusion of Nat Turner is instructive, because Turner's rebellion specifically had to rebel *against* a system, whereas Blake's vision is for a revolution and redefinition of a system. Instead, Blake instills, as Gerrity writes, "a total refusal of the racial, social, economic, and political logics by which their enslavement is rendered ideologically coherent" (5). Thus, Blake's refuge within the "wilderness" of the Dismal Swamp relies on White decisions to not transform the swamp, especially as the representations of Whiteness surround the swamp. Doolen, in the same vein, argues:

> While the maroon world is emblematic of pan-African identity formation, the Dismal Swamp demonstrates ultimately that it is sterile ground for a revolutionary politics . . . . Delany's revisionist history presents the U.S. national model as barren ground for a Black revolution in the western hemisphere. (160)

Part of the problem with basing Black revolution within a temporal frame of American Revolution is that it fails to account for the specific divorce Blake values from American tradition. Commenting on this separation, Marlene Daut says:

> *Blake*, like much of the transatlantic literature of slave resistance and rebellion published in the nineteenth-century Atlantic *World* by both Black and white authors, does not narrate a stable, already prescribed, and universal future that would necessarily follow in the path of the Haitian Revolution or *The Amistad*, but attempts to imagine new ways for sustained and permanent Black liberation to occur. (84)

Thus, while the Dismal Swamp offers Blake the ability to step out of linear time, it is time which has the potential to be transformed, just as the Dismal Swamp does. Instead, what the Dismal Swamp offers for Blake is the recognition of his abilities, that he might inspire his fellow people. Blake tells Charles, "It makes the more ignorant slaves have greater confidence in, and more respect for their headmen and leaders" (127).

Separate from the Dismal Swamp, Blake has the potential to step out of time independently from the experience of "wilderness." Stephanie LeMenager argues that "Henry Blake's abolitionist environment was homologous to that of his opponents, his colonizers, and yet destabilizing insofar as it was drawn from the perspective of a human commodity" (55). The destabilization LeMenager references is drawn specifically from Blake's agency, from having been educated in the Caribbean, while also being entrenched in a system that views him as a commodity. As Lemenager shows, the perspective of Blake, still seen as a commodity, allows him to bend the transformed conditions of time and space, even separated from the "wilderness" of the Dismal Swamp.

Blake's ability to manipulate time and space principally relates to his spectral figure. Throughout the narrative, Blake seemingly appears without warning or explanation of how he arrived. In these moments, Blake operates in different forms, specifically hiding his identity from White viewers who would otherwise hinder him. Rebecca Biggio argues that Blake operates within a specter of conspiracy and says:

> Blake's multiple identities—indeed, his very ability to shift from one social role to another—and the success of his multiple political strategies are dependent on secrecy, as is Delany's vision of community. During his travels throughout the hostile American South, Blake's survival depends on, and his masculinity is defined by his ability to remain hidden and to conquer adversaries through mysterious skills that are never really explained in the narrative. (448)

As Biggio argues, Blake operates within differing liminal spheres, and his ability to avoid detection relies on his being both revolutionary and objectified simultaneously. For example, early in his escape from Colonel Franks, Blake uses the objects of horse-riding as both bed and disguise. Delany writes, "Henry had a bridle, halter, blanket, girt, and horsewhip, the emblems of a faithful servant in discharge of his master's business . . . . The blanket, a substitute for a saddle, was in reality carried for a bed" (69-70). Blake's ability to inhabit multiple spheres, to be seen as an enslaved man while acting as a revolutionary, allows him to portray specific motivations, while planning differently. This is seen specifically in the specter of rebellion Biggio writes about where she argues that the specter of rebellion distracts Blake's adversaries from his true aim, revolution. She says:

> The tension is sustained because readers likely believe that Blake and his rebels are indeed plotting a violent insurrection. This is the delicately held secret that Delany and Blake control. The challenge for the white slaveholding community is to find a balance between obsession and caution, a position which Delany carefully manipulates for his own ends. (450)

Of course, Blake's spectral figure is integral to his depiction of enslaved labor transformation and is aided by his manipulation of the sexual economy in the South. It is through his spectral form which allows him the aerial view perspective to access a broader understanding of the gradual proliferation of mixed-race peoples.

Part I of *Blake* expresses the dual system of transformation occurring within the American South. As Delany was intent on creating an independent Black state, his conception of Black agriculture varied from the Southern economy in that he considered Blacks capable of thriving in

any environment, and thus their agriculture could flourish in any climate. In "Condition" he says, "Our oppressors, when urging us to go to Africa, tell us that we are better adapted to the climate than they—that the physical condition of the constitution of colored people better endures the heat of warm climates than that of the whites" (XXIII). Thus, when Blake leads his compatriots to Canada and purchases "fifty acres of land with improvements suitable," we might imagine that they will practice subsistence farming, rather than the monocrop harvesting associated with plantations (156). Humans' relationship to the land, in that case, is more sustainable with a personal connection, rather than a controlled and reproduced entity from which to extract value.

When Henry leaves his compatriots in Canada, the movement away from the cycle of transformation is complete. The story continues, however, and Delany seemingly shifts focus to a utilitarian consideration of nature, especially as it concerns Black labor supporting economic enterprises. Delany does this when he inserts a seafaring portion of Part II which shows the amount of energy expended in order to sustain the monocrop plantation economy (and its reliance on enslaved labor to power the ships). This continues to support the overarching theme of new economic forms away from the plantation structure. However, during Blake's revolution he describes his new country's economy specifically in terms of monocrop harvesting. He says:

> Let us prove, not only that the African race is now the principal producer of the greater part of the luxuries of enlightened countries, as various fruits, rice, sugar, coffee, chocolate, cocoa, spices, and tobacco; but that in Africa their native land, they are among the most industrious people in the world, highly cultivating the lands, and that ere long they and their country must hold the balance of commercial power by supplying as they now do as foreign bondmen in strange lands, the greatest staple commodities in demand, as rice, coffee, sugar, and especially cotton, from their own native shores, the most extensive native territory, climate, soil . . . . (262).

There is no question that the economy and terms of extraction Blake describes are specifically fitting within the colonialist conception of agriculture and economy, and the terms of power he uses strengthen this same dynamic.

Where Blake ends the unfinished novel in the process of mirroring colonialist economic patterns, there is the potential for relevancy between the argument concerning transformation and post-colonial studies. The system of commodification and transformation in *Blake* makes room for continued conversation in postcolonial theory, where the history of European settlers suggests a will to transform and make "European" all that it might conquer. These mental frameworks are mirrored in the treatment of the land as the thought processes of enslavers to enrich themselves through rape, thereby destabilizing the distinction of Black and White in society. With concern to "racial science" and racial hierarchy, Ania Loomba, in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* says:

> Some critics have suggested that racial hierarchies are the 'magic formula' which allows capitalism to expand and find all the labour power it needs, and yet pays even lower wages, and allow even fewer freedoms . . . . Racial difference, in such an analysis, is more than a by-product of class relations, although it is firmly connected to economic structures. Also important, is the question of internalization of racial ideologies. (135)

The "internalization" Loomba speaks of is resonant of the wider mental frameworks used by enslavers not only in their treatment of enslaved peoples, but also with consideration to how they

viewed the land. Similarly, the presumption that "Man" is superior to Nature also destabilizes the ability for land to create life and, in turn, exposes “Man” to environmental crises and climate change.

What Delany sought principally was for an independent Black nation, one which could support itself and play a part in the global economy. The future exploitative actions European and White American economies would take in objectifying and extracting Black labor after slavery were unknown to Delany. Unable to anticipate the forms of future exploitative practices—which were altered radically by the Civil War and its immediate aftermath—Delany sought for a way out of the sexual economy of transformation through enslaver rape in the South, and while these sexual economies would eventually lead to the fetishization and taboo of mixed-race relationships in the South, along with anti-miscegenation laws, Delany’s *Blake* draws attention to its horrific practice during the antebellum period. The exploitation of Black labor did continue, however, and defined Whiteness and White conceptions of Black populations.

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New North Star, 2024; 6: 93-94

Afterword

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Martin R. Delany's only novel, *Blake; or, The Huts of America*, was partly serialized in 1859 and then fully serialized in 1861–62, on both occasions in African American periodicals. The novel itself was not published in book form until 1970; a more reliable edition was published almost fifty years later.[1] The novel's critical reputation continues to grow—from neglected (because people did not know it existed) to canonical. Blake is now regarded as an essential nineteenth-century African American novel.

The fine essays in this cluster give an excellent sense of the novel's distinct strengths and challenges. As several of the contributors observe, *Blake* is a transnational novel variously set in the American South, Canada, Cuba, and a slave ship moving back and forth between Africa and Cuba. *Blake* is unique to the nineteenth-century United States in its depiction of a wide range of Black locales. As the settings suggest, the novel is a work about the Black diaspora, linking Blacks of the Americas and Africa. Diaspora as a theme is central to the essays in this cluster.

For good reason, Philip A. Brown reads the novel through a postcolonial lens and shows how Delany "demonstrates a sensitivity to the global currents of colonialism." Caleb Doan, too, admires the way *Blake*, as a work about the Black diaspora, examines the connections among different peoples of color in a world of colonialism. Nathanial Hawlish uses his own interest in postcolonial theory to engage connections between race and environmental studies. R. J. Boutelle's emphasis on "diaspora literacy" leads him to address Whites' "racist fearmongering" about Cuba becoming a second Haiti. During the mid-1850s, as Delany was completing his novel, Whites' fears of Black revolutionism in Cuba stimulated desires for annexation. Delany, on the other hand, regarded Cuba as central to his "theory of diaspora," as Boutelle puts it, and his hopes for a Black nationality in the Americas.

Four of the five essays take historicist approaches in which context is crucial. Tim Bruno moves in a different direction, arguing that the novel breaks through the constraints of time to speak to the summer of 2020 and what he calls the George Floyd Rebellion. *Blake*, Bruno says, "captures the concrete reality and lived experience of revolutionary time." Central to Black revolutionary time, he argues, is a "revolutionary tempo" that he calls deferral. As Bruno and the other contributors point out, deferral is central to a novel that charts a Black revolutionary conspiracy that never quite takes place (but seems on the verge of happening). The novel defers a Black uprising in the United States (Blake asks Blacks on the plantations he visits to wait for the word that will set off the revolution), and just as a Black revolution seems on the verge of happening in Cuba, the novel ends. But is this deferral? The evidence suggests that there are two remaining chapters, but the periodical issues with those chapters are missing. One cannot help wondering if Delany decided to describe a violent Black revolution in one or both of those chapters.

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[1] Floyd J. Miller brought out the first book edition, with Beacon Press, in 1970; Jerome McCann's Harvard University Press edition was published in 2017. Racist students and professors forced Delany out of Harvard's Medical School in 1850; Delany (could he return from the grave) would no doubt be astonished (and deeply gratified) that his novel was published by Harvard.

All of these essays emphasize Black themes and concerns in the novel as Delany articulated them for Black readers (those who would have come across the serializations in Black periodicals). But I wonder if Delany was so exclusively interested in reaching Black readers, which is to say that I think we could use more consideration of how Delany might have been thinking about possible White readers. Delany probably wrote the novel not too long after reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and in 1859, as he was working on a Black emigrationist plan in Africa, he hoped to fund his project by selling the novel to a commercial trade publisher in Boston or New York. Maybe he could make the kind of money that Harriet Beecher Stowe made with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. He wrote to William Lloyd Garrison on 19 February 1859, urging him to look at the chapters he was serializing in the *Anglo-African Magazine* and asking if he could line up book publication with "a good publishing house."[2] The fact that Delany imagined publishing the novel as a book for White and Black readers alike begs the question of how he conceived of what we could call the novel's implied White reader. How did Delany imagine such a reader would respond to the novel's Black diasporic theme? As a form of education? Perhaps he was using the novel to build an interracial commitment to the work of establishing Black equality in the United States and beyond.

In a similar interracial vein, we could use more work on the influence of Stowe on *Blake*. As is well known, Frederick Douglass loved *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and championed it in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Delany challenged Douglass in the pages of Douglass's own paper, asking how he could support a White writer who didn't care about Black people, who plagiarized Black writers, and who championed Liberian colonizationism. Douglass defended Stowe and raised questions about Delany's emigrationism, asserting that it was not all that different from colonizationism. At that point (I speculate) Delany began writing *Blake*, which is to say that *Blake* had its origins, at least in part, in Douglass. But as Delany worked on the novel, something happened with his thinking about Stowe. He read her poem "Caste and Christ" in Douglass's 1853 fundraising annual *Autographs for Freedom* and respected her for depicting Christ not as an Uncle Tom but as a militant who was prepared to "fight for freedom!/ . . . in the battle's van."[3] He respected her even more when she wrote a second antislavery novel, *Dred* (1856), that had a Black militant at its center. Delany provides two epigraphs in *Blake* and both are from "Caste and Christ." Critics tend to argue that *Blake* revised and undercut *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but I see propinquity as well. We could use more nuanced accounts of *Blake* in relation to White abolitionist writing of the period.

Blake will continue to engage readers interested in nineteenth-century U.S. literature, Black literature, transnationalism, and diasporic studies. The provocative essays in this cluster offer fresh approaches to Delany's fascinating novel, and suggest directions where we might take our future work as well.

[2] Delany to William Lloyd Garrison, letter of 19 February 1859, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library / Rare Books Department.

[3] Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Caste and Christ," *Autographs for Freedom*, ed. Julia Griffiths (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1853), 6. For Douglass's and Delany's letter exchanges on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in spring 1853, see *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 224–237.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 95

"Our Founder"

On October 26 and 27, 2023, the Frederick Douglass Papers convened an international symposium of scholars to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the project's founding at Yale University. On the afternoon of the second day, a plenary session was held to reminisce about the project's founder, John Wesley Blassingame (1939–2000). The three principal speakers were Lawrence N. Powell, John R. Kaufman-McKivigan, and Peter P. Hinks, all colleagues of Blassingame on the Douglass Papers at various times in its years at Yale University (1973–1994). The following are excerpts from the addresses of the three scholars remembering fondly their acquaintance with Blassingame and praising his pioneering contributions to African American history.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 96-98

"JWB and the FDPP"

Lawrence N. Powell
Tulane University

It was sometime in the spring of 1967 when I met John Blassingame in the halls of the University of Maryland history department. He had driven down from New Haven to discuss joining Louis Harlan on the Booker T. Washington Papers (BTW). I was nearing graduation and about to start Yale graduate school. This was fifty-six years ago and counting.

Moving back to the D.C. area held immense appeal for John. At nearby Howard University were friends and mentors like Dorothy Porter Wesley and Elsie Lewis from his M.A. student days. But so were the rich collections at Howard's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives. When not doing editing work at College Park, during the next few years John spent most of his waking hours in those repositories researching the Yale dissertation that became *Black New Orleans, 1860–1880*.

Then there was the lure of networking with the NEH and the NHPRC, never mind the opportunity to pick Harlan's brain about the art and politics of lofting historical editing projects. The idea of editing the Frederick Douglass Papers had been gestating with John long before he finished his Ph.D. "He already had it in the back of his mind," his wife Teasie remembers. "That was his heart. It was a mission." But so was preparing himself for life as a historian, which for him was less a career than a calling. John was an institution-builder, in the tradition of Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. DuBois, and Booker T. Washington, and he pursued that calling with tireless energy. As his longtime friend and frequent collaborator, Mary Frances Berry, remembers, "John was a man of many parts."

Everything fell into place when he returned to Yale in 1970, now as a member of the faculty, but with the understanding that he would play an active role in building out the Afro-American Studies Program established the year before. John welcomed the challenge. After all, he was a heavyweight multitasker. His scholarship scarcely missed a beat. Books and articles came out in quick succession because he seldom worked on one book alone. His norm was two at a time. Yet I have been puzzled by their sequencing. *Black New Orleans* (1973) was not the first in print. It was third in line, appearing one year after the release of *The Slave Community* (1972). Thinking back, I am convinced their publication order beams light not only on the milieu in which the Frederick Douglass Papers Project (FDPP) came into existence; it also foreshadows the difficulties the project ran into at Yale further down the road.

That *New Perspectives on Black Studies* (1971) appeared first makes perfect sense. It was a collection of sixteen essays "on the development and concerns of black studies programs in colleges and universities." One of the two essays that John contributed singled out the problem of Black professors on White campuses. They were overworked, obliged to "serve on every committee remotely concerned with black collegians." By now, following Yale's stepped-up recruitment of Black students starting in 1964, there was a substantial nucleus of "Black Collegians" at Yale, and they were fed up with tokenism. You have to remember that this was a time when the anti-war movement was convulsing American campuses, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. was lighting American cities on fire, and Black consciousness and Black Power movements were demanding more than just a hearing.

What John told the Yale's higher administration when he signed on I have not the slightest idea, but I am sure it was along the lines that it needed to step up its game and add more faculty lines to the Afro-Am Studies program.

In places like Yale, prestige was—and is—the coin of the realm. And John, it will be remembered, had been minting a currency of his own as early as his days at the BTW Papers: namely, the FDP project. There is no question in my mind that he accepted Yale's offer with the idea of offering one of his own, but not right away. John was familiar with the corridors of academic power. He waited until the financing was in place before presenting Yale with an offer they could not refuse: collecting and publishing papers of America's foremost Black freedom fighter.

After John returned to Yale we became good coffee shop friends. So, when he launched the Frederick Douglass Papers Project in 1973, he asked me to become his first full-time research assistant. The offer arrived at an opportune moment. My fellowship had run out, and I was about to become a father. The job offer literally saved my career—or, rather, John did. I was floundering, stalled on my dissertation, even weighing bailing. I owe him a lot, more than I can put into words.

The Douglass project was a special place in those years—an interracial community of complete intellectual equality, and about as free from condescension and guardedness as it was possible to be in a place where the garment of diversity was hardly a snug fit at the time. John was a great judge of talent. To be associate editor, he recruited Pete Ripley from the Sopchoppy River in northern Florida, where he had been working as a carpenter building houses while rebuilding Harley Motorcyles in his spare time.

Their paths had crossed at the National Archives while researching dissertations on New Orleans's African American community during the Civil War. When one of the archivists discovered his research interests, he told Pete: "Well, you had better meet John Blassingame. He's in the Reading Room. You can't miss him. He's the most imposing person there."

"We spent the next two days in the basement canteen chain smoking and drinking vending machine coffee," Pete remembers, "eating cellophane-wrapped cheese sandwiches that you heated in a toaster oven. There was no competitiveness. John was incredibly generous. He helped me refine my topic—the Department of the Gulf." Ripley's Florida State dissertation became the important book *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana*.

In 1975, another impressive Blassingame find arrived from the University of Georgia to serve as assistant editor. Clarence Mohr had just finished the dissertation that became the prize-winning book *On the Threshold of Freedom*. Then there was Julie Saville, still a graduate student, who like me was also working in her spare time on a dissertation (hers became the acclaimed *The Work of Reconstruction*).

Already well published and highly regarded, V. P. Franklin replaced Pete when he left to establish the Black Abolitionist Papers Project at Florida State University. As for the host of Black undergraduate student workers who also filed through our offices on College Street, they are too plentiful to enumerate. But one stands out: the Black New Orleanian Mitchell Crusto, now a professor of law at Loyola University of New Orleans.

The Douglass project was more than a hive of activity; to mix metaphors, it was also a barrel of laughs. The number of hours we spent marveling over the Comstock ore we had plundered the day before from the antislavery newspapers John tasked us with mining in Yale's imposing Sterling Memorial Library seem endless in retrospect. Even the hard labor of writing annotation notes were occasions for inflicting new insights on our neighbors.

Often the fun began first thing in the morning. Just around the corner from the Douglass Papers' office was Naples Pizzeria on Wall Street. Calling it a pizzeria hardly does justice to its ambience. The tavern had the tobacco-soured, smoky ambience of a *Gasthaus in der Schwarzwald*: oaken booths etched with the grooves of venerable Yalie initials, and the air thick with the musk of bygone privilege. This was where several of us began our day before heading to Sterling Library to research annotation notes or synopsize Douglass's imposing editorial output.

Moreover, one of the regulars was Henry Louis "Skip" Gates. Skip was among the remarkable crop of Black undergraduates that had been recruited to Yale in 1964 or thereabouts. After graduating, he headed to Cambridge University for his D.Litt. but returned to Yale to write his thesis while serving as the administrative assistant to Charles Davis, the first director of Yale's Afro-American Studies Program. The Douglass Papers was housed in the same building. No surprise there. Nor should anyone be startled to learn that even this early in Skip's stellar career he was already building his Rolodex. Who might show up with Skip in the morning was always a revelation. It might be the late Ed Bradley from *60 Minutes* or the future Nobelist Toni Morrison or the edgy playwright Amira Baraka (formerly Leroi Jones).

But still with me from those days is John's huge, booming laugh. Yet in saying that, I am also reminded of the profound seriousness that lay beneath his cheerful geniality. For when John locked in, he was as focused as a laser beam. It was commonplace spotting his measured strolls across campus: a tall, lanky figure, gripping file folders and notepads, gazing off in the middle distance, lost in rumination. Or to find him at almost any hour of the day or night occupying a table in Naples, scribbling on yellow legal pads while processing urns of coffee and barns of tobacco, for his idea of smoking was to take a few puffs, snuff out the cigarette, and immediately light another one.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 99-101

John W. Blassingame, the Fredrick Douglass Papers, and Academic Politics at Yale University in the 1980s

John R. McKivigan
Indiana University Indianapolis

My first day at work as an assistant editor for the Frederick Douglass Papers office at 1 Hillhouse Avenue on the Yale Campus in New Haven, Connecticut, September 1, 1979, started inauspiciously. There was no one in the office. Another brand-new employee, named David Roediger (whatever happened to him), and I waited in the hallway outside a locked office door almost an hour until another recently hired editor showed up with a key. I quickly learned that the project editor, John W. Blassingame, and all the editing staff who had worked on the project's first volume of Frederick Douglass's earliest speeches, were all in Washington, D.C. for a reception to celebrate the official publication of that work with the project's sponsors, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission and the National Endowment for the Humanities. When Blassingame returned to Yale later that week, I discovered that almost all his original staff (Peter Ripley, Larry Powell, and Calrence Mohr) had now departed the project to launch their own academic careers and the one last veteran, Jule Jones, was making plan to do the same shortly.

With an essentially new staff, Blassingame began work on editing the Douglass Papers in what proved to be a rapidly changing and frequently adverse political climate at Yale. It is important to recognize that Blassingame always had to balance his leadership of the Douglass Papers with a multitude of other roles. Like many of today's Africana Studies scholars, he was called upon to perform a myriad of service obligations at Yale and in professional organizations that drained away a lot of his prodigious energy. He was devoted to Yale Afro-American Studies Department (as it was then named), which had been founded in 1969. John became its chair in 1981 after the death of literary scholar Charles T. Davis and strove to improve "Afro-Am" by the recruitment and retention of topflight scholars. At one point, the Yale African Studies program included such leading African American scholars in a wide range of disciplines, in addition to Blassingame, as Henry Louis Gates, Anthony Appiah, Sylvia A. Boone, Cornell West, bell hooks, Robert Stepto, Gerald Jaynes, and numerous others. Despite his efforts, Blassingame failed to retain many of these younger, rising academic stars, which he blamed on poor tenure and financial decisions by the white-dominated departments and higher administration officials at Yale. Tenured in the prestigious Yale History department, Blassingame conspicuously never had his scholarship recognized by that body with the award of a chair or named professorship.

There were other events at Yale that probably caused Blassingame to become disenchanted with the Douglass Papers' home institution. In the mid-1980s there was the famous clerical and technical workers strike at Yale that highlighted longstanding patterns of pay inequity toward female and non-white employees. Blassingame shut down both the Douglass Papers and the Afro-American Studies offices during the more than four-month strike while the Yale administration tried unsuccessfully to convince students, parents, and the public that it was business as usual on the campus. In the late 1980s, Yale was also the scene of numerous faculty/student protests against the campus's large investment portfolio with connections to corporations doing business in Apartheid-ruled South Africa. Such events caused serious cracks to appear in Yale's image as a liberal bastion in the Ivy League.

Nationally, the political climate changed considerably during the 1980s under the administration of Republican president Ronald Reagan. For the first time, serious attacks were

launched against the funding of the National Endowment for the Humanities, one of the Douglass's Papers' primary sponsors. NEH chair Lynne Cheney waged some of the earliest assaults of the "culture war" against the perceived hegemony of liberal ideology in higher education that she branded "liberal McCarthyism." While peer reviewers for the Douglass Papers grants during the 1980s seemed largely inured to those attacks, that agency seems to move away from support for all programs in African American studies and Blassingame had to deal with reduced federal funding for the first time.

With all these factors serving as background, Blassingame continued to work to complete the contemplated fifteen-volume edition of the Douglass Papers. Shifting from the exhilarating earlier work of discovery of new Douglass documents to the more tedious steps of document selection, transcription, and annotation. The work on the remaining four volumes of the project's Speeches, Debates, and Interviews series proceeded slowly but steadily. To pay part of the salaries of his staff of three to four assistant editors during the 1980s, Blassingame persuaded the History Department to shift some of his undergraduate teaching to those individuals, including myself. (John was never fond of teaching the undergraduate courses that he had inherited from the eminent C. Van Woodward and the department might have preferred more dedicated instructors for those courses.) After the departure of several more assistant editors, Blassingame struck on a new strategy, that I supervised, of hiring and training Yale graduate students to research and prepare preliminary drafts of annotation for the later volumes of that series. With this crucial assistance, the project would complete its five-volume Speeches series in 1992.

During the 1980s, the Douglass Papers, like many established documentary editing projects, attempted to enhance its productivity by adopting the new electronic process of word processing. Prior to the mid-1980s, the project relied on a small squad of secretaries to transcribe not only Douglass documents, but the annotation prepared by editors in handwritten form that would accompany them. Volume manuscripts would be painstakingly assembled from those typed pages, literally with glue and scotch tape, and then be retyped. Blassingame, later with my assistance, then would review those pages, make corrections, and they would be retyped. And retyped. And often retyped. As you can guess, Blassingame, who had never learned to type himself, recognized that the employment of word processing would be both a major labor savings for the Douglass Papers in budgetary terms and a boon to turning around editing tasks. The available "office" computer word-processing systems of the early 1980s proved large and expensive and the project held off purchasing any until 1984 when the project obtained its first IBM "personal computers." While the Douglass Papers then had to go through numerous changes of word processing and data inventory "software" as well as constantly upgrading its "hardware" over subsequent decades, Blassingame's decision proved enormously beneficial to project productivity.

Another fateful decision in the mid-1980s was Blassingame's decision to adopt the critical scholarly edition standards of the Modern Language Association for its second series of documents: Autobiographical Writings. That decision, as were many other important ones for the Douglass Papers, was made in a booth at a New Haven neighborhood restaurant, Naples Pizza, and it was made in consultation with "Skip" Gates before his departure to Cornell University in 1984. Gates explained to Blassingame the immense labor required for a critical scholarly edition and advised against the undertaking. Gates himself would go on to edit his own single volume containing the text of all three of Douglass autobiographies in 1994. Blassingame rejected Gates' advice and began work on these three volumes, even while annotation work was still underway on the final volumes of the Speeches series. He reasoned that the *Narrative* was a work still growing in the appreciation in the American canon of autobiographical writings and deserved the highest

quality of apparatus to attract literary scholars. It was also short and had only a few authoritative texts. Douglass's second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, was longer but had even fewer authoritative texts to be compared to determine the definitive text. Publication of the final autobiography, the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, would be a decade or more off and received little attention in the decision to produce the three volume Autobiographical Writings series as the next installment of the Douglass Papers. As I and other editors who worked with me on that last volume during much of the 1990s often remarked, this was our "Vietnam," an undertaking launched with little appreciation of the commitment that would be required to achieve anything like "victory." In the late 1980s, Blassingame worked with a number of consulting textual editors to prepare a text according to MLA standards while he devoted himself to learning about the evolving genre of autobiographical writing in the nineteenth century. He also directed students in finding contemporary reviews of all of Douglass's autobiographies to provide modern-day readers with valuable insights regarding how those three books were received. Ultimately John produced rough drafts of the series introduction and two of the three autobiographies before his untimely death in 2000.

As Douglass Papers editors waded through the muddy swamps of multiple authoritative texts and pretexts of *Life and Times*, Blassingame's relations with Yale University soured further in his last years. He came to believe that the Douglass Papers, arguably the nation's premier documentary editing project in African American history, was unappreciated on its home campus. Blassingame complained that the Douglass Papers was not housed in the campus's major library like many other documentary projects such as the Benjamin Franklin Papers. In protest, he explored removing the Douglass Papers to an off-campus office space which he believed he could rent at a lower cost than Yale charged the project. This was part of an escalating quarrel with campus administrators over the "in-direct" charges the university insisted be factored into every federal grant to defray Yale's expenses in hosting the Douglass Papers. John believed this dispute had turned personal when those same administrators refused to grant him release time to work as the principal consultant with PBS on what would have been a path-breaking TV documentary series on African American history. Ironically, those Yale officials argued vindictively that federal grants required that Blassingame devote the bulk of his non-teaching time to directing the Douglass Papers.

Increasingly frustrated with the declining support shown the Douglass Papers by both the National Endowment for the Humanities and Yale University, John Blassingame would ultimately tire of the "grantsmanship" required to keep the project funded and stepped away from the role of primary investigator in which he had invested nearly two decades of his career. In those first twenty years at the Douglass Papers, however, Blassingame had successfully demonstrated that the documentary record of a runaway Maryland slave was as rich and as historically valuable as that of the nation's white "founding fathers." The momentum Blassingame had generated and the direction he had laid out for this project allowed the Douglass Papers to persist in producing the well-regarded volumes of Douglass's Correspondence series and Journalistic Writings series that Blassingame did not live to see in print. As work on the Yale University Press scholarly edition of Douglass's Papers draws near to its completion, Blassingame's reputation as a visionary documentary editor of the African American experience will be furthered enhanced.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 102-105

Remembering John Blassingame

Peter P. Hinks

I first met John Blassingame in January 1983, the beginning of my second semester as a graduate student at Yale University. I had enrolled in his Reading & Discussion Seminar on the Civil War & Reconstruction. Frankly, I knew little about John then as either historian or editor. I was about to start learning much more. But first I learned about John the man, the person, the friend. It was by way of an ice-breaker at our first seminar meeting. John recalled his first days and weeks at Yale and New Haven in the 1970s:

> I remember, he recollected, walking down York Street early in the morning to the Hall of Graduate Studies, or down High Street to go to Sterling Memorial Library. All along the way I would pass people scurrying to classes or research or meetings of one sort or another. And I did not fail to say "Good Morning!" to almost every single one of them. And, equally without fail, almost every single one of them failed to respond to me. I was dumbfounded and, yes, a little hurt. I was delighted to be in New Haven and just wanted to start making friendly acquaintance with my neighbors just like I had always done back in Covington, GA. I would no more walk past my chums or Mr. and Mrs. Pettigrew [fictional names!] or even a stranger there without offering a friendly greeting and nod than I would have hit them! But it all did not matter much in New Haven; I don't remember very many ever returning my morning greetings.

As I recall now, I think he pretty much stopped the story there, left hanging in the air one of the first lessons this southerner learned about Yankee charm. But, truth be told, John never let it bother him very much. John never stopped saying "Hello!"

The seminar was quite demanding, especially for the novice Hinks who had majored in English as an undergraduate. Only three had enrolled for the seminar—myself, the late Marcellus Blount who went on to teach at Columbia, and Xin Yei, a recently admitted student from The English Language Institute in Beijing. But John had no problem filling up the time in the seminar: each one of us was assigned a particular text treating the topic of the week—secession in the South, forging the Confederate nation, defeat and early Reconstruction, radical Reconstruction, Reconstruction in individual states, the early knitting of a New South, whatever. John then requested that each one of us summarize the argument of the author and assess its merits, deficits, and historiographical significance. It was a big bill given that we all had enormous reading and writing requirements for at least two other graduate seminars. Being far from adept with historiography, I stumbled at first with the near thirty-minute presentations and made a mash of the first few, especially Ransom & Sutch's *One Kind of Freedom*!!But John—who knew all the texts well—would make a few adroit comments, but not much more. He was unfailingly complimentary and gently prodding, never irascible or contrary. He always made you feel that you were on the right path, you might just have to clear it out a little more. By mid-way through the semester, I was getting the knack; John had taken our small numbers and created a space where the inept might move a little closer every week to becoming proficient in a skill absolutely

fundamental to the proper historian. I chose to write an essay on the historiography of the Freedmen's Bureau and surprised myself with what depth I probed that controversial institution and how I came to discern and gauge the diversity of historical interpretations on it. John walked the path with me throughout. What I wrote for him that semester bore no resemblance to my earlier unwitting meanders through works on the Reformation, a result related to the fact the professor had offered little guidance in how to grope one's way through the nuances and differences of historical writing. John quite wittingly welcomed me into the adventure of what might seem anything but an exciting enterprise—historiographical interpretation.

That same semester, I enrolled in David Brion Davis's antebellum research seminar. Rambling about Sterling Memorial Library early in the semester reviewing possible sources for my essay, I stumbled upon John by the elevator into the "Stacks," and blurted out a "Hello." While I had already learned that he appreciated that word, I was nevertheless daunted by this unexpected encounter with an eminent professor with whom I had never yet really spoken. But John being John, he of course stopped and asked me how everything was going. I mentioned my pursuit of a research topic and John only became more engaged. Bear in mind that this man had a full plate of responsibilities—Chair of African American studies, lead editor of the Frederick Douglass Papers (FDP), professor of seminars, author of ongoing scholarship, to say nothing of a very busy nest at home. Yet at that moment, John stopped in front of the elevator as though nothing else was more important to him then than to talk with Hinks about his very pressing antebellum research. I still remember so appreciatively—he gave me his undivided attention. So, I set off—I told him I was considering working with antebellum travel narratives, perhaps those focused on the South. Right away, he mentioned a bibliography on travel writings in America from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That would have been more than enough, but John went quiet and pondered. "Are you familiar with Frederic Law Olmsted?" he asked. I did actually know that he had something to do with the "Emerald Necklace" in Boston, and I may have known vaguely about some trip he took to the South in the 1850s. Well, John said, "Go read *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* and *A Journey in the Back Country*. That might help you get oriented." I am sure he made further suggestions and chatted easily with me for a while more but, truth be told, he had done more than enough with the Olmsted ding. I went immediately into the Stacks and retrieved both Olmsted volumes and soon discovered that John had so simply, so comfortably, opened for me a window that was also so dramatically revealing of the tense tenor of the U.S. in the 1850s. I had had no idea that such rich works existed; John brought me there. I went on to write an essay for David about Olmsted's free labor ethos and how it and Olmsted's deep New England animus undergirded his scathing analysis of southern culture and its huge industrial-scale cotton plantations. As Prof. Davis would always do if appropriate, he praised my work handsomely and helped guide my research and writing like few others. But without John, the door never would have opened in the first place.

In May 1983, John welcomed me again: he asked me if I would accept a full-time summer position at the FDP. I was completely surprised: I actually knew next to nothing about the project. Of course, I was delighted to have the opportunity to participate in such important research and I was also desperate for the money. But frankly, I had no real idea of what I was entering. The FDP housed the richest repository then—and probably now as well—of archival and biographical material available anywhere on Frederick Douglass and his world. And the labor there of accumulating further such material—be it obituaries, censuses, newspapers, letters, account books,

whatever—continued aggressively and resourcefully. I was entering a workshop that taught and valued the highest skills of the historian—dogged research, thoughtful processing and contextualizing of diverse documents, and the careful integration of them into annotations, [name for summary introductions to each document], and other editorial apparatus. Moreover, I and other enthusiastic apprentices including Dominic Parisi, Tamara Plaikins, and Brenda Stephenson applied ourselves under the good shepherding of Jack McKivigan, Richard Carlson, and other already seasoned historians with much to teach us. I was privileged to be asked into this foundry where so many labored to stamp the oratory and writings of one of the nineteenth century's most important actors prominently and permanently on the grail of American history. Yet the skills and acumen I learned there to apply to my craft as historian made me much more the beneficiary of my time at John's editorial hive than any bit I may have contributed to uplifting the life and labor of Frederick Douglass. And, once again, I have John to thank for welcoming me into this learning and knowledge.

Among his many other accomplishments, John sought to help and advance young historians and scholars as much as possible. Early in April 1996, he opened a crucial door for me: at a time when I was out of the conventional academic world altogether and was prepping New Haven youths snagged in the criminal justice system to pass the GED, John alerted me that an opening existed in the History Department for a temporary lecturer in African American history. Over the coming weeks, I was fortunate enough to secure it. Yet, what began as a one-year part-time position blossomed by that summer with additional assistance from David Davis into a full-time three-year position that transformed my academic trajectory. Had John not contacted me, it never would have happened. In spring 1999, when I was in fact no longer young and had known John and worked with him for many years, I had, however, come to the end of those three wonderful years at Yale as I painfully lost a contest for a tenure track position at the university. That disappointment is a whole other story. But what did not disappoint at Yale, as usual, was John Blassingame. As soon as John learned I had lost the position, he went to work to cobble together an archival project he had had in mind for the past few years, jousted with administrators for campus space, and pursued funding he was certain he could secure. Despite his disturbing decline in health, John persisted in doing all that he could to settle the position and funding for me. The last time I spoke with John, he assured me the prospects were looking up. The next day or so, Lou Pflueger at the History office called me to request that I come see the then Chair, Robin Winks, as soon as possible. When I arrived later that day and sat down with Robin, he gave me the terrible news: John had collapsed last night and was admitted to Yale New Haven Hospital where he was now in a coma. The outlook was grim. In terms of simple immediate arrangements, Robin asked me to handle the last few classes John had remaining in his Civil War & Reconstruction seminar and to grade the papers. Of course, I accepted the responsibility. I did not realize then that I would never talk with John or see him again. Yet John's spirit and legacy remained with me: he left me fully prepared to walk into that seminar room a few days later and teach the books to which he had introduced me sixteen long years ago. I could not step into his shoes; they were way too big for me. But I can say he welcomed me and got me ready to do the best I could.

I would just like to close with some words from another one of those many historians and scholars John helped to become powerful voices in the recording of America's complicated history. Stephanie Smallwood, the author of the extraordinary book, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, benefitted from John's welcome as well. Remarkably,

she had studied with Marcellus Blount at Columbia, and he had encouraged her to do advanced work in African American history. Probably on his recommendation, she chose to come to Yale. Prof. Smallwood fittingly summarizes her time at Yale:

> It was [John] Blassingame who introduced me to early America as an important and as yet insufficiently developed arena of inquiry in African American history. Seemingly endless summer days spent in the frigid air of the Sterling Library microfilm room, scrolling through the shipping lists of colonial newspapers as Blassingame's research assistant sparked my fascination with the slave ship and its social history. His generosity of mind and heart, shared almost daily in long meetings and over more than a few cups of coffee in his favorite booth at Naples Pizza, did more than words can say to help me believe in the intellectual journey that has shaped my work.
>
> The book's dedication to John W. Blassingame reflects both my intellectual debt to the African and African American Studies Program he helped build at Yale University and my deep gratitude for his mentoring and friendship.

Or, as the opening words of her book inscribed:

For John W. Blassingame
1940–2000
with gratitude for his great generosity of mind and heart

I second that emotion.

New North Star, 2024; 6: 106-110

Frederick Douglass Reverses His Opposition to the Exodus

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Frustrated by the reinstatement of oppressive Black Codes, imposition of unfair labor practices, the lack of educational opportunity, and political impotence to correct these problems, African American "Exodusters" from throughout the South, but especially Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, and Tennessee, left in large numbers during the spring and summer of 1879 for Kansas and adjacent areas of the Midwest. This group of migrants ultimately numbered over six thousand and composed the most significant resettlement of African Americans from the Civil war until the Great Migration of the early twentieth century. The Exodus received encouragement from former abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips as well as many prominent African American leaders, including Henry Highland Garnet, Sojourner Truth, John M. Langston, and Richard T. Greener.

The Exodus of African Americans from the South to Kansas and adjacent areas of the Midwest proved badly coordinated. A National Emigrant Aid Society was organized in April 1879 and supported by many former abolitionists. Sojourner Truth went herself to Kansas to volunteer to work with the Kansas Freedmen's Relief Association.[1] Kansas appealed to the Exodusters for a variety of reasons. The state had long been associated with radical abolitionists, such as the militant John Brown, and many viewed it as an ideal refuge to escape hostile policies being enacted against African Americans as Southern states were "redeemed" by the opponents of Reconstruction. There was also an effort by the federal government to populate the prairie states, and advertisements promoting Kansas ran widely in the South. African Americans departing on this Exodus often encountered harassment from Southern White planters and politicians. The aid societies often lacked sufficient resources to feed and shelter all of the migrants heading west. Upon their arrival in Kansas and adjacent territories, the Exodusters discovered a harsh climate and a shortage of available jobs or affordable farmland. Despite a growing disillusionment, the migration continued well into 1881.[2]

Perhaps the most prominent voice publicly opposed to the Exodus movement was none other than Frederick Douglass, the former Maryland slave, who had run away and acquired international fame for his articulate writing and speaking against slavery. After the Civil War, Douglass had settled in Washington to better lobby the federal government for protection of the rights of the emancipated African Americans. An active campaigner for the Republican Party, he had received from the Rutherford B. Hayes administration the high-profile patronage appointment of marshal of the District of Columbia. Arguing that conditions for Blacks in the South would soon improve and that to leave would only connote surrender to White pressure, Douglass condemned the Exodus. After criticizing the ongoing migration from the South in an address in Baltimore on 4 May 1879, Douglass endured a summer of accusations from critics

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[1] Carleton Mabee, *Sojourner Truth; Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: NYU Press, 1993), 147; Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 198–99, 228–29.
[2] Charlotte Hinger, *Nicodemus: Post-Reconstruction Politics and Racial Justice in Western Kansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016), 3, 42; Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879–80* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1978), 4, 7, 202; John G. Van Deusen, "The Exodus of 1879," *Journal of Negro History*, 21;111, 124 (April 1936).

such as Richard T. Greener, dean of the law school of Howard University, who charged he had lost touch with the plight of African Americans. Although a number of prominent Black leaders and politicians—including James E. O'Hara, Isaiah C. Wears, and Senator Blanche Kelso Bruce—agreed with Douglass's views, he endured the loudest condemnation.[3]

The controversy reached its peak when the American Social Science Association offered Douglass a chance to present a detailed explanation of his position at its annual meeting in Saratoga, New York on 12 September 1879. Douglass initially accepted the invitation and prepared a detailed defense of his opposition to the Exodus. Reports in the press that the session would actually be a debate with one of his most vociferous critics, Greener, disturbed Douglass who privately wrote an officer of the Association that he desired to meet "in the Spirit of Social Science and not in a Spirit of controversy." At the last minute, Douglass canceled his Saratoga appearance, claiming the press of business at his office of marshal of the District of Columbia. He did send his paper to be read and it, along with Greener's defense of the Exodus, were published as a pamphlet.[4] Douglass's published remarks caused several African American newspaper editors to accuse Douglass of betraying his race rather than risk losing the lucrative patronage appointments he received from the federal government.[5] One based in Kansas denounced Douglass's call for African Americans to remain in the Old South and fight for their rights as "calculated to increase the disease from which the race is now fleeing. Oh! For a leader who understands the situation, and on whom the influence of power and place has no effect."[6]

Several modern-day historians have repeated this harsh assessment of Douglass's negative response to the Exodusters. One of the earliest was Princeton historian Nell Irvin Painter who portrayed Douglass's opposition to the Exodus as in line with his post-Civil War ideology that she branded "unswervingly conservative" and "often anti-Black."[7] Painter portrayed Douglass as increasing isolated after the Civil War from the sentiments of most African Americans. Douglass biographer William S. McFeely was unequivocally disappointed in his subject's 1879 views that African Americans should remain in the South and struggle against the Redeemer's program. McFeely charged "Douglass's sense of compassion was failing him" as "was his intellectual grasp of a new problem." McFeely implied that Douglass was willing to let Blacks endure sharecropping, disenfranchisement, and segregation to prove their value to their White oppressors, calling such views "the reasoning of white Redeemers."[8] L. Diane Barnes, a more recent Douglass biographer, echoes these views in more modern language, pointing to Douglass's opposition to the Exodus as "out of touch with the plight of many southern African Americans."[9] Cultural and intellectual historian Waldo E. Martin Jr. blamed Douglass's

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[3] New York *Times,* 5 May 1879; *Douglass Papers*, ser. 4, 1:203–08; Waldo E. Martin, Jr., *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 73–77; Painter, *Exodusters,* 7–10, 184–201, 247–50; Athearn, *In Search of Canaan*, 233–38.

[4] New York *Times*, 1 September 1879; Frederick Douglass, "Southern Questions: The Negro Exodus from the Gulf States," *Journal of Social Science*, 11:1–21 (May1880); *Douglass Papers,* ser. 1, 4:510–11; ser. 3, 3:473–74, 476–77.

[5] Douglass to Blanche K. Bruce, General Correspondence File, reel 3, frames 366–67, FD Papers, DLC; Douglass to Franklin B. Sanborn, 4, 9 September 1879, in Joseph A. Borome, ed., "Some Additional Light on Frederick Douglass," *Journal of Negro History*, 38:216–24 (April 1953); 233–38; Painter, *Exodusters*, 3–68, 234–61; Athearn, *In Search of Canaan,* 233–38; Billie D. Higgins, "Negro Thought and the Exodus of 1879," *Phylon*, 32:39–52 (Spring 1971).

[6] Washington (D.C.) *People's Advocate*, 20, 27 September 1879; Topeka (Kans.) *Colored Citizen,* 18 October 1879.

[7] Painter, *Exodusters*, 26; also *see* 227, 247.

[8] William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Norton, 1991), 299–302.

[9] L. Diane Barnes, *Frederick Douglass: Reformer and Statesman* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 123.

"overweening optimism" and "faith in the ultimate decline of racism" for his "insensitivity to the fundamental concerns of the masses of impoverished and victimized southern blacks."[10]

While "Kansas Fever" cooled by the early 1880s, conditions of African Americans in the former slave states continued to deteriorate. The South's economy gradually adjusted to its loss of an enslaved labor force. While a small minority of African Americans gradually accumulated their own small landholdings, the bulk worked on White-owned former plantation lands in a variety of positions. Most of these people were "sharecroppers" who agreed to divide the crop's revenue with their landlords.[11] Over time, the region's White-controlled state legislatures passed anti-enticement, contract enforcement, vagrancy, and debt peonage laws. These laws trapped workers in a new form of economic dependency by prohibiting prospective employers from offering better contract terms than their current employers, using law enforcement to enforce labor contracts, arresting African American men without work contracts, and forcing laborers to pay off debt through work to restrict the mobility of Black farm families, preventing them from seeking better economic opportunities.[12]

In 1876, the U.S. Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Cruikshank* ruled that Congress had no power to protect African American civil rights from violation from violation by private citizens. In 1883. the Court overturned the Civil Rights Act of 1875 that had empowered the federal government to protect African American access to public accommodations, including theaters and hotels. Being emboldened by such judicial rulings, Southern legislatures and local judicatories, now controlled by ex-Confederates, increasingly mandated the racial segregation of public facilities. The region's schools had never been integrated even during Reconstruction but now racial disparity in facilities, funding, and teacher training became official practice. State laws and local ordinances were also passed in the South banning interracial marriages and racially dividing patrons in restaurants, hotels, train and trolly cars, parks, and theaters.[13]

In most states of the former Confederacy, African Americans experienced a gradual ebbing of what remained of their political influence after Reconstruction's end. While generally relegated to powerless minorities in state legislatures, Blacks continued to win a few elected offices and thereby cling onto some influence in Southern towns and cities. A corporals' guard of Black Republicans was sent to Congress in the 1880s. While politically motivated violence decreased after the defeat of the Republican Reconstruction state governments, the threat of its return remained present to depress Black voter turnouts. White Democratic leaders in the 1880s

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[10] Martin, *Mind of Frederick Douglass*, 73–74. Marxist philosopher Angela Y. Davis also criticized Douglass's opposition to the Exodus but attributes it to his understanding of economics rather than his desire to please White Republican politicians who could grant him patronage jobs. Angela Y. Davis, "From the Prison of Slavery to the Slavery of Prison: Frederick Douglass and the Convict Lease System," in *Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader*, edited by Bill E. Lawson and Frank M. Kirkland (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 345–47.

[11] Gerald Jaynes, *Branches Without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press,1986), 149, 220, 303–04; William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), Appendix A, 299–300.

[12] Jay R. Mandle, *Not Slave, Not Free: The African American Experience since the Civil War* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), 33–40; Harold Woodman, *New South, New Law: The Legal Foundations of Credit and Labor Relations in the Postbellum Agricultural South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 93, 105; Jennifer Roback, "Southern Labor Law in the Jim Crow Era: Exploitative or Competitive?" *University of Chicago Law Review*, 51, no. 4 (Autumn 1984), 1161–92.

[13] William J. Reese, *History, Education, and the Schools* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 145; Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

began passing state poll taxes and other measures calculated to discourage Black voting. In the following decade, Southern legislatures began the effort to curb African American voting with property and literary requirements.[14] As African American political power receded, the group's ability to resist the post-Reconstruction assault on the civil rights and economic opportunities similarly declined.

From his base in Washington, Douglass kept himself well-abreast of the depressing new reports about increasing segregation, politically motivated attacks, and declining economic opportunities for African Americans in the South. Rather than unaware, Douglass was made well-informed of the plight of other African Americans by a steady stream of letters he received from victims beseeching his assistance.[15] Rather than acquiesce to this situation, Douglass pursued a variety of tactics to attempt to protect his race. He maintained a vigorous schedule of lecturing and journalistic writing on top of performing the duties of his federal offices. In 1881, Douglass authored his third autobiography, the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, which contained powerful criticisms of the nation's political leaders for failing to reverse these disturbing trends. Two years later, Douglass publicly condemned the U.S. Supreme Court for failing to defend African American civil rights. The same year, he helped organize and presided at the first post-Reconstruction national African American convention, held in Louisville, Kentucky, where he criticized the Republican Party for failing to safeguard the equal rights of his race. Also, during the 1880s, Douglass delivered annual "Emancipation Day" addresses in the District of Columbia, often printed and circulated nationally, in which he assessed the problems caused by intensifying racism.[16]

In April 1888, Douglass responded to a query from David M. Lindsey[17] asking if he had any possible second thoughts regarding such "exodus" from the former slave states. Lindsey was a White former Confederate military officer turned Reconstruction Era "Scalawag" Republican

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[14] J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1901* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974) 244; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York, 1992), 34–53; Douglas R. Egerton, *The Wars of Reconstruction: The Brief, Violent History of America's Most Progressive Era* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 316–17.

[15] Among such examples are O.O. Howard to Frederick Douglass, 1 December 1874, in *Douglass Papers*, ser. 3., 3:288–89; Frederick Douglass to R. C. Hewett, George Follansbee, and Donn Piatt, 11 February 1875, in Douglass papers, ser. 3, 3:291–96; William Breck to Frederick Douglass, 15 September 1876, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 3, 3: 335–39; "Citizen" to Frederick Douglass, 5 Aprill 1877, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 3, 3:375–77.

[16] "Parties Were Made for Men, Not Men for Parties," 25 September 1883, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 5:85–110; "This Decision Has Humbled the Nation," 22 October 1883, *Douglass Papers,* ser. 1, 5:110–123; "Our Destiny Is Largely In Our Own Hands," 16 April 1883, *Douglass Papers,* ser. 1, 5:59–80; "We Are Confronted by a New Administration," 16 April 1885, *Douglass Papers,* ser. 1, 5:172–192; "Strong to Suffer, and Yet Strong to Strive," 16 April 1886, *Douglass Papers,* ser. 1, 5:212–238; "In Law Free; In Fact, A Slave," 16 April 1888, *Douglass Papers*, ser. 1, 5:357–73; "The Nation's Problem," 16 April 1889," *Douglass Papers,* ser. 1, 5:403–426; John R. McKivigan, "Stalwart Douglass: Life and Times as Political Manifesto," *Journal of African American History*, 99, no. 1–2 (Winter-Spring 2014): 46–55.

[17] Daniel McDonald Lindsey (1836-99) was born in Currituck County, North Carolina. Before the Civil War he was a successful local politician and during the war he was elected state senator in 1862 and 1864. Lindsay also played an active part in the war, becoming a captain for the Confederacy in the Seventeenth North Carolina Infantry Regiment. Following the war, he returned to politics as a Republican and aided freedmen to have their rights fulfilled, for which he was greatly ridiculed in his home state. Lindsay became the surveyor of his home county and ran unsuccessfully for Congress. Wilmington (N.C.) *Journal,* 22 September 1876; Westminster (Md.) *Democratic Advocate,* 30 October 1880; Washington (D.C.) *Evening Critic,* 3 July 1882; Harpers Ferry (W.V.) *Spirit of Jefferson,* 21 October 1890; Edenton (N.C.) *Fisherman and Farmer,* 24 October 1890; Hampton Rhoads (Va.) *Virginian-Pilot,* 19 January 1899; *James Sprunt Historical Monographs, No. 1.* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1900), 53–54.

from North Carolina. By the 1880s, Lindsay was living in Washington, D.C. and working for the Treasury Department. It was around this time that Lindsey began devising a plan for relocating Southern freedmen to West Virginia, Indiana, and Connecticut. In a letter that has not survived, Lindsey sounded out Douglass about such a second "Exodus" attempt. Published below is Douglass's reply to Lindsey, that revealed that events in the 1880s had produced a significant shift in his opinion about the value of a coordinated migration from the South for African Americans. The letter demonstrates that it is incorrect to assume that the aging Douglass became aloof or unresponsive to the problems fellow members of his race endured in the years following Reconstruction. At a minimum, Douglass's response to Lindsay demonstrates that he was capable of shifting his tactics and public positions in pursuit of an unswerving goal of protecting the interests of African Americans in an increasing racist era.

Anacostia, D.C. 10 April 1888[.]

DEAR MR. LINDSEY.—

I have long hesitated to give my endorsement to any movement looking to the removal of considerable numbers of the colored people of the South to the North and West. I have felt that it was better that they should endure and patiently wait for better conditions of existence where they are than to take the chance of seeking them in the cold North, or in Africa, or elsewhere. I had hoped that the relations subsisting between the former slaves and the old master class would gradually improve; but while I believed this, and still have some such weak faith, I have, of late, seen enough, heard enough and learned enough of the condition of these people in South Carolina and Georgia to make me welcome any movement which will take them out of the wretched condition in which I now know them to be. While I shall continue to labor for increased justice to those who stay in the South, I give you my hearty "God speed" in your emigration scheme. I believe you are doing a good work, and I am glad that one who knows the ground as well as you do has taken in hand this important work. I thank you for bringing the subject to my attention, and for giving me a chance of joining with you in this effort to help the freed men of the South.

Very truly yours,

FREDERICK DOUGLASS.

Source: Subject File, frames 554–61, Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress.